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... AN ...

Exposition of the Bible

A SERIES OF EXPOSITIONS COVERING
ALL THE BOOKS OF THE OLD AND
NEW TESTAMENT

BY

MARCUS DODS, D. D.,
R. A. WATSON, D. D.,
DEAN F. W. FARRAR, D. D.,
ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.,
S. H. KELLOGG, D. D.,
J. MONRO GIBSON, D. D.,
H. C. G. MOULE, D. D.,
ROBERT RAINY, D. D.,
J. R. LUMBY, D. D.,

G. A. CHADWICK, D. D., GEORGE ADAM SMITH, D.D., LL.D.,
ANDREW HARPER, D. D., W. G. BLAIKIE, D. D., LL.D.,
W. H. BENNETT, M. A., W. F. ADENEY, M. A.,
R. F. HORTON, D. D., SAMUEL COX, D. D.,
C. J. BALL, M. A., JOHN SKINNER, M. A.,
HENRY BURTON, M. A., G. T. STOKES, D. D.,
JAMES DENNEY, D. D., G. G. FINDLAY, D. D.,
A. PLUMMER, D. D., T. C. EDWARDS, D. D.,
W. ALEXANDER, D. D., W. MILLIGAN, D. D.

Vol. III.

PSALMS—ISAIAH.

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THE PSALMS.

PREFACE.

A volume which appears in "The Expositor's Bible" should obviously, first of all, be expository. I have tried to conform to that requirement, and have therefore found it necessary to leave questions of date and authorship all but untouched. They could not be adequately discussed in conjunction with Exposition. I venture to think that the deepest and most precious elements in the Psalms are very slightly affected by the answers to these questions, and that expository treatment of the bulk of the Psalter may be separated from critical, without condemning the former to incompleteness. If I have erred in thus restricting the scope of this volume, I have done so after due consideration; and am not without hope that the restriction may commend itself to some readers.

A. McL.

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THE PSALMS.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

PSALM I.

- 1 Happy the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
And has not stood in the way of sinners,
And in the session of scorners has not sat.
- 2 But in the law of Jehovah [is] his delight,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
- 3 And he is like a tree planted by the runnels of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season,
And whose leafage does not fade,
And all which he does he prosperously accomplishes.
- 4 Not so are the wicked,
But like chaff which the wind drives away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
- 6 For Jehovah knows the righteous,
And the way of the wicked shall perish.

THE Psalter may be regarded as the heart's echo to the speech of God, the manifold music of its wind-swept strings as God's breath sweeps across them. Law and Prophecy are the two main elements of that speech, and the first two psalms, as a double prelude to the book, answer to these, the former setting forth the blessedness of loving and keeping the law, and the latter celebrating the enthronement of Messiah. Jewish tradition says that they were originally one, and a well-attested reading of Acts xiii. 33 quotes "Thou art my Son" as part of "the first Psalm." The diversity of subject makes original unity improbable, but possibly our present first Psalm was prefixed, unnumbered.

Its theme, the blessedness of keeping the law, is enforced by the juxtaposition of two sharply contrasted pictures, one in bright light, another in deep shadow, and each heightening the other. Ebal and Gerizim face one another.

The character and fate of the lover of the law are sketched in vv. 1-3, and that of the "wicked" in vv. 4-6.

"How abundantly is that word Blessed multiplied in the Book of Psalms! The book seems to be made out of that word, and the foundation raised upon that word, for it is the first word of the book. But in all the book there is not one Woe" (Donne).

It is usually taken as an exclamation, but may equally well be a simple affirmation, and declares a universal truth even more strongly, if so regarded. The characteristics which thus bring blessedness are first described negatively, and that order is significant. As long as there is so much evil in the world, and society is what it is, godliness must be largely negative, and its possessors "a people whose laws are different from all people that be on earth." Live fish swim against the stream; dead ones go with it.

The tender graces of the devout soul will not flourish unless there be a wall of close-knit and unparticipating opposition round them, to keep off nipping blasts. The negative clauses present a climax, notwithstanding the unquestionable correctness of one of the grounds on which that has

been denied—namely, the practical equivalence of "wicked" and "sinner."

Increasing closeness and permanence of association are obvious in the progress from *walking* to *standing* and from standing to *sitting*. Increasing boldness in evil is marked by the progress from *counsel* to *way*, or course of life, and thence to *scoffing*. Evil purposes come out in deeds, and deeds are formularised at last in bitter speech. Some men scoff because they have already sinned. The tongue is blackened and made sore by poison in the system. Therefore goodness will avoid the smallest conformity with evil, as knowing that if the hem of the dress or the tips of the hair be caught in the cruel wheels, the whole body will be drawn in. But these negative characteristics are valuable mainly for their efficacy in contributing to the positive, as the wall round a young plantation is there for the sake of what grows behind it. On the other hand, these positive characteristics, and eminently that chief one of a higher love, are the only basis for useful abstinence. Mere conventional, negative virtue is of little power or worth unless it flow from a strong set of the soul in another direction.

"So did not I" is good and noble when we can go on to say, as Nehemiah did, "because of the fear of God." The true way of floating rubbish out is to pour water in. Delight in the law will deliver from delight in the counsel of the wicked. As the negative, so the positive begins with the inward man. The main thing about all men is the direction of their "delight." Where do tastes run? what pleases them most? and where are they most at ease? Deeds will follow the current of desires, and be right if the hidden man of the heart be right. To the psalmist, that law was revealed by Pentateuch and prophets; but the delight in it, in which he recognises the germ of godliness, is the coincidence of will and inclination with the declared will of God, however declared. In effect, he reduces perfection to the same elements as the other psalmist who sang, "I delight to do Thy will, yea, Thy law is within my heart." The secret of blessedness is self-renunciation,—

"A love to lose my will in His,
And by that loss be free."

Thoughts which are sweet will be familiar.

The command to Joshua is the instinct of the devout man. In the distractions and activities of the busy day the law beloved will be with him, illuminating his path and shaping his acts. In hours of rest it will solace weariness and renew strength. That habit of patient, protracted brooding on the revelation of God's will needs to be cultivated. Men live meanly because they live so fast. Religion lacks depth and volume because it is not fed by hidden springs.

The good man's character being thus all condensed into one trait, the psalm next gathers his blessedness up in one image. The tree is an eloquent figure to Orientals, who knew water as the one requisite to turn desert into garden. Such a life as has been sketched will be rooted and steadfast. "Planted" is expressed by a word which suggests fixity. The good man's life is deeply anchored, and so rides out storms. It goes down

through superficial fleeting things to that Eternal Will, and so stands unmoved and upright when winds howl. Scotch firs lift massive, corrugated boles, and thrust out wide, gnarled branches clothed in steadfast green, and look as if they could face any tempest, but their roots run laterally among the surface gravel, and therefore they go down before blasts which feeble saplings, that strike theirs vertically, meet unharmed.

Such a life is fed and refreshed. The law of the Lord is at once soil and stream. In the one aspect fastening a life to it gives stability; in the other, freshening and means of growth. Truly loved, that Will becomes, in its manifold expressions, as the divided irrigation channels through which a great river is brought to the roots of each plant. If men do not find it life-giving as rivers of water in a dry place, it is because they do not delight in it. Opposed, it is burdensome and harsh; accepted, this sweet image tells what it becomes—the true good, the only thing that really nourishes and reinvigorates. The disciples came back to Jesus, whom they had left too wearied and faint to go with them to the city, and found Him fresh and strong. Their wonder was answered by, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.”

Such a life is vigorous and productive. It would be artificial straining to assign definite meanings to “fruit” and “leaf.” All that belongs to vigorous vitality and beauty is included. These come naturally when the preceding condition is fulfilled. This stage of the psalm is the appropriate place for deeds to come into view. By loving fellowship with God and delight in His law the man is made capable of good. His virtues are growths, the outcome of life. The psalm anticipates Christ’s teaching of the good tree bringing forth good fruit, and also tells how His precept of making the tree good is to be obeyed—namely, by transplanting it from the soil of self-will to that of delight in the law. How that transplanting is to be effected it does not tell. “But now being made free from sin, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness,” and the fruit of the Spirit in “whatsoever things are lovely and of good report” hangs in clusters on the life that has been shifted from the realm of darkness and rooted in Christ. The relation is more intimate still. “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.”

Such a life will be prosperous. The figure is abandoned here. The meaning is not affected whether we translate “whatsoever he doeth shall prosper,” or “whatsoever . . . he shall cause to succeed.” That is not unconditionally true now, nor was it then, if referred to what the world calls prospering, as many a sad and questioning strain in the Psalter proves. He whose life is rooted in God will have his full share of foiled plans and abortive hopes, and will often see the fruit nipped by frost or blown green from the boughs, but still the promise is true in its inmost meaning. For what is prosperity? Does the psalmist merely mean to preach the more vulgar form of the doctrine that religion makes the best of both worlds? or are his hopes to be harmonised with experience, by giving a deeper meaning to “prosperity”? They to whom the will of God is delight can never be hurt by evil, for all that meets them expresses and serves that will, and the fellow-servants of the King do not wound one another. If a life be

rooted in God and a heart delight in His law, that life will be prosperous and that heart will be at rest.

The second half of the psalm gives the dark contrast of the fruitless, rootless life (vv. 4-6). The Hebrew flashes the whole dread antithesis on the view at once by its first word, “Not so,” a universal negative, which reverses every part of the preceding picture. “Wicked” is preferable to “ungodly,” as the designation of the subjects. Whether we take the root idea of the word to be “restless,” as most of the older and many modern commentators do, or “crooked” (Hupfeld), or “loose, flaccid” (Delitzsch), it is the opposite of “righteous,” and therefore means one who lives not by the law of God, but by his own will. The psalmist has no need to describe him further nor to enumerate his deeds. The fundamental trait of his character is enough. Two classes only, then, are recognised here. If a man has not God’s uttered will for his governor, he goes into the category of “wicked.” That sounds harsh doctrine, and not corresponding to the innumerable gradations of character actually seen. But it does correspond to facts, if they are grasped in their roots of motive and principle. If God be not the supreme delight, and His law sovereign, some other object is men’s delight and aim, and that departure from God taints a life, however fair it may be. It is a plain deduction from our relations to God that lives lived irrespective of Him are sinful, whatever be their complexion otherwise.

The remainder of the psalm has three thoughts—the real nullity of such lives, their consequent disappearance in “the judgment,” and the ground of both the blessedness of the one type of character and the vanishing of the other in the diverse attitude of God to each. Nothing could more vividly suggest the essential nothingness of the “wicked” than the contrast of the leafy beauty of the fruit-laden tree and the chaff, rootless, fruitless, lifeless, light, and therefore the sport of every puff of wind that blows across the elevated and open threshing floor.

Such is indeed a true picture of every life not rooted in God and drawing fertility from Him. It is rootless; for what hold-fast is there but in Him? or where shall the heart twine its tendrils if not round God’s stable throne? or what basis do fleeting objects supply for him who builds elsewhere than on the enduring Rock? It is fruitless; for what is fruit? There may be much activity and many results satisfying to part of man’s nature and admired by others. One fruit there will be, in character elaborated. But if we ask what ought to be the products of a life, man and God being what they are in themselves and to each other, we shall not wonder if every result of godless energy is regarded by “those clear eyes and perfect judgment” of heaven as barrenness. In the light of these higher demands, achievements hymned by the world’s acclamations seem infinitely small, and many a man, rich in the apparent results of a busy and prosperous life, will find to his dismayed astonishment that he has nothing to show but unfruitful works of darkness. Chaff is fruitless because lifeless.

Its disappearance in the winnowing wind is the consequence and manifestation of its essential nullity. “Therefore” draws the conclusion of necessary transiency. Just as the winnower throws up his shovel full into the breeze, and the chaff goes fluttering out of the floor because it is light, while the wheat falls on the heap because it

is solid, so the wind of judgment will one day blow and deal with each man according to his nature. It will separate them, whirling away the one, and not the other. "One shall be taken and the other left." When does this sifting take effect? The psalmist does not date it. There is a continually operative law of retribution, and there are crises of individual or national life, when the accumulated consequences of evil deeds fall on the doers. But the definite article prefixed to "judgment" seems to suggest some special "day" of separation. It is noteworthy and perhaps illuminative that John the Baptist uses the same figures of the tree and the chaff in his picture of the Messianic judgments, and that epoch may have been in the psalmist's mind. Whatever the date, this he is sure of—that the wind will rise some time, and that, when it does, the wicked will be blown out of sight. When the judgment comes, the "congregation of the righteous"—that is, the true Israel within Israel, or, to speak in Christian language, the true invisible Church—will be freed from admixture of outward adherents, whose lives give the lie to their profession. Men shall be associated according to spiritual affinity, and "being let go," will "go to their own company" and "place," wherever that may be.

The ground of these diverse fates is the different attitude of God to each life. Each clause of the last verse really involves two ideas, but the pregnant brevity of style states only half of the antithesis in each, suppressing the second member in the first clause and the first member in the second clause, and so making the contrast the more striking by emphasising the cause of an unspoken consequence in the former, and the opposite consequence of an unspoken cause in the latter. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous [therefore it shall last]. The Lord knoweth not the way of the wicked [therefore it shall perish]." The way which the Lord knows abides. "Know" is, of course, here used in its full sense of loving knowledge, care, and approval, as in "He knoweth my path" and the like sayings. The direction of the good man's life is watched, guarded, approved, and blessed by God. Therefore it will not fail to reach its goal. They who walk patiently in the paths which He has prepared will find them paths of peace, and will not tread them unaccompanied, nor ever see them diverging from the straight road to home and rest. "Commit thy way unto the Lord," and let His way be thine, and He shall make thy way prosperous.

The way or course of life which God does not know perishes. A path perishes when, like some dim forest track, it dies out, leaving the traveller bewildered amid impenetrable forests, or when, like some treacherous Alpine track among rotten rocks, it crumbles beneath the tread. Every course of life but that of the man who delights in and keeps the law of the Lord comes to a fatal end, and leads to the brink of a precipice, over which the impetus of descent carries the reluctant foot. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more till the noon-tide of the day. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

PSALM II.

- 1 Why do the nations muster with tumult,
And the peoples meditate vanity?

- 2 The kings of the earth take up their posts,
And the chieftains sit in counsel together
Against Jehovah and against His Anointed.
- 3 "Let us wrench off their bands,
And let us fling off from us their cords."
- 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
The Lord mocks at them.
- 5 Then He speaks to them in His anger-wrath,
And in His wrath-heat puts them in panic.
- 6 . . . "And yet I, I have set my King
Upon Zion, my holy mountain."
- 7 I will tell of a decree:
Jehovah said unto me, My son art thou;
I have begotten thee this day.
- 8 Ask from me and I will give thee the nations
as thine inheritance,
And as thy possession the ends of the earth.
- 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,
Like a potter's vessel shalt thou shatter them.
- 10 And now, O kings, be wise;
Let yourselves be warned, O judges of the
earth.
- 11 Serve Jehovah in fear,
And rejoice in trembling.
- 12 Kiss the Son (?), lest He be angry, and ye perish
in [your] way;
For easily may His wrath kindle.
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

VARIOUS unsatisfactory conjectures as to a historical basis for this magnificent lyric have been made, but none succeeds in specifying events which fit with the situation painted in it. The banded enemies are rebels, and the revolt is widespread; for the "kings of the earth" is a very comprehensive, if we may not even say a universal, expression. If taken in connection with "the uttermost parts of the earth" (ver. 8), which are the King's rightful dominion, it implies a sweep of authority and a breadth of opposition quite beyond any recorded facts. Authorship and date must be left undetermined. The psalm is anonymous, like Psalm i., and is thereby marked off from the psalms which follow in Book I., and with one exception are ascribed to David. Whether these two preludes to the Psalter were set in their present place on the completion of the whole book, or were prefixed to the smaller "Davidic" collection, cannot be settled. The date of composition may have been much earlier than that of either the smaller or the larger collection.

The true basis of the psalm is not some petty revolt of subject tribes, even if such could be aduced, but Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam. vii., which sets forth the dignity and dominion of the King of Israel as God's son and representative. The poet-prophet of our psalm may have lived after many monarchs had borne the title, but failed to realise the ideal there outlined, and the imperfect shadows may have helped to lift his thoughts to the reality. His grand poem may be called an idealising of the monarch of Israel, but it is an idealising which expected realisation. The psalm is prophecy as well as poetry; and whether it had contemporaneous persons and events as a starting-point or not, its theme is a real person, fully possessing the prerogatives and wielding the dominion which Nathan had declared to be God's gift to the King of Israel.

The psalm falls into four strophes of three verses each, in the first three of which the reader

is made spectator and auditor of vividly painted scenes, while in the last the psalmist exhorts the rebels to return to allegiance.

In the first strophe (vv. 1-3) the conspiracy of banded rebels is set before us with extraordinary force. The singer does not delay to tell what he sees, but breaks into a question of astonished indignation as to what *can* be the cause of it all. Then, in a series of swift clauses, of which the vivid movement cannot be preserved in a translation, he lets us see what had so moved him. The masses of the "nations" are hurrying tumultuously to the mustering-place; the "peoples" are meditating revolt, which is smitingly stigmatised in anticipation as "vanity." But it is no mere uprising of the common herd; "the kings of the earth" take their stand as in battle-array, and the men of mark and influence lay their heads together, pressing close to one another on the divan as they plot. All classes and orders are united in revolt, and hurry and eagerness mark their action and throb in the words. The rule against which the revolt is directed is that of "Jehovah and His Anointed." That is one rule, not two,—the dominion of Jehovah exercised through the Messiah. The psalmist had grasped firmly the conception that God's visible rule is wielded by Messiah, so that rebellion against one is rebellion against both. Their "bands" are the same. Pure monotheism as the psalmist was, he had the thought of a king so closely associated with Jehovah, that he could name them in one breath as, in some sense, sharers of the same throne and struck at by the same revolt. The foundation of such a conception was given in the designation of the Davidic monarch as God's vicegerent and representative, but its full justification is the relation of the historic Christ to the Father whose throne He shares in glory.

That eloquent "why" may include both the ideas of "for what reason?" and "to what purpose?" Opposition to that King, whether by communities or individuals, is unreasonable. Every rising of a human will against the rule which it is blessedness to accept is absurd, and hopelessly incapable of justification. The question, so understood, is unanswerable by the rebels or by any one else. The one mystery of mysteries is that a finite will should be able to lift itself against the Infinite Will, and be willing to use its power. In the other aspect, the question, like that pregnant "vanity," implies the failure of all rebellion. Plot and strive, conspire and muster, as men may, all is vanity and striving of wind. It is destined to break down from the beginning. It is as hopeless as if the stars were to combine to abolish gravitation. That dominion does not depend on man's acceptance of it, and he can no more throw it off by opposition than he can fling a somersault into space and so get away from earth. When we can vote ourselves out of submission to physical law, we may plot or fight ourselves out of subjection to the reign of Jehovah and of His Anointed.

All the self-will in the world does not alter the fact that the authority of Christ is sovereign over human wills. We cannot get away from it; but we can either lovingly embrace it, and then it is our life, or we can set ourselves against it, like an obstinate ox planting its feet and standing stock-still, and then the goad is driven deep and draws blood.

The metaphor of bands and cords is taken from the fastenings of the yoke on a draught bullock. One can scarcely miss the lovely contrast of this

truculent exhortation to rebellion with the gracious summons "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." The "bands" are already on our necks in a very real sense, for we are all under Christ's authority, and opposition is rebellion, not the effort to prevent a yoke being imposed, but to shake off one already laid on. But yet the consent of our own wills is called for, and thereby we take the yoke, which is a stay rather than a fetter, and bear the burden which bears up those who bear it.

Psalm i. set side by side in sharp contrast the godly and the godless. Here a still more striking transition is made in the second strophe (vv. 4-6), which changes the scene to heaven. The lower half of the picture is all eager motion and strained effort; the upper is full of Divine calm. Hot with hatred, flushed with defiant self-confidence and busy with plots, the rebels hurry together like swarming ants on their hillock. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." That representation of the seated God contrasts grandly with the stir on earth. He needs not to rise from His throned tranquillity, but regards undisturbed the disturbances of earth. The thought embodied is like that expressed in the Egyptian statues of gods carved out of the side of a mountain, "moulded in colossal calm," with their mighty hands laid in their laps and their wide-opened eyes gazing down on the little ways of the men creeping about their feet.

And what shall we say of that daring and awful image of the laughter of God? The attribution of such action to Him is so bold that no danger of misunderstanding it is possible. It sends us at once to look for its translation, which probably lies in the thought of the essential ludicrousness of opposition, which is discerned in heaven to be so utterly groundless and hopeless as to be absurd. "When He came nigh and beheld the city, He wept over it." The two pictures are not incapable of being reconciled. The Christ who wept over sinners is the fullest revelation of the heart of God, and the laughter of the psalm is consistent with the tears of Jesus as He stood on Olivet, and looked across the glen to the Temple glittering in the morning sun.

God's laughter passes into the utterance of His wrath at the time determined by Him. The silence is broken by His voice, and the motionless form flashes into action. One movement is enough to "vex" the enemies and fling them into panic, as a flock of birds put to flight by the lifting of an arm. There is a point, known to God alone, when He perceives that the fulness of time has come, and the opposition must be ended. By long-drawn-out, gentle patience He has sought to win to obedience (though that side of His dealings is not presented in this psalm), but the moment arrives when in world-wide catastrophes or crushing blows on individuals sleeping retribution wakes at the right moment, determined by considerations inappreciable by us: "Then does He speak in His wrath."

The last verse of this strophe is parallel with the last of the preceding, being, like it, the dramatically introduced speech of the actor in the previous verses. The revolvers' mutual encouragement is directly answered by the sovereign word of God, which discloses the reason for the futility of their attempts. The "I" of ver. 6 is emphatic. On one side is that majestic "I have set my King"; on the other a world of rebels. They may put their shoulders to the throne of the Anointed to overthrow it; but what of that? God's hand

holds it firm, whatever forces press on it. All enmity of banded or of single wills breaks against and is dashed by it into ineffectual spray.

Another speaker is next heard, the Anointed King, who, in the third strophe (vv. 7-9), bears witness to Himself and claims universal dominion as His by a Divine decree. "Thou art my son; to-day have I begotten thee." So runs the first part of the decree. The allusion to Nathan's words to David is clear. In them the prophet spoke of the succession of David's descendants, the king as a collective person, so to speak. The psalmist, knowing how incompletely any or all of these had fulfilled the words which were the patent of their kingship, repeats them in confident faith as certain to be accomplished in the Messiah-king, who fills the future for him with a great light of hope. He knew not the historic person in whom the word has to be fulfilled, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he had before him the prospect of a king living as a man, the heir of the promises. Now, this idea of sonship, as belonging to the monarch, is much better illustrated by the fact that Israel, the nation, was so named, than by the boasts of Gentile dynasties to be sons of Zeus or Ra. The relationship is moral and spiritual, involving Divine care and love and appointment to office, and demanding human obedience and use of dignity for God. It is to be observed that in our psalm the day of the King's self-attestation is the day of His being "begotten." The point of time referred to is not the beginning of personal existence, but of investiture with royalty. With accurate insight, then, into the meaning of the words, the New Testament takes them as fulfilled in the Resurrection (Acts xiii. 33; Rom. i. 4). In it, as the first step in the process which was completed in the Ascension, the manhood of Jesus was lifted above the limitations and weaknesses of earth, and began to rise to the throne. The day of His resurrection was, as it were, the day of the birth of His humanity into royal glory.

Built upon this exaltation to royalty and sonship follows the promise of universal dominion. Surely the expectation of "the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession" bursts the bonds of the tiny Jewish kingdom! The wildest national pride could scarcely have dreamed that the narrow strip of seaboard, whose inhabitants never entered on any wide schemes of conquest, should expand into a universal monarchy, stretching even farther than the giant empires on either side. If such were the psalmist's expectations, they were never even approximately fulfilled; but the reference of the glowing words to Messiah's kingdom is in accordance with the current of prophetic hopes, and need cause no hesitation to those who believe in prophecy at all.

Universal dominion is God's gift to Messiah. Even while putting His foot on the step of the throne, Jesus said, "All power is *given* unto me." This dominion is founded not on His essential divinity, but on His suffering and sacrifice. His rule is the rule of God in Him, for He is the highest form of the Divine self-revelation, and whose trusts, loves, and obeys Christ, trusts, loves, and obeys God in Him. The psalmist did not know in how much more profound a sense than he attached to his words they were true. They had an intelligible, great, and true meaning for him. They have a greater for us.

The Divine voice foretells victory over opposition and destruction to opposers. The sceptre is of iron, though the hand that holds it once

grasped the reed. The word rendered "break" may also be translated, with a different set of vowels, "shepherd," and is so rendered by the LXX. (which Rev. ii. 27, etc., follows) and by some other versions. But, in view of the parallelism of the next clause, "break" is to be preferred. The truth of Christ's destructive energy is too often forgotten, and, when remembered, is too often thrown forward into another world. The history of this world ever since the Resurrection has been but a record of conquered antagonism to Him. The stone cut out without hands has dashed against the images of clay and silver and gold and broken them all. The Gospel of Christ is the great solvent of institutions not based upon itself. Its work is

"To cast the kingdoms old
Into another mould."

Destructive work has still to be done, and its most terrible energy is to be displayed in the future, when all opposition shall be withered into nothingness by the brightness of His presence. There are two kinds of breaking: a merciful one, when His love shatters our pride and breaks into penitence the earthen vessels of our hearts; and a terrible one, when the weight of His sceptre crushes, and His hand casts down in shivers "vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction."

We have listened to three voices, and now, in vv. 10-12, the poet speaks in solemn exhortation: "Be wise now, ye kings." The "now" is argumentative, not temporal. It means "since things are so." The kings addressed are the rebel monarchs whose power seems so puny measured against that of "my King." But not only these are addressed, but all possessors of power and influence. Open-eyed consideration of the facts is true wisdom. The maddest thing a man can do is to shut his eyes to them and steel his heart against their instruction. This pleading invitation to calm reflection is the purpose of all the preceding. To draw rebels to loyalty which is life, is the meaning of all appeals to terror. God and His prophet desire that the conviction of the futility of rebellion with a poor "ten thousand" against "the king of twenty thousands" should lead to "sending an embassy" to sue for peace. The facts are before men, that they may be warned and wise.

The exhortation which follows in vv. 11, 12 points to the conduct which will be dictated by wise reception of instruction. So far as regards ver. 11 there is little difficulty. The exhortation to "serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with trembling" points to obedience founded on awe of God's majesty,—the fear which love does not cast out, but perfect; and to the gladness which blends with reverence, but is not darkened by it. To love and cleave to God, to feel the silent awe of His greatness and holiness giving dignity and solemnity to our gladness, and from this inmost heaven of contemplation to come down to a life of practical obedience—this is God's command and man's blessedness.

The close connection between Jehovah and Messiah in the preceding sections, in each of which the dominion of the latter is treated as that of the former and rebellion as against both at once, renders it extremely improbable that there should be no reference to the King in this closing hortatory strophe. The view-point of the psalm, if consistently retained throughout, requires something

equivalent to the exhortation to "kiss the Son" in token of fealty, to follow, "serve Jehovah." But the rendering "Son" is impossible. The word so translated is *Bar*, which is the Aramaic for *son*, but is not found in that sense in the Old Testament except in the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel and in Prov. xxxi. 2, a chapter which has in other respects a distinct Aramaic tinge. No good reason appears for the supposition that the singer here went out of his way to employ a foreign word instead of the usual *Ben*. But it is probably impossible to make any good and certain rendering of the existing text. The LXX. and Targum agree in rendering, "Take hold of instruction," which probably implies another reading of Hebrew text. None of the various proposed translations—*e. g.*, *Worship purely*, *Worship the chosen One*—are without objection; and, on the whole, the supposition of textual corruption seems best. The conjectural emendations of Grätz, *Hold fast by warning*, or reproof; Cheyne's alternative ones, *Seek ye His face* ("Book of Psalms," adopted from Brüll) or *Put on [again] His bonds* ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 351, adopted from Lagarde), and Hupfeld's (in his translation) *Cleave to Him*, obliterate the reference to the King, which seems needful in this section, as has been pointed out, and depart from the well-established meaning of the verb—namely, "kiss." These two considerations seem to require that a noun referring to Messiah, and grammatically object of the verb, should stand in the place occupied by *Son*. The Messianic reference of the psalm remains undimmed by the uncertainty of the meaning of this clause.

The transition from the representative of Jehovah to Jehovah Himself, which takes place in the next clause, is in accordance with the close union between them which has marked the whole psalm. It is henceforth Jehovah only who appears till the close. But the anger which is destructive, and which may easily flash out like flames from a furnace mouth, is excited by opposition to Messiah's kingdom, and the exclusive mention of Jehovah in these closing clauses makes the picture of the anger the more terrible.

But since the disclosure of the danger of perishing "in [or as to] the way," or course of rebellious conduct is part of an exhortation, the purpose of which is that the threatened flash of wrath may never need to shoot forth, the psalmist will not close without setting forth the blessed alternative. The sweet benediction of the close bends round to the opening words of the companion psalm of prelude, and thus identifies the man who delights in the law of Jehovah with him who submits to the kingdom of God's Anointed. The expression "put their trust" literally means to take refuge in. The act of trust cannot be more beautifully or forcibly described than as the flight of the soul to God. They who take shelter in God need fear no kindling anger. They who yield to the King are they who take refuge in Jehovah; and such never know aught of His kingdom but its blessings, nor experience any flame of His wrath, but only the happy glow of His love.

PSALM III.

- 1 Jehovah, how many are my oppressors!
Many are rising against me.
- 2 Many are saying to my soul,
There is no salvation for him in God. Selah.

- 3 And yet Thou, Jehovah, art a shield round me;
My glory, and the lifter up of my head.
- 4 With my voice to Jehovah I cry aloud,
And He answers me from His holy mountain.
Selah.
- 5 I laid myself down and slept;
I awaked; for Jehovah upholds me.
- 6 I am not afraid of ten thousands of people,
Who round about have set themselves against me.
- 7 Arise, Jehovah; save me, my God:
For Thou hast smitten all my enemies [on] the
cheek-bone;
The teeth of the wicked Thou hast broken.
- 8 To Jehovah belongs salvation:
Upon Thy people be Thy blessing. Selah.

ANOTHER pair of psalms follows the two of the Introduction. They are closely connected linguistically, structurally, and in subject. The one is a morning, the other an evening hymn, and possibly they are placed at the beginning of the earliest psalter for that reason. Ewald and Hitzig accept the Davidic authorship, though the latter shifts the period in David's life at which they were composed to the mutiny of his men at Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx.). Cheyne thinks that "you will find no situation which corresponds to these psalms," though you "search the story of David's life from end to end." He takes the whole of the Psalms from iii. to xvii., excepting viii., xv., xvi., as a group, "the heart utterances of the Church amidst some bitter persecution"—namely, "the period when faithful Israelites were so sorely oppressed both by traitors in their midst and by Persian tyrants" ("Orig. of Psalt.," pp. 226, 227). But correspondences of the two psalms with David's situation will strike many readers as being at least as close as that which is sought to be established with the "spiritual kernel of the nation during the Persian domination," and the absence of more specific reference is surely not unnatural in devout song, however strange it would be in prosaic narrative. We do not look for mention of the actual facts which wring the poet's soul and were peculiar to him, but are content with his expression of his religious emotions, which are common to all devout souls. Who expects Cowper to describe his aberrations of intellect in the "Olney Hymns"? But who cannot trace the connection of his pathetic strains with his sad lot? If ever a seeming reference to facts is pointed out in a so-called Davidic psalm, it is brushed aside as "prosaic," but the absence of such is, notwithstanding, urged as an argument against the authorship. Surely that is inconsistent.

This psalm falls into four strophes, three of which are marked by Selah. In the first (vv. 1, 2) the psalmist recounts his enemies. If we regard this as a morning psalm, it is touchingly true to experience that the first waking thought should be the renewed inrush of the trouble which sleep had for a time daunted back. His enemies are many, and they taunt him as forsaken of God. Surely it is a strong thing to say that there is no correspondence here with David's situation during Absalom's revolt. It was no partial conspiracy, but practically the nation had risen against him, "ut totidem fere haberet hostes quot subditos" (Calvin).

Shimei's foul tongue spoke the general mind: "The Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the

hand of Absalom" (2 Sam. xvi. 8). There had been sin enough in the king's recent past to give colour to the interpretation of his present calamity as the sign of his being forsaken of God. The conviction that such was the fact would swell the rebel ranks. The multitude has delight in helping to drown a sinking man who has been prosperous. The taunt went deep, for the Hebrew has "to my soul," as if the cruel scoff cut like a knife to the very centre of his personality, and wounded all the more because it gave utterance to his own fears. "The Lord hath bidden him," said David about Shimei's curses. But the psalmist is finding refuge from fears and foes even in telling how many there are, since he begins his complaint with "Jehovah." Without that word the exclamations of this first strophe are the voice of cowardice or despair. With it they are calmed into the appeal of trust.

The *Selah* which parts the first from the second strophe is probably a direction for an instrumental interlude while the singer pauses.

The second strophe (vv. 3, 4) is the utterance of faith, based on experience, laying hold of Jehovah as defence. By an effort of will the psalmist rises from the contemplation of surrounding enemies to that of the encircling Jehovah. In the thickest of danger and dread there is a power of choice left a man as to what shall be the object of thought, whether the stormy sea or the outstretched hand of the Christ. This harassed man flings himself out of the coil of troubles round about him and looks up to God. He sees in Him precisely what he needs most at the moment, for in that infinite nature is fulness corresponding to all emptiness of ours. "A shield around me," as He had promised to be to Abraham in his peril; "my glory," at a time when calumny and shame were wrapping him about and his kingdom seemed gone; "the lifter up of my head," sunk as it is both in sadness and calamity, since Jehovah can both cheer his spirit and restore his dignity. And how comes this sudden burst of confidence to lighten the complaining soul? Ver. 4 tells. Experience has taught him that as often as he cries to Jehovah he is heard. The tenses in ver. 4 express a habitual act and a constant result. Not once or twice, but as his wont, he prays, and Jehovah answers. The normal relation between him and Jehovah is that of frank communion; and since it has long been so and is so now, even the pressure of present disaster does not make faith falter. It is hard to begin to trust when in the grip of calamity, but feet accustomed to the road to God can find it in the dark. There may be an allusion to David's absence from sanctuary and ark in ver. 4. The expectation of being answered "from His holy hill" gains in pathetic force when the lovely scene of submissive sacrifice in which he sent back the Ark is recalled (2 Sam. xv. 25). Though he be far from the place of prayer, and feeling the pain of absence, the singer's faith is not so tied to form as to falter in the assurance that his prayer is heard. Jehovah is shield, glory, and strengthener to the man who cries to Him, and it is by means of such crying that the heart wins the certitude that He is all these. Again the instruments sound and the singer pauses.

The third strophe (vv. 5, 6) beautifully expresses the tranquil courage which comes from trust. Since sleeping and safe waking again in ordinary circumstances is no such striking proof of Divine help that one in the psalmist's situation

would be induced to think especially of it and to found his confidence on it, the view is to be taken that the psalmist in ver. 5 is contemplating the experience which he has just made in his present situation. "Surrounded by enemies, he was quite safe under God's protection and exposed to no peril even in the night" (Riehm, in Hupfeld *in loc.*). Surely correspondence with David's circumstances may be traced here. His little band had no fortress in Mahanaim, and Ahithophel's counsel to attack them by night was so natural that the possibility must have been present to the king. But another night had come and gone in safety, disturbed by no shout of an enemy. The nocturnal danger had passed, and day was again brightening.

They were safe because the Keeper of Israel had kept them. It is difficult to fit this verse into the theory that here the persecuted Israelitish Church is speaking, but it suits the situation pointed to in the superscription. To lie down and sleep in such circumstances was itself an act of faith, and a sign of the quiet heart which faith gives. Like Christ on the hard wooden "pillow" during the storm, or like Peter sleeping an infant's sleep the night before his purposed execution, this man can shut his eyes and quiet himself to slumber, though "ten thousands have set themselves against him." They ring him round, but cannot reach him through his shield. Ver. 6 rises to bold defiance, the result of the experience in ver. 5. How different the tone of reference to the swarms of the enemy here and in ver. 1! There the psalmist was counting them and cowering before them; here their very number is an element in his triumphant confidence. Courage comes from thinking of the one Divine Ally, before whom myriads of enemies are nothing. One man with God to back him is always in the majority. Such courage, based on such experience and faith, is most modest and reasonable, but it is not won without an effort of will, which refuses to fear, and fixes a trustful gaze not on peril, but on the protector. "I will not be afraid" speaks of resolve and of temptations to fear, which it repels, and from "the nettle danger plucks the flower" *trust* and the fruit *safety*. *Selah* does not follow here. The tone of the strophe is that of lowly confidence, which is less congruous with an instrumental interlude than are the more agitated preceding strophes. The last strophe, too, is closely connected with the third, since faith bracing itself against fear glides naturally into prayer.

The final strophe (vv. 7, 8) gives the culmination of faith in prayer. "Arise, Jehovah," is quoted from the ancient invocation (Num. x. 35), and expresses in strongly anthropomorphic form the desire for some interposition of Divine power. Fearlessness is not so complete that the psalmist is beyond the need of praying. He is courageous because he knows that God will help, but he knows, too, that God's help depends on his prayer. The courage which does not pray is foolish, and will break down into panic; that which fears enough to cry "Arise, Jehovah," will be vindicated by victory. This prayer is built on experience, as the preceding confidence was. The enemies are now, according to a very frequent figure in the Psalter, compared to wild beasts. Smiting on the cheek is usually a symbol of insult, but here is better taken in close connection with the following "breaking the teeth." By a daring image Jehovah is represented as dealing the beasts of prey, who prowl round the psalmist

with open mouth, the buffets which shatter their jaws and dislodge their teeth, thus making them powerless to harm him. So it has been in the past, and that past is a plea that so it will be now. God will be but doing as He has done, if now He "arise." If He is to be true to Himself, and not to stultify His past deliverances, He must save his suppliant now. Such is the logic of faith, which is only valid on the supposition that God's resources and purpose are inexhaustible and unchangeable. The whole ends with confident anticipation of an answer. "Salvation belongeth unto Jehovah." The full spiritual meaning of that salvation was not yet developed. Literally, the word means "breadth," and so, by a metaphor common to many languages, deliverance as an act, and well-being or prosperity as a state. Deliverance from his enemies is the psalmist's main idea in the word here. It "belongs to Jehovah," since its bestowal is His act. Thus the psalmist's last utterance of trust traverses the scoff which wounded him so much (ver. 2), but in a form which beautifully combines affiance and humility, since it triumphantly asserts that salvation is in God's power, and silently implies that what is thus God's "to will and do" shall certainly be His suppliant's to enjoy.

Intensely personal as the psalm is, it is the prayer of a king; and rebels as the bulk of the people are ("ten thousands of the people"), they are still God's. Therefore all are included in the scope of his pitying prayer. In other psalms evil is invoked on evil-doers, but here hate is met by love, and the self-absorption of sorrow counteracted by wide sympathy. It is a lower exemplification of the same spirit which breathed from the lips of the greater King the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

PSALM IV.

- 1 When I cry answer me, O God of my righteousness; Thou hast in straits made space for me:
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.
- 2 Sons of men! how long shall my glory be mocked, [in that] ye love vanity,
[And] seek after a lie? Selah.
- 3 But know that Jehovah has set apart as His own him whom He favours:
Jehovah hears when I cry to Him.
- 4 Stand in awe, and sin not:
Speak in your hearts on your beds, and be silent.
Selah.
- 5 Sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness,
And trust on Jehovah.
- 6 Many are saying, Who will let us see good?
Lift Thou upon us the light of Thy face, O Jehovah.
- 7 Thou hast given gladness in my heart,
More than in the time of their corn and their wine [when] they abound.
- 8 In peace will I lie down and at once sleep:
For Thou, Jehovah, in [my] loneliness, makest me dwell in safety.

PSALMS iii. and iv. are a pair. They are similar in expression (*my glory, there be many which say, I laid me down and slept*) in the psalmist's situation, and in structure (as indicated by the *Selahs*). But they need not be contemporaneous, nor need the superscription of Psalm iii. be extended to Psalm iv. Their tone is different, the fourth hav-

ing little reference to the personal danger so acutely felt in Psalm iii. and being mainly a gentle, earnest remonstrance with antagonists, seeking to win them to a better mind. The strophical division into four parts of two verses each, as marked by the *Selahs*, is imperfectly carried out, as in Psalm iii., and does not correspond with the logical division—a phenomenon which occurs not infrequently in the Psalter, as in all poetry, where the surging thought or emotion overleaps its bounds. Dividing according to the form, we have four strophes, of which the first two are marked by *Selah*; dividing by the flow of thought, we have three parts of unequal length—prayer (ver. 1), remonstrance (vv. 2-5), communion and prayer (vv. 6-8).

The cry for an answer by deed is based on the name, and on the past acts of God. Grammatically, it would be possible and regular to render "my God of righteousness," i. e., "my righteous God"; but the pronoun is best attached to "righteousness" only, as the consideration that God is righteous is less relevant than that He is the source of the psalmist's righteousness. Since He is so, He may be expected to vindicate it by answering prayer by deliverance. He who feels that all good in himself comes from God may be quite sure that, sooner or later, and by some means or other, God will witness to His own work. To the psalmist nothing was so incredible as that God should not take care of what He had planted, or let the springing crop be trodden down or rooted up. The Old Testament takes prosperity as the Divine attestation of righteousness; and though they who worship the Man of Sorrows have new light thrown on the meaning of that conception, the substance of it remains true for ever. The compellation "God of my righteousness" is still mighty with God. The second ground of the prayer is laid in the past deeds of God. Whether the clause "Thou hast in straits made space for me" be taken relatively or not, it appeals to former deliverances as reasons for man's prayer and for God's act. In many languages trouble and deliverance are symbolised by narrowness and breadth. Compression is oppression. Closely hemmed in by crowds or by frowning rocks, freedom of movement is impossible and breathing is difficult. But out in the open, one expatiates, and a clear horizon means an ample sky.

The strophe division keeps together the prayer and the beginning of the remonstrance to opponents, and does so in order to emphasise the eloquent, sharp juxtaposition of God and the "sons of men." The phrase is usually employed to mean persons of position, but here the contrast between the varying height of men's molehills is not so much in view as that between them all and the loftiness of God. The lips which by prayer have been purged and cured of quivering can speak to foes without being much abashed by their dignity or their hatred. But the very slight reference to the psalmist's own share in the hostility of these "sons of men" is noticeable. It is their false relation to God which is prominent throughout the remonstrance; and that being so, "my glory," in ver. 2, is probably to be taken, as in iii. 3, as a designation of God. It is usually understood to mean either personal or official dignity, but the suggested interpretation is more in keeping with the tone of the psalm. The enemies were really flouting God and turning that great name in which the singer gloried into a jest. They were not there-

fore idolaters, but practical heathen in Israel, and their "vanity" and "lies" were their schemes doomed to fail and their blasphemies. These two verses bring most vividly into view the contrast between the psalmist clinging to his helping God and the knot of opponents hatching their plans which are sure to fail.

The *Selah* indicates a pause in the song, as if to underscore the question "How long?" and let it soak into the hearts of the foes, and then, in vv. 3 and 4, the remonstrating voice presses on them the great truth which has sprung anew in the singer's soul in answer to his prayer, and beseeches them to let it stay their course and still their tumult. By "the godly" is meant, of course, the psalmist. He is sure that he belongs to God and is set apart, so that no real evil can touch him; but does he build this confidence on his own character or on Jehovah's grace? The answer depends on the meaning of the pregnant word rendered "godly," which here occurs for the first time in the Psalter. So far as its form is concerned, it may be either active, one who shows *chesed* (lovingkindness or favour), or passive, one to whom it is shown. But the usage in the Psalter seems to decide in favour of the passive meaning, which is also more in accordance with the general biblical view, which traces all man's hopes and blessings, not to his attitude to God, but to God's to him, and regards man's love to God as a derivative, "Amati amamus, amantes amplius mere-mur amari" (Bern). Out of His own deep heart of love Jehovah has poured His lovingkindness on the psalmist, as he thrillingly feels, and He will take care that His treasure is not lost; therefore this conviction, which has flamed up anew since the moment before when he prayed, brings with it the assurance that He "hears when I cry," as he had just asked Him to do. The slight emendation, adopted by Cheyne from Grätz and others, is tempting, but unnecessary. He would read, with a small change which would bring this verse into parallelism with xxxi. 22, "See how passing great lovingkindness Jehovah hath shown me"; but the present text is preferable, inasmuch as what we should expect to be urged upon the enemies is not outward facts, but some truth of faith neglected by them. On such a truth the singer rests his own confidence; such a truth he lays, like a cold hand, on the hot brows of the plotters, and bids them pause and ponder. Believed, it would fill them with awe, and set in a lurid light the sinfulness of their assault on him. Clearly the rendering "Be ye angry" instead of "Stand in awe" gives a less worthy meaning, and mars the picture of the progressive conversion of the enemy into a devout worshipper, of which the first stage is the recognition of the truth in ver. 3; the second is the awestruck dropping of the weapons, and the third is the silent reflection in the calm and solitude of night. The psalm being an evening song, the reference to "your bed" is the more natural; but "speak in your hearts"—what? The new fact which you have learned from my lips. Say it quietly to yourselves then, when forgotten truths blaze on the waking eye, like phosphorescent writing in the dark, and the nobler self makes its voice heard. "Speak . . . and be silent," says the psalmist, for such meditation will end the busy plots against him, and in a wider application "that dread voice," heard in the awed spirit, "shrinks the streams" of passion and earthly desires, which otherwise brawl and roar there. Another strain of the "stringed instruments" makes

that silence, as it were, audible, and then the remonstrance goes on once more.

It rises higher now, exhorting to positive godliness, and that in the two forms of offering "sacrifices of righteousness," which here simply means those which are prescribed or which are offered with right dispositions, and of trusting in Jehovah—the two aspects of true religion, which outwardly is worship and inwardly is trust. The poet who could meet hate with no weapon but these earnest pleadings had learned a better lesson than "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love," and anticipated "bless them which curse you." The teacher who thus outlined the stages of the way back to God as recognition of His relation to the godly, solitary meditation thereon, forsaking of sin and hushing of the Spirit thereby, and finally worship and trust, knew the discipline for rebellious souls.

Ver. 6 seems at first sight to belong more closely to what follows than to what precedes, and is taken by those who hold the Davidic authorship as addressed to his followers beginning to despond. But it may be the continuance of the address to the enemies, carrying on the exhortation to trust. The sudden appearance of the plural "us" suggests that the psalmist associates himself with the persons whom he has been addressing, and, while he glances at the vain cries of the "many" would make himself the mouthpiece of the nascent faith which he hopes may follow his beseechings. The cry of *the many* would, in that case, have a general reference to the universal desire for "good," and would pathetically echo the hopelessness which must needs mingle with it, so long as the heart does not know who is the only good. The passionate weariness of the question, holding a negation in itself, is wonderfully contrasted with the calm prayer. The eyes fail for want of seeing the yearned-for blessing; but if Jehovah lifts the light of His face upon us, as He will certainly do in answer to prayer, "in His light we shall see light." Every good, however various, is sphered in Him. All colours are smelted into the perfect white and glory of His face.

There is no *Selah* after ver. 6, but, as in iii. 6, one is due, though omitted.

Vv. 7 and 8 are separated from ver. 6 by their purely personal reference. The psalmist returns to the tone of his prayer in ver. 1, only that petition has given place, as it should do, to possession and confident thankfulness. The many ask, Who?; he prays, "Lord." They have vague desires after God; he knows what he needs and wants. Therefore in the brightness of that Face shining on him his heart is glad. The mirth of harvest and vintage is exuberant, but it is poor beside the deep, still blessedness which trickles round the heart that craves most the light of Jehovah's countenance. That craving is joy and the fruition is bliss. The psalmist here touches the bottom, the foundation fact on which every life that is not vanity must be based, and which verifies itself in every life that is so based. Strange and tragic that men should forget it and love vanity which mocks them, and, though won, still leaves them looking wearily round the horizon for any glimmer of good! The glad heart possessing Jehovah can, on the other hand, lay itself down in peace and sleep, though foes stand round. The last words of the psalm flow restfully like a lullaby. The expression of confidence gains much if "alone" be taken as referring to the psalmist. Solitary as he is, ringed round by hostility as he

may be, Jehovah's presence makes him safe, and being thus safe, he is secure and confident. So he shuts his eyes in peace, though he may be lying in the open, beneath the stars, without defences or sentries. The Face brings light in darkness, gladness in want, enlargement in straits, safety in peril, and any and every good that any and every man needs.

PSALM V.

- 1 Give ear to my words, Jehovah;
Consider my meditation.
- 2 Listen to the voice of my crying, my King and my God,
For to Thee do I make supplication.
- 3 Jehovah, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice;
In the morning will I order my [prayer] to Thee and keep watch.
- 4 For not a God delighting in wickedness art Thou;
Evil cannot sojourn with Thee.
- 5 Fools cannot stand before Thine eyes;
Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.
- 6 Thou destroyest the speakers of falsehood;
The man of blood and deceit Jehovah loathes.
- 7 But I, in the multitude of Thy lovingkindness I dare come into Thy house;
I dare fall prostrate before Thy holy temple in Thy fear.
- 8 Jehovah, lead me in Thy righteousness, because of them that are spies on me;
Make Thy way level before me.
- 9 For in his mouth is nothing trustworthy;
Their inward part is destruction;
An open grave is their throat;
Their tongue they smooth.
- 10 Hold them guilty, Jehovah: let them fall by their own schemes;
In the multitude of their transgressions strike them down, for they have rebelled against Thee.
- 11 Then shall all those who take refuge in Thee be glad;
For ever shall they shout for joy, since Thou dost shelter them;
And they that love Thy name shall exult in Thee.
- 12 For Thou dost bless the righteous;
Jehovah, as with a shield, with favour dost Thou compass him about.

THE reference to the temple in ver. 7 is not conclusive against the Davidic authorship of this psalm, since the same word is applied in 1 Sam. i. 9 and iii. 3 to the house of God in Shiloh. It means a palace, and may well be used for any structure, even if a hair tent, in which God dwelt. No doubt it is oftenest used for the Solomonic temple, but it does not necessarily refer to it. Its use here, then, cannot be urged as fatal to the correctness of the superscription. At the same time, it does create a certain presumption against it. But there is nothing in the psalm to determine its date, and its worth is quite independent of its authorship. The psalmist is surrounded by foes, and seeks access to God. These are constant features of the religious life, and their expression here fits as closely to the present time as to any past.

The psalm falls into two main parts: vv. 1-7 and 8-12. The former division deals with the inner side of the devout life, its access to God, to whom sinful men cannot approach, the latter with the outward side, the conduct, "the way" in which the psalmist seeks to be led, and in which sinful men come to ruin because they will not walk. Naturally the inward comes first, for communion with God in the secret place of the Most High must precede all walking in His way and all blessed experience of His protection, with the joy that springs from it. These two halves of the psalm are arranged in inverted parallelism, the first verse of the second part (ver. 8) corresponding to the last verse of the first (ver. 7) and being, like it, purely personal; vv. 9 and 10 corresponding similarly to vv. 4-6 and like them, painting the character and fate of evil-doers; and, finally, vv. 11, 12, answering to vv. 1-3 and representing the blessedness of the devout soul, as in the one case led and protected by God and therefore glad, and in the other abiding in His presence. The whole is a prayerful meditation on the inexhaustible theme of the contrasted blessedness of the righteous and misery of the sinner as shown in the two great halves of life: the inward of communion and the outward of action.

In the first part (vv. 1-7) the central thought is that of access to God's presence, as the desire and purpose of the psalmist (1-3), as barred to evil-doers (4-6), and as permitted to, and embraced as his chief blessing by, the singer (7). The petition to be heard in vv. 1 and 2 passes into confidence that he is heard in ver. 3. There is no shade of sadness nor trace of struggle with doubt in this prayer, which is all sunny and fresh, like the morning sky, through which it ascends to God. "Consider [or Understand] my meditation"—the brooding, silent thought is spread before God, who knows unspoken desires, and "understands thoughts afar off." The contrast between "understanding the meditation" and "hearkening to the voice of my cry" is scarcely unintentional, and gives vividness to the picture of the musing psalmist, in whom, as he muses, the fire burns, and he speaks with his tongue, in a "cry" as loud as the silence from which it issued had been deep. Meditations that do not pass into cries and cries which are not preceded by meditations are alike imperfect. The invocation "my King" is full of meaning if the singer be David, who thus recognises the delegated character of his own royalty; but whoever wrote the psalm, that expression equally witnesses to his firm grasp of the true theocratic idea.

Noteworthy is the intensely personal tone of the invocation in both its clauses, as in the whole of these first verses, in every clause of which "my" or "I" occurs. The poet is alone with God and seeking to clasp still closer the guiding hand, to draw still nearer to the sweet and awful presence where is rest. The invocation holds a plea in itself. He who says, "My King and my God," urges the relation, brought about by God's love and accepted by man's faith, as a ground for the hearing of his petition. And so prayer passes into swift assurance; and with a new turn in thought, marked by the repetition of the name "Jehovah" (ver. 3), he speaks his confidence and his resolve. "In the morning" is best taken literally, whether we suppose the psalm to have been composed for a morning song or no. Apparently the compilers of the first Psalter placed it next to Psalm iv., which they regarded as an evening hymn, for this

reason. "I will lay me down and sleep" is beautifully followed by "In the morning shalt Thou hear my voice." The order of clauses in ver. 3 is significant in its apparent breach of strict sequence, by which God's hearing is made to precede the psalmist's praying. It is the order dictated by confidence, and it is the order in which the thoughts rise in the trustful heart. He who is sure that God will hear will therefore address himself to speak. First comes the confidence, and then the resolve. There are prayers wrung from men by sore need, and in which doubt causes faltering, but the happier, serener experience is like that of this singer. He resolves to "order" his prayer, using there the word employed for the priest's work in preparing the materials for the morning sacrifice. Thus he compares his prayer to it, and stands at the same level as the writer of Psalm iv., with whose command to "offer the sacrifices of righteousness" this thought again presents a parallel.

A psalmist who has grasped the idea that the true sacrifice is prayer is not likely to have missed the cognate thought that the "house of the Lord," of which he will presently speak, is something other than any material shrine. But to offer the sacrifice is not all which he rejoices to resolve. He will "keep watch," as Habakkuk said that he would do, on his watch-tower; and that can only mean that he will be on the outlook for the answer to his prayer, or, if we may retain the allusion to sacrifice, for the downward flash of the Divine fire, which tells his prayer's acceptance. Many a prayer is offered, and no eyes afterwards turned to heaven to watch for the answer, and perhaps some answers sent are like water spilled on the ground, for want of such observance.

The confidence and resolve ground themselves on God's holiness, through which the necessary condition of approach to Him comes to be purity—a conviction which finds expression in all religions, but is nowhere so vividly conceived or construed as demanding such stainless inward whiteness as in the Psalter. The "for" of ver. 4 would naturally have heralded a statement of the psalmist's grounds for expecting that he would be welcomed in his approach, but the turn of thought, which postpones that, and first regards God's holiness as shutting out the impure, is profoundly significant. "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness" means more than the simple "Thou hast not pleasure" would do; it argues from the character of God, and glances at some of the foul deities whose nostrils snuff up sensual impurity as acceptable sacrifice. The one idea of absolute contrariety between God and evil is put in a rich variety of shapes in vv. 4-6 which first deal with it negatively in three clauses (*not a God; not dwell; not stand in Thy sight*) and then positively in other three (*hatest; shalt destroy; abhorreth*). "Evil shall not sojourn with Thee." The verb is to be taken in its full meaning of sojourning as a guest-friend, who has the right to hospitality and defence. It thus constitutes the antithesis to ver. 7. Clearly the sojourning does not mean access to the temple, but abiding with God. The barriers are of the same nature as the communion which they hinder, and something far deeper is meant than outward access to any visible shrine. No one sojourned in the temple. In like manner, the "standing in Thy sight" is a figure drawn from courts, reminding us of "my King" in ver. 2 and suggesting the impossibility of evil or its doers approaching the Divine throne.

But there is more than a negative side to the relation between God and evil, which the psalm goes on to paint in sombre colours, for God not only does not delight in sin, but hates it with a hatred like the physical loathing of some disgusting thing, and will gather all His alienation into one fatal lightning bolt. Such thoughts do not exhaust the truth as to the Divine relation to sin. They did not exhaust the psalmist's knowledge of that relation, and still less do they exhaust ours, but they are parts of the truth to-day as much as then, and nothing in Christ's revelation has antiquated them.

The psalmist's vocabulary is full of synonyms for sin, which witness to the profound consciousness of it which law and ritual had evoked in devout hearts. First, he speaks of it in the abstract, as "wickedness" and "evil." Then he passes to individuals, of whom he singles out two pairs, the first a more comprehensive and the second a more specific designation. The former pair are "the foolish" and "workers of iniquity." The word for "foolish" is usually translated by the moderns "arrogant," but the parallelism with the general expression "workers of iniquity" rather favours a less special meaning, such as Hupfeld's "fools" or the LXX's "transgressors." Only in the last pair are special forms of evil mentioned, and the two selected are significant of the psalmist's own experience. *Liars* and *men of blood and craft* are his instances of the sort of sinners most abominable to God. That specification surely witnesses to his own sufferings from such.

In ver. 7 the psalmist comes back to the personal reference, contrasting his own access to God with the separation of evil-doers from His presence. But he does not assert that he has the right of entrance because he is pure. Very strikingly he finds the ground of his right of entry to the palace in God's "multitude of mercy," not in his own innocence. Answering to "in Thy righteousness" is "in Thy fear." The one phrase expresses God's disposition to man which makes access possible, the other man's disposition to God which makes worship acceptable. "In the multitude of Thy mercy" and "in Thy fear," taken together, set forth the conditions of approach. Having regard to ver. 4, it seems impossible to restrict the meaning of "Thy house" to the material sanctuary. It is rather a symbol of communion, protection, and friendship. Does the meaning pass into the narrower sense of outward worship in the material "temple" in the second clause? It may be fairly taken as doing so (Hupfeld). But it may be maintained that the whole verse refers to the spiritual realities of prayer and fellowship, and not at all to the externalities of worship, which are used as symbols, just as in ver. 3 prayer is symbolised by the morning sacrifice. But probably it is better to suppose that the psalmist's faith, though not tied to form, was fed by form, and that symbol and reality, the outward and the inward worship, the access to the temple and the approach of the silent soul to God, are fused in his psalm as they tended to be in his experience. Thus the first part of the psalm ends with the psalmist prostrate (for so the word for "worship" means) before the palace sanctuary of his King and God. It has thus far taught the conditions of approach to God, and given a concrete embodiment of them in the progress of the singer's thoughts from petition to assurance and from resolve to accomplishment.

The second part may be taken as his prayer

when in the temple, whether that be the outward sanctuary or no. It is likewise a further carrying out of the contrast of the condition of the wicked and of the lovers of God, expressed in terms applying to outward life rather than to worship. It falls into three parts: the personal prayer for guidance in life, the contemplation of evil-doers, and the vehement prayer for their destruction, corresponding to vv. 4-6, and the contrasted prayer for the righteous, among whom he implies his own inclusion.

The whole of the devout man's desires for himself are summed up in that prayer for guidance. All which the soul needs is included in these two: access to God in the depths of still prostration before His throne as the all-sufficient good for the inner life; guidance, as by a shepherd, on a plain path, chosen not by self-will but by God, for the outward. He who has received the former in any degree will in the same measure have the latter. To dwell in God's house is to desire His guidance as the chief good. "In Thy righteousness" is capable of two meanings: it may either designate the path by which the psalmist desired to be led, or the Divine attribute to which he appealed. The latter meaning, which is substantially equivalent to "because Thou art righteous," is made more probable by the other instances in the psalm of a similar use of "in" (*in the multitude of Thy mercy; in Thy fear; in the multitude of their transgressions*). His righteousness is manifested in leading those who seek for His guidance (compare Psalm xxv. 8; xxxi. 1. etc.). Then comes the only trace in the psalm of the presence of enemies, because of whom the singer prays for guidance. It is not so much that he fears falling into their hands as that he dreads lest, if left to himself, he may take some step which will give them occasion for malicious joy in his fall or his calamity. Wherever a man is earnestly God-fearing, many eyes watch him, and gleam with base delight if they see him stumble. The psalmist, whether David or another, had that cross to carry, like every thorough-going adherent of the religious ideal (or of any lofty ideal, for that matter); and his prayer shows how heavy it was, since thoughts of it mingled with even his longings for righteousness. "Plain" does not mean *obvious*, but *level*, and may possibly include both freedom from stumbling-blocks ("Lead us not into temptation") and from calamities, but the prevalent tone of the psalm points rather to the former. He who knows his own weaknesses may legitimately shrink from snares and occasions to fall, even though, knowing the wisdom of his Guide and the help that waits on his steps, he may "count it all joy" when he encounters them.

The picture of the evil-doers in ver. 9 is introduced, as in ver. 4, with a "for." The sinners here are evidently the *enemies* of the previous verse. Their sins are those of speech; and the force of the rapid clauses of the picture betrays how recently and sorely the psalmist had smarted from lies, flatteries, slanders, and all the rest of the weapons of smooth and bitter tongues. He complains that there is no faithfulness or steadfastness in "his mouth"—a distributive singular, which immediately passes into the plural—nothing there that a man can rely on, but all treacherous. "Their inward part is destruction." The other rendering, "engulfing ruin" or "a yawning gulf," is picturesque; but *destruction* is more commonly the meaning of the word and yields a vigorous sense here. They plot inwardly the ruin of the

men whom they flatter. The figure is bold. Down to this pit of destruction is a way like an open sepulchre, the throat expanded in the act of speech; and the falsely smoothed tongue is like a slippery approach to the descent (so Jennings and Lowe). Such figures strike Western minds as violent, but are natural to the East. The shuddering sense of the deadly power of words is a marked characteristic of the Psalter. Nothing stirs psalmists to deeper indignation than "God's great gift of speech abused," and this generation would be all the better for relearning the lesson.

The psalmist is "in the sanctuary," and there "understands their end," and breaks into prayer which is also prophecy. The vindication of such prayers for the destruction of evil-doers is that they are not the expressions of personal enmity ("They have rebelled against Thee"), and that they correspond to one side of the Divine character and acts, which was prominent in the Old Testament epoch of revelation, and is not superseded by the New. But they do belong to that lower level; and to hesitate to admit their imperfection from the Christian point of view is to neglect the plain teaching of our Lord, who built His law of the kingdom on the declared relative imperfection of the ethics of the Old. Terrible indeed are the prayers here. *Hold them guilty*—that is, probably, treat them as such by punishing; *let them fall; thrust them out*—from Thy presence, if they have ventured thither, or out into the darkness of death. Let us be thankful that we dare not pray such prayers, but let us not forget that for the psalmist not to have prayed them would have indicated, not that he had anticipated the tenderness of the Gospel, but that he had failed to learn the lesson of the law and was basely tolerant of baseness.

But we come into the sunshine again at the close, and hear the contrasted prayer, which thrills with gladness and hope. "When the wicked perish there is shouting." The servants of God, relieved from the incubus and beholding the fall of evil, lift up their praises. The order in which the designations of these servants occur is very noteworthy. It is surely not accidental that we have them first described as "those that trust in Thee," then as "all them that love Thy name," and finally as "the righteous." What is this sequence but an anticipation of the evangelical order? The root of all is trust, then love, then righteousness. Love follows trust. "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us." Righteousness follows trust and love, inasmuch as by faith the new life enters the heart and inasmuch as love supplies the great motive for keeping the commandments. So root, stem, and flower are here, wrapped up, as it were, in a seed, which unfolds into full growth in the New Testament. The literal meaning of the word rendered "put their trust" is "flee as to a refuge," and that beautifully expresses the very essence of the act of faith: while the same metaphor is carried on in "defendest," which literally means *coverest*. The fugitive who shelters in God is covered by the shadow of His wing. Faith, love, and righteousness are the conditions of the purest joy. Trust is joy; love is joy; obedience to a loved law is joy. And round him who thus, in his deepest self, dwells in God's house and in his daily life walks, with these angels for his companions, on God's path, which by choice he has made his own, there is ever cast the broad buckler of God's favour. He is safe from all evil on whom God looks with

love, and he on whom God so looks is he whose heart dwells in God's house and whose feet "travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness."

PSALM VI.

- 1 Jehovah, not in Thine anger do Thou correct me,
And not in Thy hot wrath do Thou chastise me.
- 2 Be gracious to me, Jehovah, for I am withered away;
Heal me, Jehovah, for my bones are dismayed:
- 3 And my soul is sorely dismayed;
And Thou, Jehovah—how long?
- 4 Return, Jehovah, deliver my soul;
Save me for the sake of Thy lovingkindness.
- 5 For in death there is no remembrance of Thee;
In Sheol who gives thee thanks?
- 6 I am wearied out with my groaning;
Every night I make my bed swim;
With my tears I melt away my couch.
- 7 My eye is wasted with trouble;
It is aged because of all my oppressors.
- 8 Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity,
For Jehovah has heard the voice of my weeping.
- 9 Jehovah has heard my supplication;
Jehovah will accept my prayer.
- 10 Ashamed and sorely dismayed shall be all my enemies;
They shall turn back, shall be ashamed in a moment.

THE theme and progress of thought in this psalm are very common, especially in those attributed to David. A soul compassed by enemies, whose hate has all but sapped the life out of it, "catches at God's skirts and prays," and thence wins confidence which anticipates deliverance and victory. There are numerous variations of this *leitmotif*, and each of the psalms which embody it has its own beauty, its own discords resolved into its own harmonies. The representation of the trouble of spirit as producing wasting of the body is also frequent, and is apparently not to be taken as metaphor, though not to be pressed, as if the psalmist were at once struck with the two calamities of hostility and disease, but the latter is simply the result of the former, and will disappear with it. It is needless to look for a historical occasion of the psalm, but to an ear that knows the tones of sorrow, or to a heart that has itself uttered them, the supposition that in these pathetic cries we hear only a representative Israelite bewailing the national ruin sounds singularly artificial. If ever the throb of personal anguish found tears and a voice, it does so in this psalm. Whoever wrote it wrote with his blood. There are in it no obvious references to events in the recorded life of David, and hence the ascription of it to him must rest on something else than the interpretation of the psalm. The very absence of such allusions is a fact to be dealt with by those who deny the accuracy of the attribution of authorship. But, however that question may be settled, the worth of this little plaintive cry depends on quite other considerations than the discovery of the name of the singer or the nature of

his sorrow. It is a transcript of a perennial experience, a guide for a road which all feet have to travel. Its stream runs turbid and broken at first, but calms and clears as it flows. It has four curves or windings, which can scarcely be called strophes without making too artificial a framework for such a simple and spontaneous gush of feeling. Still the transitions are clear enough.

In vv. 1-3 we have a cluster of sharp, short cries to God for help, which all mean the same thing. In each of these the great name of Jehovah is repeated, and in each the plea urged is simply the sore need of the suppliant. These are no "vain repetitions," which are pressed out of a soul by the grip of the rack; and it is not "taking the name of the Lord in vain" when four times in three short verses the passionate cry for help is winged with it as the arrow with its feather. Two thoughts fill the psalmist's consciousness, or rather one thought—the Lord—and one feeling—his pains. In ver. 1 the Hebrew makes "in Thine anger" and "in Thine hot wrath" emphatic by setting these two phrases between the negative and the verb: "Not in Thine anger rebuke me; not in Thy heat chasten me." He is willing to submit to both rebuke and chastisement; but he shrinks appalled from that form of either which tends to destruction, not to betterment. There are chastisements in tenderness, which express God's love, and there are others which manifest His alienation and wrath. This psalmist did not think that all Divine retribution was intended for reformation. To him there was such a thing as wrath which slew. Jeremiah has the same distinction (x. 24), and the parallel has been made an argument for the later date of the psalm. Cheyne and others assume that Jeremiah is the original, but that is simple conjecture, and the prophet's conspicuous fondness for quotations from older authors makes the supposition more probable that the psalm is the earlier. Resignation and shrinking blend in that cry, in which a heart conscious of evil confesses as well as implores, recognises the justice and yet deprecates the utmost severity of the blow. He who asks, "Not in Thine anger rebuke me," thereby submits to *loving* chastisement.

Then follow in vv. 2 and 3 three short petitions, which are as much cries of pain as prayers, and as much prayers as cries of pain. In the two former the prayer is put first, and its plea second; in the last the order is reversed, and so the whole is, as it were, enclosed in a circlet of prayer. Two words make the petition in each clause, "Have mercy on me, Jehovah" (tastelessly corrected by Grätz into "Revive me"), and "Heal me, Jehovah." The third petition is daring and pregnant in its incompleteness. In that emphatic "And Thou, Jehovah," the psalmist looks up, with almost reproach in his gaze, to the infinite Personality which seems so unaccountably passive. The hours that bring pain are leaden-footed, and their moments each seem an eternity. The most patient sufferer may cry, "How long?" and God will not mistake the voice of pain for that of impatience. This threefold prayer, with its triple invocation, has a triple plea, which is all substantially one. His misery fills the psalmist's soul, and he believes that God will feel for him. He does not at first appeal to God's revealed character, except in so far as the plaintive reiteration of the Divine name carries such an appeal, but he spreads out his own wretchedness, and he who does that has faith in God's pity. "I am withered away," like a faded

flower. "My bones are vexed";—the physical effects of his calamity, "bones" being put for the whole body, and regarded as the seat of sensibility, as is frequently the usage. "Vexed" is too weak a rendering. The idea is that of the utmost consternation. Not only the body, but the soul, partakes in the dismay. The "soul" is even more shaken than the "bones"; that is to say, mental agitation rather than physical disease (and the latter as the result of the former) troubles the psalmist. We can scarcely fail to remember the added sanctity which these plaintive words have received, since they were used by the Prince of sufferers when all but in sight of the cross.

The next turn of thought includes vv. 4, 5, and is remarkable for the new pleas on which it rests the triple prayer, "Return; deliver; save." God is His own motive, and His self-revelation in act must always be self-consistent. Therefore the plea is presented, "for Thy lovingkindness' sake." It beseeches Him to be what He is, and to show Himself as still being what He had always been. The second plea is striking both in its view of the condition of the dead and in its use of that view as an argument with God. Like many other psalmists, the writer thinks of Sheol as the common gathering-place of the departed, a dim region where they live a poor shadowy life, inactive, joyless, and all but godless, inasmuch as praise, service, and fellowship with Him have ceased.

That view is equally compatible with the belief in a resurrection and the denial of it, for it assumes continued individual consciousness. It is the prevailing tone in the Psalter and in Job and Ecclesiastes. But in some psalms, which embody the highest rapture of inward and mystical devotion, the sense of present union with God bears up the psalmist into the sunlight of the assurance that against such a union death can have no power, and we see the hope of immortality in the very act of dawning on the devout soul. May we not say that the subjective experience of the reality of communion with God now is still the path by which the certainty of its perpetuity in a future life is reached? The objective proof in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is verified by this experience. The psalmists had not the former, but, having the latter, they attained to at all events occasional confidence in a blessed life beyond. But the tone of such triumphant glimpses as xvi. 10, xvii. 15, xlix. 15, lxxiii. 24, is of a higher mood than that of this and other psalms, which probably represent the usual view of devout Hebrews.

The fact, as it appeared to those at the then stage of revelation, that remembrance and praise of God were impossible in Sheol, is urged as a plea. That implies the psalmist's belief that God cared for men's praise—a thought which may be so put as to make Him an almighty Selfishness, but which in its true aspect is the direct inference from the faith that He is infinite Love. It is the same sweet thought of Him which Browning has when he makes God say, "I miss my little human praise." God's joy in men's praise is joy in men's love and in their recognition of His love.

The third turn of feeling is in vv. 6 and 7. The sense of his own pains which, in the two previous parts of the psalm, had been contending with the thought of God, masters the psalmist in these dreary verses, in which the absence of the name of God is noteworthy as expressive of his absorption in brooding over his misery. The vehemence of the manifestations of sorrow and the frankness

of the record of these manifestations in the song are characteristic of the emotional, demonstrative Eastern temperament, and strike our more reticent dispositions as excessive. But however expressed in unfamiliar terms, the emotion which wails in these sad verses is only too familiar to men of all temperaments. All sad hearts are tempted to shut out God and to look only at their griefs. There is a strange pleasure in turning round the knife in the wound and recounting the tokens of misery. This man feels some ease in telling how he had exhausted his strength with groaning and worn away the sleepless night with weeping. Night is ever the nurse of heavy thought, and stings burn again then. The hyperbolic expressions that he had set his bed afloat with his tears and "melted" it (as the word means) are matched by the other hyperboles which follow, describing the effect of this unmeasured weeping on his eyes. He had wept them away, and they were bleared and dim like those of an old man. The cause of this passion of weeping is next expressed, in plain words, which connect this turn of the thought with the next verses, and seem to explain the previously mentioned physical pains as either metaphorical or consequent on the hostility of "mine adversaries."

But even while thus his spirit is bitterly burying itself in his sorrows the sudden certainty of the answer to his prayer flashes on him. "Sometimes a light surprises," as Cowper, who too well knew what it was to be worn with groaning, has sung. That swift conviction witnesses its origin in a Divine inspiration by its very suddenness. Nothing has changed in circumstances, but everything has changed in aspect. Wonder and exultation throb in the threefold assurance that the prayer is heard. In the two former clauses the "hearing" is regarded as a present act; in the latter the "receiving" is looked for in the future. The process which is usually treated as one simple act, is here analysed. "God has heard; therefore God will receive"—i. e., answer—"my weeping prayer." Whence came that confidence but from the breath of God on the troubled spirit? "The peace of God" is ever the reward of submissive prayer. In this confidence a man can front the close-knit ring of enemies, of whatever sort they be, and bid them back. Their triumphant dismissal is a vivid way of expressing the certainty of their departure, with their murderous hate unslaked and baulked. "Mine enemies" are "workers of iniquity." That is a daring assumption, made still more remarkable by the previous confession that the psalmist's sorrow was God's rebuke and chastening. But a man has the right to believe that his cause is God's in the measure in which he makes God's cause his. In the confidence of prayer heard, the psalmist can see "things that are not as though they were," and, though no change has passed on the beleaguering hosts, triumphs in their sure rout and retreat. Very significantly does he predict in ver. 10 the same fate for them which he had bewailed as his own. The "dismay" which had afflicted his soul shall pass to them ("sore vexed"). Since God "returns" (ver. 4), the enemy will have to "return" in baffled abandonment of their plans, and be "ashamed" at the failure of their cruel hopes. And all this will come as suddenly as the glad conviction had started up in the troubled heart of the singer. His outward life shall be as swiftly rescued as his inward has been. One gleam of God's presence in his soul had lit its darkness, and turned tears into sparkling homes of the rainbow; one

flash of that same presence in his outward life shall scatter all his foes with like swiftness.

PSALM VII.

- 1 Jehovah, my God, in Thee I take refuge;
Save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,
- 2 Lest like a lion he tear my soul, breaking it
while there is no deliverer.
- 3 Jehovah, my God, if I have done this,
If there is iniquity in my hands,
- 4 If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace
with me—
Nay, I have delivered him that was my enemy
causelessly—
- 5 May the enemy chase my soul and overtake it,
and trample my life to the ground!
And may he lay my honour in the dust! Selah.
- 6 Arise, Jehovah, in Thine anger;
Lift up Thyself against the ragings of my ad-
versaries,
And awake for me: judgment Thou hast ap-
pointed.
- 7 And let a gathering of peoples stand round
Thee,
And above it sit Thou on high.
- 8 Jehovah will judge the peoples;
Do me right, Jehovah, according to my right-
eousness and according to my innocence
[that is] upon me.
- 9 Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and
establish Thou the righteous,
For a Trier of hearts and reins is God the
righteous.
- 10 My shield is upon God,
The Saviour of the upright-hearted.
- 11 God is a righteous Judge,
And a God who is angry every day.
- 12 If [a man] turn not, He will sharpen His
sword;
His bow He has bent, and made it ready.
- 13 And at him He has aimed deadly weapons;
His arrows He will kindle into flaming darts.
- 14 See! he is in labour with wickedness;
Yea, he is pregnant with mischief, and gives
birth to a lie.
- 15 A pit has he sunk, and dug it out;
And he will fall into the hole he is making.
- 16 His mischief shall come back on his own head,
And upon his own skull shall his violence come
down.
- 17 I will thank Jehovah according to His right-
eousness,
And sing with the harp to the name of Jehovah
most high.

THIS is the only psalm with the title "Shiggaion." The word occurs only here and in Hab. iii. 1, where it stands in the plural, and with the preposition "upon," as if it designated instruments. The meaning is unknown, and commentators, who do not like to say so, have much ado to find one. The root is a verb, "to wander," and the explanation is common that the word describes the disconnected character of the psalm, which is full of swiftly succeeding emotions rather than of sequent thoughts. But there is no such exceptional discontinuity as to explain the title. It may refer to the character of the musical accompaniment rather than to that of the

words. The authorities are all at sea, the LXX. shirking the difficulty by rendering "psalm," others giving "error" or "ignorance," with allusion to David's repentance after cutting off Saul's skirt or to Saul's repentance of his persecuting David. The later Jewish writers quoted by Neubauer ("Studia Biblicæ," ii. 36, sq.) guess at most various meanings, such as "love and pleasure," "occupation with music," "affliction," "humility," while others, again, explain it as the name of a musical instrument. Clearly the antiquity of the title is proved by this unintelligibility. If we turn to the other part of it, we find further evidence of age and of independence. Who was "Cush, a Benjamite"? He is not mentioned elsewhere. The author of the title, then, had access to some sources for David's life other than the Biblical records; and, as Hupfeld acknowledges, we have here evidence of ancient ascription of authorship which "has more weight than most of the others." Cush has been supposed to be Shimei or Saul himself, and to have been so called because of his swarthy complexion (Cush meaning an African) or as a jest, because of his personal beauty. Cheyne, following Krochmal, would correct into "because of [Mordecai] the son of Kish, a Benjamite," and finds in this entirely conjectural and violent emendation an "attestation that the psalm was very early regarded as a work of the Persian age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 229). But there is really no reason of weight for denying the Davidic authorship, as Ewald, Hitzig, Hupfeld, and Riehm allow; and there is much in 1 Sam. xxiv.-xxvi. correspondent with the situation and emotions of the psalmist here, such as, *e. g.*, the protestations of innocence, the calumnies launched at him, and the call on God to judge. The tone of the psalm is high and courageous, in remarkable contrast to the depression of spirit in the former psalm, up out of which the singer had to pray himself. Here, on the contrary, he fronts the enemy, lion-like though he be, without a quiver. It is the courage of innocence and of trust. Psalm vi. wailed like some soft flute; Psalm vii. peals like the trumpet of judgment, and there is triumph in the note. The whole may be divided into three parts, of which the close of the first is marked by the Selah at the end of ver. 5; and the second includes vv. 6-10. Thus we have the appeal of innocence for help (vv. 1-5), the cry for more than help—namely, definite judgment (vv. 6-10)—and the vision of judgment (vv. 11-17).

The first section has two main thoughts: the cry for help and the protestation of innocence. It is in accordance with the bold triumphant tone of the psalm that its first words are a profession of faith in Jehovah. It is well to look to God before looking at dangers and foes. He who begins with trust can go on to think of the fiercest antagonism without dismay. Many of the psalms ascribed to David begin thus, but it is no mere stereotyped formula. Each represents a new act of faith, in the presence of a new danger. The word for "put trust" here is very illuminative and graphic, meaning properly the act of fleeing to a refuge. It is sometimes blended with the image of a sheltering rock, sometimes with the still tenderer one of a mother-bird, as when Ruth "came to trust under the wings of Jehovah," and in many other places. The very essence of the act of faith is better expressed by that metaphor than by much subtle exposition. Its blessedness as bringing security and warm shelter and ten-

derness more than maternal is wrapped up in the sweet and instructive figure. The many enemies are, as it were, embodied in one, on whom the psalmist concentrates his thoughts as the most formidable and fierce. The metaphor of the lion is common in the psalms attributed to David, and is, at all events, natural in the mouth of a shepherd king, who had taken a lion by the beard. He is quite aware of his peril, if God does not help him, but he is so sure of his safety, since he trusts, that he can contemplate the enemy's power unmoved, like a man standing within arm's length of the lion's open jaws, but with a strong grating between. This is the blessing of true faith, not the oblivion of dangers, but the calm fronting of them because our refuge is in God.

Indignant repelling of slander follows the first burst of triumphant trust (vv. 3-5). Apparently "the words of Cush" were calumnies poisoning Saul's suspicious nature, such as David refers to in 1 Sam. xxiv. 9: "Wherefore hearkenest thou to men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?" The emphatic and enigmatic *This* in ver. 3 is unintelligible, unless it refers to some slander freshly coined, the base malice of which stirs its object into flashing anger and vehement self-vindication. The special point of the falsehood is plain from the repudiation. He had been charged with attempting to injure one who was at peace with him. That is exactly what "men's words" charged on David, "saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt" (1 Samuel, as above), "If there be iniquity in my hands" is very like. "See that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee"! "Thou huntest after my soul to take it" (1 Samuel) is also like our ver. 1: "them that pursue me," and ver. 5: "let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it." The specific form of this protestation of innocence finds no explanation in the now favourite view of the sufferer in the psalm as being the righteous nation. The clause which is usually treated as a parenthesis in ver. 4, and translated, as in the R. V., "I have delivered him that without cause was mine adversary," is needlessly taken by Delitzsch and others as a continuation of the hypothetical clauses, and rendered, with a change in the meaning of the verb, "And if I have despoiled him," etc.; but it is better taken as above and referred to the incident in the cave when David spared Saul's life. What meaning would that clause have with the national reference? The metaphor of a wild beast in chase of its prey colours the vehement declaration in ver. 5 of readiness to suffer if guilty. We see the swift pursuit, the victim overtaken and trampled to death. There may also be an echo of the Song of Miriam (Exod. xv. 9): "The enemy said, I will pursue; I will overtake." To "lay my glory in the dust" is equivalent to "bring down my soul to the dust of death." Man's glory is his "soul." Thus, nobly throbbing with conscious innocence and fronting unmerited hate, the rush of words stops, to let the musical accompaniment blare on, for a while, as if defiant and confident.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 6-10) is a cry for the coming of the Divine Judge. The previous prayer was content with deliverance, but this takes a bolder flight, and asks for the manifestation of the punitive activity of God on the enemies, who, as usually, are identified with "evil-doers." The grand metaphors in "Arise," "Lift up Thyself," "Awake," mean substantially the same thing. The long periods during which

evil works and flaunts with impunity are the times when God sits as if passive and, in a figure still more daring, as if asleep. When His destructive power flashed into act, and some long-tolerated iniquity was smitten at a blow, the Hebrew singers saw therein God springing to His feet or awaking to judgment: Such long stretches of patient permission of evil and of swift punishment are repeated through the ages, and individual lives have them in miniature. The great judgments of nations and the small ones of single men embody the same principles, just as the tiniest crystal has the same angles and lines of cleavage as the greatest of its kind. So this psalmist has penetrated to a true discernment of the relations of the small and the great, when he links his own vindication by the judicial act of God with the pomp and splendour of a world-wide judgment, and bases his prayer for the former on the Divine purpose to effect the latter. The sequence, "The Lord ministereth judgment to the peoples"—therefore—"judge me, O Lord," does not imply that the "me" is the nation, but simply indicates as the ground of the individual hope of a vindicating judgment the Divine fact, of which history had given him ample proof and faith gave him still fuller evidence, that God, though He sometimes seemed to sleep, did indeed judge the nations. The prerogative of the poet, and still more, the instinct of the inspired spirit, is to see the law of the greatest exemplified in the small and to bring every triviality of personal life into contact with God and His government. The somewhat harsh construction of the last clause of ver. 6 begins the transition from the prayer for the smaller to the assurance of the greater judgment which is its basis, and similarly the first clause of ver. 8 closes the picture of that wider act, and the next clause returns to the prayer. This picture, thus embedded in the heart of the supplication, is majestic in its few broad strokes. First comes the appointment of judgment, then the assembling of the "peoples," which here may, perhaps, have the narrower meaning of the "tribes," since "congregation" is the word used for them in their national assembly, and would scarcely be employed for the collection of Gentile nations. But whether the concourse be all Israel or all nations, they are gathered in silent expectance as in a great judgment-hall. Then enters the Judge. If we retain the usual reading and rendering of ver. 7 *b*, the act of judgment is passed over in silence, and the poet beholds God, the judgment finished, soaring above the awe-struck multitudes, in triumphant return to the repose of His heavenly throne. But the slight emendation of the text, needed to yield the meaning "Sit Thou above it," is worthy of consideration. In either case, the picture closes with the repeated assurance of the Divine judgment of the peoples, and (ver. 8) the prayer begins again. The emphatic assertion of innocence must be taken in connection with the slanders already repudiated. The matter in hand is the evils charged on the psalmist, for which he was being chased as if by lions, the judgment craved is the chastisement of his persecutors, and the innocence professed is simply the innocence which they calumniated. The words have no bearing at all on the psalmist's general relation to the Divine law, nor is there any need to have recourse to the hypothesis that the speaker is the "righteous nation." It is much more difficult to vindicate a member of that remnant from the charge of overestimating the extent and qual-

ity of even the righteous nation's obedience, if he meant to allege, as that interpretation would make him do, that the nation was pure in life and heart, than it is to vindicate the single psalmist vehemently protesting his innocence of the charges for which he was hunted. Cheyne confesses (*Commentary in loc.*) that the "psalmist's view may seem too rose-coloured," which is another way of acknowledging that the interpretation of the protestation as the voice of the nation is at variance with the facts of its condition.

The accents require ver. 9 *a* to be rendered "Let wickedness make an end of the wicked," but that introduces an irrelevant thought of the suicidal nature of evil. It may be significant that the psalmist's prayer is not for the destruction of the wicked, but of their wickedness. Such annihilation of evil is the great end of God's judgment, and its consequence will be the establishment of the righteous. Again the prayer strengthens itself by the thought of God as righteous and as trying the hearts and reins (the seat of feeling). In the presence of rampant and all but triumphant evil, a man needs to feed hopes of its overthrow that would else seem vainest dreams, by gazing on the righteousness and searching power of God. Very beautifully does the order of the words in ver. 9 suggest the kindred of the good man with God by closing each division of the verse with "righteous." A righteous man has a claim on a righteous God. Most naturally then the prayer ends with the calm confidence of ver. 10: "My shield is upon God." He Himself bears the defence of the psalmist. This confidence he has won by his prayer, and in it he ceases to be a suppliant and becomes a seer.

The last section (ver. 11 to end) is a vision of the judgment prayed for, and may be supposed to be addressed to the enemy. If so, the hunted man towers above them, and becomes a rebuker. The character of God underlies the fact of judgment, as it had encouraged the prayer for it. What he had said to himself when his hope drooped, he now, as a prophet, peals out to men as making retribution sure: "God is a righteous Judge, yea a God that hath indignation every day." The absence of an object specified for the indignation makes its inevitable flow wherever there is evil the more vividly certain. If He is such, then of course follows the destruction of every one who "turns not." Retribution is set forth with solemn vigour under four figures. First, God is as an armed enemy sharpening His sword in preparation for action, a work of time which in the Hebrew is represented as in process, and bending His bow, which is the work of a moment, and in the Hebrew is represented as a completed act. Another second, and the arrow will whizz. Not only is the bow bent, but (ver. 11) the deadly arrows are aimed, and not only aimed, but continuously fed with flame. The Hebrew puts "At him" (the wicked) emphatically at the beginning of the verse, and uses the form of the verb which implies completed action for the "aiming" and that which implies incomplete for "making" the arrows burn. So the stern picture is drawn of God as in the moment before the outburst of His punitive energy—the sword sharpened, the bow bent, the arrows fitted, the burning stuff being smeared on their tips. What will happen when all this preparation blazes into action?

The next figure in ver. 14 insists on the automatic action of evil in bringing punishment. It is the Old Testament version of "Sin when it is

finished bringeth forth death." The evil-doer is boldly represented as "travailing with iniquity," and that metaphor is broken up into the two parts "He hath conceived mischief" and "He hath brought forth falsehood." The "falsehood," which is the thing actually produced, is so called, not because it deceives others, but because it mocks its producer with false hopes and never fulfils his purposes. This is but the highly metaphorical way of saying that a sinner never does what he means to do, but that the end of all his plans is disappointment. The law of the universe condemns him to feed on ashes and to make and trust in lies.

A third figure brings out more fully the idea implied in "falsehood," namely, the failure of evil to accomplish its doer's purpose. Crafty attempts to trap others have an ugly habit of snaring their contriver. The irony of fortune tumbles the hunter into the pitfall dug by him for his prey. The fourth figure (ver. 16) represents the incidence of his evil on the evil-doer as being certain as the fall of a stone thrown straight up, which will infallibly come back in the line of its ascent. Retribution is as sure as gravitation, especially if there is an Unseen Hand above, which adds impetus and direction to the falling weight. All these metaphors, dealing with the "natural" consequences of evil, are adduced as guarantees of God's judgment, whence it is clear both that the psalmist is thinking not of some final future judgment, but of the continuous one of daily providence, and that he made no sharp line of demarcation between the supernatural and the natural. The qualities of things and the play of natural events are God's working.

So the end of all is thanksgiving. A stern but not selfish nor unworthy thankfulness follows judgment, with praise which is not inconsistent with tears of pity, even as the act of judgment which calls it forth is not inconsistent with Divine love. The vindication of God's righteousness is worthily hymned by the choral thanksgivings of all who love righteousness. By judgment Jehovah makes Himself known as "most high," supreme over all creatures; and hence the music of thanksgiving celebrates Him under that name. The title "Elyon" here employed is regarded by Cheyne and others as a sign of late date, but the use of it seems rather a matter of poetic style than of chronology. Melchizedek, Balaam, and the king of Babylon (*Isa. xiv. 14*) use it; it occurs in Daniel, but, with these exceptions, is confined to poetical passages, and cannot be made out to be a mark of late date, except by assuming the point in question—namely, the late date of the poetry, principally nineteen psalms, in which it occurs.

PSALM VIII.

- 1 Jehovah, our Lord,
How glorious is Thy name in all the earth!
Who hast set Thy glory upon the heavens.
- 2 Out of the mouth of children and sucklings
hast Thou founded a strength,
Because of Thine adversaries,
To still the enemy and the revengeful.
- 3 When I gaze on Thy heavens, the work of Thy
fingers,
Moon and stars, which Thou hast established,

- 4 What is frail man, that Thou rememberest him,
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?
5 For Thou didst let him fall but little short of
God,
And crownedst him with glory and honour.
6 Thou madest him ruler over the works of Thy
hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet,
7 Sheep and oxen, all of them,
And likewise beasts of the field,
8 Fowl of the heavens and fishes of the sea,
Whatever traverses the paths of the seas.
9 Jehovah, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in
all the earth!

THE exclamation which begins and ends this psalm, enclosing it as a jewel in a setting, determines its theme as being neither the nightly heaven with all its stars, nor the dignity of man, but the name of the Lord as proclaimed by both. The Biblical contemplation of nature and man starts from and ends in God. The main thought of the psalm is the superiority of the revelation in man's nature and place to that in the vault of heaven. The very smallness of man makes the revelation of God in His dealings with him great. In his insignificance is lodged a Divine spark, and, lowly as is his head as he stands beneath the midnight sky blazing with inaccessible lights, it is crowned with a halo which reflects God's glory more brightly than does their lustre. That one idea is the theme of both parts of the psalm. In the former (vv. 1, 2) it is briefly stated; in the latter (vv. 3-8) it is wrought out in detail. The movement of thought is by expansion rather than progress.

The name of the Lord is His character as made known. The psalmist looks beyond Israel, the recipient of a fuller manifestation, and, with adoring wonder, sees far-flashing through all the earth, as if written in light, the splendour of that name. The universal revelation in the depths of the sparkling heavens and the special one by which Israel can say, "our Lord," are both recognised. The very abruptness of the exclamation in ver. 1 tells that it is the end of long, silent contemplation, which overflows at last in speech. The remainder of ver. 1 and ver. 2 present the two forms of Divine manifestation which it is the main purpose of the psalm to contrast, and which effect the world-wide diffusion of the glory of the Name. These are the apocalypse in the nightly heavens and the witness from the mouth of babes and sucklings. As to the former, there is some difficulty in the text as it stands; and there may be a question also as to the connection with the preceding burst of praise. The word rendered "hast set" is an imperative, which introduces an incongruous thought, since the psalm proceeds on the conviction that God has already done what such a reading would be asking him to do. The simplest solution is to suppose a textual corruption, and to make the slight change required for the rendering of the A. V. and R. V. God's name is glorious in all the earth, first, because He has set His glory upon the heavens, which stretch their solemn magnificence above every land. It is His glory of which theirs is the shimmering reflection, visible to every eye upturned from "this dim spot which men call earth." May we attach significance to the difference between "Thy name" and "Thy glory"? Possibly

there is a hint of the relative inferiority even of the heavenly proclamation, inasmuch as, while it rays out "glory," the lustre of power and infinitude, it is only on earth that that revelation becomes the utterance of the Name, since here are hearts and minds to interpret.

The relative at the beginning of the last clause of ver. 1 seems to require that the initial exclamation should not be isolated, as it is in the last verse; but, in any case, the two methods of revelation must be taken in the closest connection and brought into line as parallel media of revelation.

Ver. 2 gives the second of these. The sudden drop from the glories of the heavens to the babble and prattle of infancy and childhood is most impressive, and gives extraordinary force to the paradox that the latter's witness is more powerful to silence gainsayers than that of the former. This conviction is expressed in a noble metaphor, which is blurred by the rendering "strength." The word here rather means *a strength* in the old use of the term—that is, a stronghold or fortress—and the image, somewhat more daring than colder Western taste finds permissible, is that, out of such frail material as children's speech, God builds a tower of strength, which, like some border castle, will bridle and still the restless enemy. There seems no sufficient reason for taking "children and sucklings" in any but its natural meaning, however the reference to lowly believers may accord with the spirit of the psalm. The children's voices are taken as a type of feeble instruments, which are yet strong enough to silence the enemy. Childhood, "with no language but a cry," is, if rightly regarded in its source, its budding possibilities, its dependence, its growth, a more potent witness to a more wondrous name than are all the stars. In like manner, man is man's clearest revelation of God. The more lowly he is, the more lofty his testimony. What are all His servants' words but the babbling of children who "do not know half the deep things they speak"? God's strongest fortress is built of weakest stones. The rendering of the LXX., which is that used by our Lord in the Temple when He claimed the children's shrill hosannas as perfected praise, is an explanation rather than a translation, and as such is quite in the line of the psalmist's meaning. To find in the "children and sucklings" a reference either to the humble believers in Israel or to the nation as a whole, and in the "enemy and the vengeful man" hostile nations, introduces thoughts alien to the universality of the psalm, which deals with humanity as a whole and with the great revelations wide as humanity. If the two parts of the psalm are to be kept together, the theme of the compendious first portion must be the same as that of the second, namely, the glory of God as revealed by nature and man, but most chiefly by the latter, notwithstanding and even by his comparative feebleness.

The second part (vv. 3-8) expands the theme of the first. The nightly sky is more overwhelming than the bare blue vault of day. Light conceals and darkness unveils the solemn glories. The silent depths, the inaccessible splendours, spoke to this psalmist, as they do to all sensitive souls, of man's relative insignificance, but they spoke also of the God whose hand had fashioned them, and the thought of Him carried with it the assurance of His care for so small a creature, and therefore changed the aspect of his insignificance.

nificance. To an ear deaf to the witness of the heavens to their Maker, the only voice which sounds from their crushing magnificence is one which counsels unmitigated despair, insists on man's nothingness, and mocks his aspirations. If we stop with "What is man?" the answer is, A fleeting nothing. The magnitude, the duration, the multitudes of these awful suns and stars dwarf him. Modern astronomy has so far increased the impression that it has landed many minds in blank unbelief that God has visited so small a speck as earth, and abundant ridicule has been poured on the arrogance which dreams that such stupendous events, as the Christian revelation asserts, have been transacted on earth for man. If we begin with man, certainly his insignificance makes it supremely absurd to suppose him thus distinguished; but if we begin at the other end, the supposition takes a new appearance of probability. If there is a God, and men are His creatures, it is supremely unlikely that He should not have a care of them. Nothing can be more absurd than the supposition of a dumb God, who has never spoken to such a being as man. The psalmist gives full weight to man's smallness, his frailty, and his lowly origin, for his exclamation, "What is man?" means, "How little is he!" and he uses the words which connote frailty and mortality, and emphasise the fact of birth as if in contrast with "the work of Thy fingers"; but all these points only enhance the wonderfulness of what is to the poet an axiom—that God has personal relations with His creature. "Thou art mindful of him" refers to God's thought, "Thou visitest him" to His acts of loving care; and both point to God's universal beneficence, not to His special revelation. The bitter parody in Job vii. 17, 18 takes the truth by the other handle, and makes the personal relations those of a rigid inspector on the one hand and a creature not worth being so strict with on the other. Mindfulness is only watchfulness for slips and visiting means penal visitation. So the same fact may be the source of thankful wonder or of almost blasphemous murmuring.

Vv. 5-8 draw out the consequences of God's loving regard which has made the insignificance of man the medium of a nobler manifestation of the Divine name than streams from all the stars. There is no allusion here to sin; and its absence has led to the assertion that this psalmist knew nothing of a fall, and was not in harmony with the prevalent Old Testament tone as to the condition of humanity. But surely the contemplation of the ideal manhood, as it came from God's hand, does not need to be darkened by the shadows of the actual. The picture of man as God made him is the only theme which concerns the psalmist; and he paints it with colours drawn from the Genesis account, which tells of the fall as well as the creation of man.

The picture contains three elements: man is Deiform, crowned with glory and honour, and lord of the creatures on earth. The rendering "than the angels" in the A. V. comes from the LXX., but though defensible, is less probable than the more lofty conception contained in "than God," which is vindicated, not only by lexical considerations, but as embodying an allusion to the original creation "in the image of God." What then is the "little" which marks man's inferiority? It is mainly that the spirit, which is God's image, is confined in and limited by flesh, and subject to death. The distance from the

apex of creation to the Creator must ever be infinite; but man is so far above the non-sentient, though mighty, stars and the creatures which share earth with him, by reason of his being made in the Divine image—*i. e.*, having consciousness, will, and reason—that the distance is foreshortened. The gulf between man and matter is greater than that between man and God. The moral separation caused by sin is not in the psalmist's mind. Thus man is invested with some reflection of God's glory, and wears this as a crown. He is king on earth.

The enumeration of his subjects follows, in language reminding again of the Genesis narrative. The catalogue begins with those nearest to him, the long-tamed domestic animals, and of these the most submissive (sheep) first; it then passes to the untamed animals, whose home is "the field" or uncultivated land, and from them goes to the heights and depths, where the free fowls of the air and fish of the sea and all the mysterious monsters that may roam the hidden ways of that unknown ocean dwell. The power of taming and disciplining some, the right to use all, belong to man, but his subjects have their rights and their king his limits of power and his duties.

Such then is man, as God meant him to be. Such a being is a more glorious revelation of the Name than all stars and systems. Looked at in regard to his duration, his years are a handbreadth before these shining ancients of days that have seen his generations fret their little hour and sink into silence; looked at in contrast with their magnitude and numbers numberless, he is but an atom, and his dwelling-place a speck. Science increases the knowledge of his insignificance, but perhaps not the impression of it made on a quiet heart by the simple sight of the heavens. But besides the merely scientific view, and the merely poetic, and the grimly Agnostic, there is the other, the religious, and it is as valid to-day as ever. To it the heavens are the work of God's finger, and their glories are His, set there by Him. That being so, man's littleness magnifies the name, because it enhances the condescending love of God, which has greatedened the littleness by such nearness of care and such gifts of dignity. The reflection of His glory which blazes in the heavens is less bright than that which gleams in the crown of glory and honour on man's lowly yet lofty head. The "babe and suckling" of creation has a mouth from which the strength of perfected praise issues and makes a bulwark against all gainsayers.

The use made of this psalm in the Epistle to the Hebrews proceeds on the understanding that it describes ideal humanity. Where, then, says the writer of the epistle, shall we look for the realisation of that ideal? Do not the grand words sound liker irony than truth? Is this poor creature that crawls about the world, its slave, discrowned and sure to die, the Man whom the psalmist saw? No. Then was the fair vision a baseless fabric, and is there nothing to be looked for but a dreary continuance of such abortions dragging out their futile being through hopeless generations? No; the promise shall be fulfilled for humanity, because it has been fulfilled in one Man: the Man Christ Jesus. He is the realised ideal, and in Him is a life which will be communicated to all who trust and obey Him, and they, too, will become all that God meant man to be. The psalm was not intended

as a prophecy, but every clear vision of God's purpose is a prophecy, for none of His purposes remain unfulfilled. It was not intended as a picture of the Christ, but it is so; for He, and He alone, is the Man who answers to that fair Divine Ideal, and He will make all His people partakers of His royalty and perfect manhood.

So the psalm ends, as it began, with adoring wonder, and proclaims this as the result of the twofold witness which it has so nobly set forth: that God's name shines glorious through all the earth, and every eye may see its lustre.

PSALM IX.

- 1 (N) I will thank Jehovah with my whole heart;
I will recount all Thy wonders.
- 2 I will be glad and exult in Thee;
I will sing Thy name, Most High,
- 3 (D) Because mine enemies turn back;
They stumble and perish at Thy presence.
- 4 For Thou hast upheld my right and my suit;
Thou didst seat Thyself on Thy throne, judging righteously.
- 5 (D) Thou hast rebuked the nations, Thou hast destroyed the wicked;
Thou hast blotted out their name for ever and aye.
- 6 The enemy—they are ended, [they are] desolations for ever,
And [their] cities hast Thou rooted out; perished is their memory.
- 7 (H) They [are perished], but Jehovah shall sit throned for ever;
He hath prepared His throne for judgment.
- 8 And He—He shall judge the world in righteousness;
He shall deal judgment to the peoples in equity.
- 9 (I) And Jehovah shall be a lofty stronghold for the crushed,
A lofty stronghold in times of extremity.
- 10 And they who know Thy name will put trust in Thee,
For Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, Jehovah.
- 11 (I) Sing with the harp to Jehovah, sitting throned in Zion;
Declare among the peoples His doings.
- 12 For He that makes inquisition for blood has remembered them;
He has not forgotten the cry of the humble.
- 13 (N) Have mercy on me, Jehovah;
Look on my affliction from my haters,
Thou who liftest me up from the gates of death
- 14 To the end that I may recount all Thy praises.
In the gates of the daughter of Zion,
I will rejoice in Thy salvation.
- 15 (U) The nations are sunk in the pit they made;
In the net which they spread their foot is caught.
- 16 Jehovah makes Himself known; judgment hath He done,
Snaring the wicked by the work of his own hands. Higgaion; Selah.

- 17 (V) The wicked shall return to Sheol,
All the nations who forget God.
- 18 For not for ever shall the needy be forgotten,
Nor the expectation of the afflicted perish for aye.
- 19 (P) Arise, Jehovah: let not man grow strong;
Let the nations be judged before Thy presence.
- 20 Appoint, Jehovah, terrors for them;
Let the nations come to know that they are men.

PSALMS vii. and ix. are connected by the recurrence of the two thoughts of God as the Judge of nations and the wicked falling into the pit which he digged. Probably the original arrangement of the Psalter put these two next each other, and Psalm viii. was inserted later.

Psalm ix. is imperfectly acrostic. It falls into strains of two verses each, which are marked by sequence of thought as well as by the acrostic arrangement. The first begins with Aleph, the second with Beth, and so on, the second verse of each pair not being counted in the scheme. The fourth letter is missing, and ver. 7, which should begin with it, begins with the sixth. But a textual correction, which is desirable on other grounds, makes the fifth letter (He) the initial of ver. 7, and then the regular sequence is kept up till ver. 19, which should begin with the soft K, but takes instead the guttural Q. What has become of the rest of the alphabet? Part of it is found in Psalm x., where the first verse begins with the L, which should follow the regular K for ver. 19. But there is no more trace of acrostic structure in x. till ver. 12, which resumes it with the Q which has already appeared out of place in ix. 19; and it goes on to the end of the alphabet, with only the irregularity that the R strain (x. 14) has but one verse. Verses with the missing letters would just about occupy the space of the non-acrostic verses in Psalm x., and the suggestion is obvious that the latter are part of some other psalm which has been substituted for the original; but there are links of connection between the non-acrostic and acrostic portions of Psalm x., which make that hypothesis difficult. The resemblances between the two psalms as they stand are close, and the dissimilarities not less obvious. The psalmist's enemies are different. In the former they are foreign, in the latter domestic. Psalm ix. rings with triumph; Psalm x. is in a minor key. The former celebrates a judgment as accomplished which the latter almost despairingly longs to see begun. On the whole, the two were most probably never formally one, but are a closely connected pair.

There is nothing to discredit the Davidic authorship. The singer's enemies are "nations" and the destruction of these foreign foes is equivalent to "maintaining his cause." That would be language natural in the mouth of a king, and there were foreign wars enough in David's reign to supply appropriate occasions for such a song. The psalm falls into two parts, vv. 1-12 and 13 to end, of which the second substantially repeats the main thoughts of the first, but with a significant difference. In the first part the sequence is praise and its occasion (Aleph and Beth verses, 1-4), triumphant recounting of accomplished judgment (Gimel verses, 5, 6), confident expectation of future wider judgment (amended He and Vav pairs, vv. 7-10), and a

final call to praise (vii. 12). Thus set, as it were, in a circlet of praise, are experience of past and consequent confidence of future deliverance. The second part gives the same order, only, instead of praise, it has prayer for its beginning and end, the two central portions remaining the same as in part 1. The Cheth pair (vv. 13, 14) is prayer, the deliverance not being perfected, though some foes have fallen; the past act of accomplished judgment is again celebrated in the Teth pair (vv. 15, 16), followed, as before, by the triumphant confidence of future complete crushing of enemies (Yod strain, vv. 17, 18); and all closes with prayer (Qoph pair, vv. 19, 20). Thus the same thoughts are twice dwelt on; and the different use made of them is the explanation of the repetition, which strikes a cursory reader as needless. The diamond is turned a little in the hand, and a differently tinted beam flashes from its facet.

In the first pair of verses, the song rushes out like some river breaking through a dam and flashing as it hurries on its course. Each short clause begins with Aleph; each makes the same fervid resolve. Wholehearted praise is sincere, and all the singer's being is fused into it. "All Thy marvellous works" include the great deliverances of the past, with which a living sense of God's working associates those of the present, as one in character and source. To-day is as full of God to this man as the sacred yesterdays of national history, and his deliverances as wonderful as those of old. But high above the joy in God's work is the joy in Himself to which it leads, and "Thy name, O thou Most High," is the ground of all pure delight and the theme of all worthy praise.

The second stanza (Beth, vv. 3, 4) is best taken as giving the ground of praise. Render in close connection with preceding "*because* mine enemies turn back; they stumble and perish at [or from] Thy presence." God's face blazes out on the foe, and they turn and flee from the field, but in their flight they stumble, and, like fugitives, once fallen can rise no more. The underlying picture is of a battle-field and a disastrous rout. It is God's coming into action that scatters the enemy, as ver. 4 tells by its "for." When he took His seat on the throne (of judgment rather than of royalty), they fled; and that act of assuming judicial activity was the maintaining of the psalmist's cause.

The third pair of verses (Gimel, 5, 6) dwells on the grand picture of judgment, and specifies for the first time the enemies as "the nations" or "heathen," thus showing that the psalmist is not a private individual, and probably implying that the whole psalm is a hymn of victory, in which the heat of battle still glows, but which writes no name on the trophy but that of God. The metaphor of a judgment-seat is exchanged for a triumphant description of the destructions fallen on the land of the enemy, in all which God alone is recognised as the actor. "Thou hast rebuked"; and just as His creative word was all-powerful, so His destructive word sweeps its objects into nothingness. There is a grand and solemn sequence in that "Thou hast rebuked; . . . Thou hast destroyed." His breath has made; His breath can unmake. In ver. 6 the rendering to be preferred is substantially that of the R. V.: "The enemy are ended, [they are] ruins for ever, and cities hast Thou rooted out; perished is their memory." To take

"enemy" as a vocative breaks the continuity of the address to God, and brings in an irrelevant reference to the former conquests of the foe ("Thou hast destroyed cities") which is much more forcible if regarded as descriptive of God's destruction of his cities. "Their memory" refers to the enemy, not to the cities. Utter, perpetual ruin, so complete that the very name is forgotten, has fallen on the foe.

In the fourth pair of verses a slight emendation of the text is approved of by most critics. The last word of ver. 6 is the pronoun "they," which, though possible in such a position, is awkward. If it is transferred to the beginning of ver. 7, and it is further supposed that "are perished" has dropped out, as might easily be the case, from the verb having just occurred in the singular, a striking antithesis is gained: "They perish, but Jehovah shall sit," etc. Further, the pair of verses then begins with the fifth letter; and the only irregularity in the acrostic arrangement till ver. 19 is the omission of the fourth letter: Daleth. A very significant change in tenses takes place at this point. Hitherto the verbs have been perfects, implying a finished act; that is to say, hitherto the psalm has been dealing with facts of recent but completed experience. Now the verbs change to imperfects or futures, and continue so till ver. 12; that is to say, "experience doth attain to something of prophetic strain," and passes into confidence for the future. That confidence is cast in the mould supplied by the deliverance on which it is founded. The smaller act of judgment, which maintained the psalmist's cause, expands into a world-wide judgment in righteousness, for which the preparations are already made. "He hath prepared His throne for judgment" is the only perfect in the series. This is the true point of view from which to regard the less comprehensive acts of judgment thinly sown through history, when God has arisen to smite some hoary iniquity or some godless conqueror. Such acts are premonitions of the future, and every "day of the Lord" is a miniature of that final *dies iræ*. The psalmist probably was rather thinking of other acts of judgment which would free him and his people from hostile nations, but his hope was built on the great truth that all such acts are prophecies of others like them, and it is a legitimate extension of the same principle to view them all in relation to the last and greatest of the series.

The fifth pair (Vav stanza, vv. 9, 10) turns to the glad contemplation of the purpose of all the pomp and terror of the judgment thus hoped for. The Judge is seated on high, and His elevation makes a "lofty stronghold" for the crushed or downtrodden.

The rare word rendered "extremity" in ver. 9 occurs only here and in x. 1. It means a cutting off, *i. e.*, of hope of deliverance. The notion of distress intensified to despair is conveyed. God's judgments show that even in such extremity He is an inexpugnable defence, like some hill fortress, inaccessible to any foe. A further result of judgment is the (growing) trust of devout souls (ver. 10). To "know Thy name" is here equivalent to learning God's character as made known by His acts, especially by the judgments anticipated. For such knowledge some measure of devout trust is required, but further knowledge deepens trust. The best teacher of faith is experience; and, on the other hand, the condition of such experience is faith. The action

of knowledge and of trust is reciprocal. That trust is reinforced by the renewed evidence, afforded by the judgments, that Jehovah does not desert them that seek Him. To "seek Him" is to long for Him, to look for His help in trouble, to turn with desire and obedience to Him in daily life; and anything is possible rather than that He should not disclose and give Himself to such search. Trust and seeking, fruition and desire, the repose of the soul on God and its longing after God, are inseparable. They are but varying aspects of the one thing. When a finite spirit cleaves to the infinite God, there must be longing as an element in all possession and possession as an element in all longing; and both will be fed by contemplation of the self-revealing acts which are the syllables of His name.

Section 6, the last of the first part (Zayin, vv. 11, 12), circles round to section 1, and calls on all trusters and seekers to be a chorus to the solo of praise therein. The ground of the praise is the same past act which has been already set forth as that of the psalmist's thanksgiving, as is shown by the recurrence here of perfect tenses (*hath remembered; hath not forgotten*). The designation of God as "dwelling" in Zion is perhaps better rendered, with allusion to the same word in ver. 7, "sitteth." His seat had been therefrom the time that the Ark was brought thither. That earthly throne was the type of his heavenly seat, and from Zion He is conceived as executing judgment. The world-wide destination of Israel's knowledge of God inspires the call to "show forth His doings" to "the peoples." The "nations" are not merely the objects of destructive wrath, but are to be summoned to share in the blessing of knowing His mighty acts. The psalmist may not have been able to harmonise these two points of view as to Israel's relation to the Gentile world, but both thoughts vibrate in his song. The designation of God as "making inquisition for blood" thinks of him as the Goel, or Avenger. To seek means here to demand back as one who had entrusted property to another who had destroyed it would do, thence to demand compensation or satisfaction, and thus finally comes to mean to avenge or punish (so Hupfeld, Delitzsch, etc.). "The poor" or "meek" (R. V. and margin) whose cry is heard are the devout portion of the Jewish people, who are often spoken of in the Psalms and elsewhere as a class.

The second part of the psalm begins with ver. 13. The prayer in that verse is the only trace of trouble in the psalm. The rest is triumph and exultation. This, at first sight discordant, note has sorely exercised commentators; and the violent solution that the whole Cheth stanza (vv. 13, 14) should be regarded as "the cry of the meek," quoted by the psalmist, and therefore be put in inverted commas (though adopted by Delitzsch and Cheyne), is artificial and cold. If the view of the structure of the psalm given above is adopted, there is little difficulty in the connection. The victory has been completed over certain enemies, but there remain others; and the time for praise unmingled with petition has not yet come for the psalmist, as it never comes for any of us in this life. Quatre Bras is won, but Waterloo has to be fought to-morrow. The prayer takes account of the dangers still threatening, but it only glances at these, and then once more turns to look with hope on the accomplished deliverance. The thought of how God had lifted the

suppliant up from the very gates of death heartens him to pray for all further mercy needed. Death is the lord of a gloomy prison-house, the gates of which open inwards only and permit no egress. On its very threshold the psalmist had stood. But God had lifted him thence, and the remembrance wings his prayer. "The gates of the daughter of Zion" are in sharp, happy contrast with the frowning portals of death. A city's gates are the place of cheery life, stir, gossip, business. Anything proclaimed there flies far. There the psalmist resolves that he will tell his story of rescue, which he believes was granted that it might be told. God's purpose in blessing men is that they may open their lips to proclaim the blessings and so bring others to share in them. God's end is the spread of his name, not for any good to Him, but because to know it is life to us.

The Teth pair (vv. 15, 16) repeats the thoughts of the Gimel stanza (5, 6), recurring to the same significant perfects and dwelling on the new thought that the destruction of the enemy was self-caused. As in Psalm vii., the familiar figure of the pitfall catching the hunter expresses the truth that all evil, and especially malice, recoils on its contriver. A companion illustration is added of the fowler's (or hunter's) foot being caught in his own snare. Ver. 16 presents the other view of retribution, which was the only one in vv. 5, 6, namely that it is a Divine act. It is God who executes judgment, and who "snareth the wicked," though it be "the work of his own hands" which weaves the snare. Both views are needed for the complete truth. This close of the retrospect of deliverance which is the main motive of the psalm is appropriately marked by the musical direction "Higgaion. Selah," which calls for a strain of instrumental music to fill the pause of the song and to mark the rapture of triumph in accomplished deliverance.

The Yod stanza (vv. 17, 18), like the He and Vav stanzas (vv. 7-10), passes to confidence for the future. The correspondence is very close, but the two verses of this stanza represent the four of the earlier ones; thus ver. 17 answers to vv. 7 and 8, while ver. 18 is the representative of vv. 9 and 10. In ver. 17 the "return to Sheol" is equivalent to destruction. In one view, men who cease to be may be regarded as going back to original nothingness, as in Psalm xc. 3. Sheol is not here a place of punishment, but is the dreary dwelling of the dead, from the gates of which the psalmist had been brought up. Reduction to nothingness and yet a shadowy, dim life or death-in-life will certainly be the end of the wicked. The psalmist's experience in his past deliverance entitles him to generalise thus. To forget God is the sure way to be forgotten. The reason for the certain destruction of the nations who forget God and for the psalmist's assurance of it is (ver. 18) the confidence he has that "the needy shall not always be forgotten." That confidence corresponds precisely to vv. 9, 10, and also looks back to the "hath remembered" and "not forgotten" of ver. 12. They who remember God are remembered by Him; and their being remembered—i.e. by deliverance—necessitates the wicked's being forgotten, and those who are forgotten by God perish. The second clause of ver. 18 echoes the other solemn word of doom from vv. 3-6. There the fate of the evil-doers was set forth as "perishing"; their very memory was to "perish." But the "expectation of the poor shall not perish." Apparently fragile and to the

eye of sense unsubstantial as a soap-bubble, the devout man's hope is more solid than the most solid-seeming realities, and will outlast them all.

The final stanza (vv. 19, 20) does not take Kaph as it should do, but Qoph. Hence some critics suspect that this pair of verses has been added by another hand, but the continuity of sense is plain, and is against this supposition. The psalmist was not so bound to his form but that he could vary it, as here. The prayer of this concluding stanza circles round to the prayer in ver. 13, as has been noticed, and so completes the whole psalm symmetrically. The personal element in ver. 13 has passed away; and the prayer is general, just as the solo of praise in ver. 1 broadened into the call for a chorus of voices in ver. 12. The scope of the prayer is the very judgment which the previous stanza has contemplated as certain. The devout man's desires are moulded on God's promises, and his prayers echo these. "Let not mortal man grow strong," or rather "vaunt his strength." The word for *man* here connotes weakness. How ridiculous for him, being such as he is, to swell and swagger as if strong, and how certain his boasted strength is to shrivel like a leaf in the fire, if God should come forth, roused to action by his boasting! Ver. 20 closes the prayer with the cry that some awe-inspiring act of Divine justice may be flashed before the "nations," in order to force the conviction of their own weakness home to them. "Set terror for them," the word *terror* meaning not the emotion, but the object which produces it, namely an act of judgment such as the whole psalm has had in view. Its purpose is not destruction, but conviction, the wholesome consciousness of weakness, out of which may spring the recognition of their own folly and of God's strength to bless. So the two parts of the psalm end with the thought that the "nations" may yet come to know the name of God, the one calling upon those who have experienced his deliverance to "declare among the peoples His doings," the other praying God to teach by chastisement what nations who forget Him have failed to learn from mercies.

PSALM X.

- 1 (י) Why, Jehovah, dost Thou stand far off?
Why veilest [Thine eyes] in times of extremity?
- 2 Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted is burned away;
They are taken in the plots which these have devised.
- 3 For the wicked boasts of his soul's desire,
And the rapacious man renounces, contemns, Jehovah.
- 4 The wicked, by (lit., according to) the uplifting of his nostrils, [says,] He will not inquire;
There is no God, is all his thought.
- 5 His ways are stable at all times;
High above [him] are Thy judgments, remote from before him;
His adversaries—he snorts at them.
- 6 He says in his heart, I shall not be moved;
To generation after generation, [I am he] who never falls into adversity.

- 7 Of cursing his mouth is full, and deceits, and oppression;
Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.
- 8 He couches in the hiding-places of the villages;
In secret he slays the innocent;
His eyes watch the helpless.
- 9 He lies in wait in secret, like a lion in his lair;
He lies in wait to seize the afflicted;
He seizes the afflicted, dragging him in his net.
- 10 He crouches, he bows down,
And there falls into his strong [claws] the helpless.
- 11 He says in his heart, God forgets;
He hides His face, He will not ever see it.
- 12 (ך) Rise! Jehovah. God! lift up Thy hand!
Forget not the afflicted.
- 13 Wherefore does the wicked blaspheme God,
[And] say in his heart, Thou wilt not inquire?
- 14 (ו) Thou hast seen, for Thou, Thou dost behold mischief and trouble, to take it into Thy hand;
To Thee the helpless leaves himself;
The orphan, Thou, Thou hast been his Helper.
- 15 (ש) Break the arm of the wicked;
As for the evil man, inquire for his wickedness [till] Thou find none.
- 16 Jehovah is King for ever and aye;
The nations are perished out of the land.
- 17 (ה) The desire of the meek Thou hast heard, Jehovah;
Thou wilt prepare their heart, wilt make Thine ear attentive
- 18 To do judgment for the orphan and down-trodden;
Terrible no more shall the man of the earth be.

PSALMS ix. and x. are alike in their imperfectly acrostic structure, the occurrence of certain phrases—e. g., the very uncommon expression for "times of trouble" (ix. 9; x. 1), "Arise, O Lord" (ix. 19; x. 12)—and the references to the nation's judgment. But the differences are so great that the hypothesis of their original unity is hard to accept. As already remarked, the enemies are different. The tone of the one psalm is jubilant thanksgiving for victory won and judgment affected; that of the other is passionate portraiture of a rampant foe and cries for a judgment yet unmanifested. They are a pair, though why the psalmist should have bound together two songs of which the unlikenesses are at least as great as the likenesses it is not easy to discover. The circumstances of his day may have brought the cruelty of domestic robbers close upon the heels of foreign foes, as is often the case, but that is mere conjecture.

The acrostic structure is continued into Psalm x., as if the last stanza of ix. had begun with the regular Kaph instead of the cognate Qoph; but it then disappears till ver. 12, from which point it continues to the end of the psalm, with the anomaly that one of the four stanzas has but one verse: the unusually long verse 14. These four stanzas are allotted to the four last letters of the alphabet. Six letters are thus omitted, to which twelve verses should belong. The nine non-acros-

tic verses (3 to 11) are by some supposed to be substituted for the missing twelve, but there are too many verbal allusions to them in the subsequent part of the psalm to admit of their being regarded as later than it. Why, then, the break in the acrostic structure? It is noticeable that the (acrostic) psalm ix. is wholly addressed to God, and that the parts of x. which are addressed to Him are likewise acrostic, the section vv. 3-11 being the vivid description of the "wicked," for deliverance from whom the psalmist prays. The difference of theme may be the solution of the difference of form, which was intended to mark off the prayer stanzas and to suggest, by the very continuity of the alphabetical scheme and the allowance made for the letters which do not appear, the calm flow of devotion and persistency of prayer throughout the parenthesis of oppression. The description of the "wicked" is as a black rock damming the river, but it flows on beneath and emerges beyond.

The psalm falls into two parts after the introductory verse of petition and remonstrance: vv. 3-11, the grim picture of the enemy of the "poor"; and vv. 12-18, the cry for deliverance and judgment.

The first stanza (vv. 1, 2) gives in its passionate cry a general picture of the situation, which is entirely different from that of Psalm ix. The two opposite characters, whose relations occupy so much of these early psalms, "the wicked" and "the poor," are, as usual, hunter and hunted, and God is passive, as if far away, and hiding His eyes. The voice of complaining but devout remonstrance is singularly like the voice of arrogant godlessness (vv. 4-11), but the fact which brings false security to the one moves the other to prayer. The boldness and the submissiveness of devotion are both throbbing in that "Why?" and beneath it lies the entreaty to break this apparent apathy. Ver. 2 spreads the facts of the situation before God. "Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted is burned," *i. e.*, with anguish, *pride* being the fierce fire and *burning* being a vigorous expression for anguish, or possibly for destruction. The ambiguous next clause may either have "the wicked" or "the poor" for its subject. If the former (R.V.), it is a prayer that the retribution which has been already spoken of in Psalm ix. may fall, but the context rather suggests the other construction, carrying on the description of the sufferings of the poor, with an easy change to the plural, since the singular is a collective. This, then, being how things stand, the natural flow of thought would be the continuance of the prayer; but the reference to the enemy sets the psalmist on fire, and he "burns" in another fashion, flaming out into a passionate portraiture of the wicked, which is marked as an interruption of the current of his song by the cessation of the acrostic arrangement.

The picture is drawn with extraordinary energy, and describes first the character (vv. 3-6) and then the conduct of the wicked. The style reflects the vehemence of the psalmist's abhorrence, being full of gnarled phrases and harsh constructions. As with a merciless scalpel the inner heart of the man is laid open. Observe the recurrence of "saith," "thoughts," and "saith in his heart." But first comes a feature of character which is open and palpable. He "boasts of his soul's desire." What is especially flagrant in that? The usual explanation is that he is not ashamed of his shameful lusts, but glories in them, or that he

boasts of succeeding in all that he desires. But what will a good man do with his heart's desires? Ver. 7 tells us, namely breathe them to God; and therefore to boast of them instead is the outward expression of godless self-confidence and resolve to consult inclination and not God. The word rendered *boast* has the two significations of *pray* and *boast*, and the use of it here, in the worse one, is parallel with the use of *bless* or *renounce* in the next clause. The wicked is also "rapacious," for "covetous" is too weak. He grasps all that he can reach by fair or foul means. Such a man in effect and by his very selfish greed "renounces, contemns God." He may be a worshipper; but his "blessing" is like a parting salutation, dismissing Him to whom it is addressed. There is no need to suppose that conscious apostasy is meant. Rather the psalmist is laying bare the under-meaning of the earth-bound man's life, and in effect anticipates Christ's "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" and Paul's "covetousness which is idolatry."

The next trait of character is practical atheism and denial of Divine retribution. The Hebrew is rough and elliptical, but the A.V. misses its point, which the R. V. gives by the introduction of "saith." "The pride of his countenance" is literally "the elevation of his nose." Translate those upturned nostrils into words, and they mean that God will not require (seek, in the sense of punish). But a God who does not punish is a dim shape, through which the empty sky is seen, and the denial (or forgetfulness) of God's retributive judgment is equivalent to denying that there is a God at all.

Thus armed, the wicked is in fancied security. "His ways are firm"—*i. e.*, he prospers—and, in the very madness of arrogance, he scoffs at God's judgments as too high up to be seen. His scoff is a truth, for how can eyes glued to earth see the solemn lights that move in the heavens? Purblind men say, We do not see them, and mean, They are not; but all that their speech proves is their own blindness. Defiant of God, he is truculent to men, and "snorts contempt at his enemies." "In his heart he says, I shall not be moved." The same words express the sane confidence of the devout soul and the foolish presumption of the man of the earth; but the one says, "because He is at my right hand," and the other trusts in himself. "To all generations I shall not be in adversity" (R.V.). The Hebrew is gnarled and obscure; and attempts to amend the text have been made (compare Cheyne, Grätz *in loc.*), but needlessly. The confidence has become almost insane, and has lost sight altogether of the brevity of life. "His inward thought is, that he shall continue for ever" (Psalm xlix.). "Pride stifles reason. The language of the heart cannot be translated into spoken words without seeming exaggeration" (Cheyne). He who can be so blind to facts as to find no God may well carry his blindness a step further and wink hard enough to see no death, or may live as if he did not.

Following the disclosure of the inner springs of life in the secret thoughts comes, in vv. 7-10, the outcome of these in word and deed. When the wicked "lets the rank tongue blossom into speech," the product is affronts to God and maledictions, lies, mischiefs, for men. These stuff the mouth full, and lie under the tongue as sweet morsels for the perverted taste or as stored there, ready to be shot out. The deeds match the words.

The vivid picture of a prowling lion seems to begin in ver. 8, though it is sometimes taken as the unmetaphorical description of the wicked man's crime. The stealthy couching of the beast of prey, hiding among the cover round the unwalled village or poorly sheltered fold, the eyes gleaming out of the darkness and steadfastly fixed on the victim with a baleful light in them, belong to the figure, which is abruptly changed in one clause (ver. 9 c) into that of a hunter with his net, and then is resumed and completed in ver. 10, where the R.V. is, on the whole, to be preferred—"He croucheth; he boweth down"—as resuming the figure at the point where it had been interrupted and finishing it in the next clause, with the helpless victim fallen into the grip of the strong claws. With great emphasis the picture is rounded off (ver. 11) with the repetition of the secret thought of God's forgetfulness, which underlies the cruel oppression.

This whole section indicates a lawless condition in which open violence, robbery, and murder were common. In Hosea's vigorous language, "blood touched blood," the splashes being so numerous that they met, and the land was red with them. There is no reason to suppose that the picture is ideal or exaggerated. Where in the turbulent annals of Israel it is to be placed must remain uncertain; but that it is a transcript of bitter experience is obvious, and the aspect which it presents should be kept in view as a corrective of the tendency to idealise the moral condition of Israel, which at no time was free from dark stains, and which offered only too many epochs of disorganisation in which the dark picture of the psalm could have been photographed from life.

The phrases for the victims in this section are noteworthy: "the innocent"; "the helpless"; "the poor." Of these the first and last are frequent, and the meaning obvious. There is a doubt whether the last should be regarded as the designation of outward condition or of disposition, *i.e.* whether "meek" or "poor" is the idea. There are two cognate words in Hebrew, one of which means one who is bowed down, *i.e.* by outward troubles, and the other one who bows himself down, *i.e.* is meek. The margin of the Hebrew Bible is fond of correcting these words when they occur in the text and substituting the one for the other, but arbitrarily; and it is doubtful whether in actual usage there is any real distinction between them. "Helpless" is a word only found in this psalm (vv. 8, 10, 14), which has received various explanations, but is probably derived from a root meaning *to be black*, and hence comes to mean *miserable*, *hapless*, or the like. All the designations refer to a class—namely, the devout minority, the true Israel within Israel—and hence the plurals in vv. 10, 12, and 17.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 12 to end) is the prayer, forced from the heart of the persecuted remnant, God's little flock in the midst of wolves. No trace of individual reference appears in it, nor any breath of passion or vengeance, such as is found in some of the psalms of persecution; but it glows with indignation at the blasphemies which are, for the moment, triumphant, and cries aloud to God for a judicial act which shall shatter the dream that He does not see and will not requite. That impious boast, far more than the personal incidence of sufferings, moves the prayer. As regards its form, the reappearance of the acrostic arrangement is significant, as is the repetition of the prayer and letter of ix. 19, which

binds the two psalms together. The acrostic reappears with the direct address to God. The seven verses of the prayer are divided by it into four groups, one of which is abnormal as containing but one verse, the unusual length of which, however, somewhat compensates for the irregularity (ver. 14). The progress of thought in them follows the logic of emotional prayer rather than of the understanding. First, there are a vehement cry for God's intervention and a complaint of His mysterious apparent apathy. The familiar figure for the Divine flashing forth of judgment, "Arise, O Lord," is intensified by the other cry that He would "lift His hand." A God who has risen from His restful throne and raised His arm is ready to bring it down with a shattering blow; but before it falls the psalmist spreads in God's sight the lies of the scornful men. They had said (ver. 11) that He forgot; the prayer pleads that He would not forget. Their confidence was that He did not see nor would requite; the psalmist is bold to ask the reason for the apparent facts which permit such a thought. The deepest reverence will question God in a fashion which would be daring, if it were not instinct with the assurance of the clearness of His Divine knowledge of evil and of the worthiness of the reasons for its impunity. "Wherefore doest Thou thus?" may be insolence or faith. Next, the prayer centres itself on the facts of faith, which sense does not grasp (ver. 14). The specific acts of oppression which force out the psalmist's cry are certainly "seen" by God, for it is His very nature to look on all such ("Thou" in ver. 14 is emphatic); and faith argues from the character to the acts of God and from the general relation of all sin towards Him to that which at present afflicts the meek. But is God's gaze on the evil an idle look? No; he sees, and the sight moves Him to act. Such is the force of "to take it into Thy hand," which expresses the purpose and issue of the beholding. What He sees He "takes in hand," as we say, with a similar colloquialism. If a man believes these things about God, it will follow of course that he will leave himself in God's hand, that uplifted hand which prayer has moved. So ver. 14 is like a great picture in two compartments, as Raphael's Transfiguration. Above is God, risen with lifted arm, beholding and ready to strike; beneath is the helpless man, appealing to God by the very act of "leaving" himself to Him. That absolute reliance has an all-prevalent voice which reaches the Divine heart, as surely as her child's wail the mother's; and wherever it is exercised the truth of faith which the past has established becomes a truth of experience freshly confirmed. The form of the sentence in the Hebrew (the substantive verb with a participle, "Thou hast been helping") gives prominence to the continuousness of the action: It has always been Thy way, and it is so still. Of course "fatherless" here is tantamount to the "hapless," or poor, of the rest of the psalm.

Then at last comes the cry for the descent of God's uplifted hand (vv. 15, 16). It is not invoked to destroy, but simply to "break the arm" of, the wicked, *i.e.*, to make him powerless for mischief, as a swordsman with a shattered arm is. One blow from God's hand lames, and the arm hangs useless. The impious denial of the Divine retribution still affects the psalmist with horror; and he returns to it in the second clause of ver. 15, in which he prays that God would "seek out"—*i.e.*, require and requite, so as to abolish and

make utterly non-existent—the wicked man's wickedness. The yearning of every heart that beats in sympathy with and devotion to God, especially when it is tortured by evil experienced or beheld flourishing unsmitten, is for its annihilation. There is no prayer here for the destruction of the doer; but the reduction to nothingness of his evil is the worthy aspiration of all the good, and they who have no sympathy with such a cry as this have either small experience of evil, or a feeble realisation of its character.

The psalmist was heartened to pray his prayer, because "the nations are perished out of His land." Does that point back to the great instance of exterminating justice in the destruction of the Canaanites? It may do so, but it is rather to be taken as referring to the victories celebrated in the companion psalm. Note the recurrence of the words "nations" and "perished," which are drawn from it. The connection between the two psalms is thus witnessed, and the deliverance from foreign enemies, which is the theme of Psalm ix., is urged as a plea with God and taken as a ground of confidence by the psalmist himself for the completion of the deliverance by making domestic oppressors powerless. This lofty height of faith is preserved in the closing stanza, in which the agitation of the first part and the yearning of the second are calmed into serene assurance that the *Ecclesia pressa* has not cried nor ever can cry in vain. Into the praying, trusting heart "the peace of God, which passeth understanding," steals, and the answer is certified to faith long before it is manifest to sense. To pray and immediately to feel the thrilling consciousness, "Thou hast heard," is given to those who pray in faith. The wicked makes a boast of his "desire"; the humble makes a prayer of it, and so has it fulfilled. Desires which can be translated into petitions will be converted into fruition. If the heart is humble, that Divine breath will be breathed over and into it which will prepare it to desire only what accords with God's will, and the prepared heart will always find God's ear open. The cry of the *hapless*, which has been put into their lips by God Himself, is the appointed prerequisite of the manifestations of Divine judgment which will relieve the earth of the incubus of "the man of the earth." "Shall not God avenge His own elect, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." The prayer of the humble, like a whisper amid the avalanches, has power to start the swift, white destruction on its downward path; and when once that gliding mass has way on it, nothing which it smites can stand.

PSALM XI.

- 1 In Jehovah have I taken refuge;
How say ye to my soul,
Flee to the mountain as a bird?
- 2 For lo, the wicked bend the bow,
They make ready their arrow upon the string,
To shoot in the dark at those who are upright of heart.
- 3 For the foundations are being destroyed;
The righteous—what hath he achieved?
- 4 Jehovah in His holy palace, Jehovah, whose throne is in heaven—
His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.

- 5 Jehovah trieth the righteous,
But the wicked and lover of violence His soul hateth.
- 6 May He rain upon the wicked snares;
Fire and brimstone and a burning wind be the portion of their cup!
- 7 For Jehovah is righteous: righteous deeds He loveth;
The upright shall behold His face.

THE correctness of the superscription is, in the present case, defended by Ewald and Hitzig. Delitzsch refers the psalm to the eve of Absalom's conspiracy, while other supporters of the Davidic authorship prefer the Sauline persecution. The situation as described in the psalm corresponds sufficiently well to either of these periods, in both of which David was surrounded by stealthy hostility and counselled by prudence to flight. But there are no definite marks of date in the psalm itself; and all that is certain is its many affinities with the other psalms of the group which Cheyne calls the "persecution psalms," including iii.-vii., ix.-xiv., xvii. These resemblances make a common authorship probable.

The structure of the psalm is simple and striking. There are two vividly contrasted halves; the first gives the suggestions of timid counsellors who see only along the low levels of earth, the second the brave answer of faith which looks up into heaven.

In the first part (vv. 1-3) the psalmist begins with an utterance of faith, which makes him recoil with wonder and aversion from the cowardly, well-meant counsels of his friends. "In Jehovah have I taken refuge"—a profession of faith which in Psalm vii. 1 was laid as the basis of prayer for deliverance and is here the ground for steadfastly remaining where he stands. The metaphor of flight to a stronghold, which is in the word for trust, obviously colours the context, for what can be more absurd than that he who has sought and found shelter in God Himself should listen to the whisperings of his own heart or to the advice of friends and hurry to some other hiding-place? "He that believeth shall not make haste," and, even when the floods come, shall not need to seek in wild hurry for an asylum above the rising waters. Safe in God, the psalmist wonders why such counsel should be given, and his question expresses its irrationality and his rejection of it. But these timid voices spoke to his "soul," and the speakers are undefined. Is he apostrophising his own lower nature? Have we here a good man's dialogue with himself? Were there two voices in him: the voice of sense, which spoke to the soul, and that of the soul, which spoke authoritatively to sense? Calvin finds here the mention of *spirituales luctas*; and whether there were actual counsellors of flight or no, no doubt prudence and fear said to and in his soul, "Flee." If we might venture to suppose that the double thought of the oneness of the psalmist's personality and the manifoldness of his faculties was in his mind, we should have an explanation of the strange fluctuation between singulars and plurals in ver. 1 b. "Flee" is plural, but is addressed to a singular subject: "my soul"; "your" is also plural, and "bird" singular. The Hebrew marginal correction smooths away the first anomaly by reading the singular imperative, but that leaves the anomaly in "your." The LXX. and other old versions had apparently a slightly different text, which got rid of that anomaly by reading (with

the addition of one letter and a change in the division of words), "Flee to the mountain as a bird"; and that is probably the best solution of the difficulty. One can scarcely fail to recall the comparison of David to a partridge hunted on the mountains. Cheyne finds in the plurals a proof that "it is the Church within the Jewish nation of which the poet thinks." The timid counsel is enforced by two considerations: the danger of remaining a mark for the stealthy foe and the nobler thought of the hopelessness of resistance, and therefore the quixotism of sacrificing one's self in a prolongation of it.

The same figure employed in Psalm vii. 12 of God's judgments on the wicked is here used of the wicked's artillery against the righteous. The peril is imminent, for the bows are bent, and the arrows already fitted to the string. In midnight darkness the assault will be made (compare lxiv. 3, 4). The appeal to the instinct of self-preservation is reinforced by the consideration (ver. 3) of the impotence of efforts to check the general anarchy. The particle at the beginning of the verse is best taken as in the same sense as at the beginning of ver. 2, thus introducing a second co-ordinate reason for the counsel. The translation of it as hypothetical or temporal (if or when) rather weakens the urgency of ver. 3 as a motive for flight. The probably exaggerated fears of the advisers, who are still speaking, are expressed in two short, breathless sentences: "The foundations [of society] are being torn down; the righteous—what has he achieved?" or possibly, "What can he do?" In either case, the implication is, Why wage a hopeless conflict any longer at the peril of life? All is lost; the wise thing to do is to run. It is obvious that this description of the dissolution of the foundations of the social order is either the exaggeration of fear, or poetic generalisation from an individual case (David's), or refers the psalm to some time of anarchy, when things were much worse than even in the time of Saul or Absalom.

All these suggestions may well represent the voice of our own fears, the whispers of sense and sloth, which ever dwell on and exaggerate the perils in the road of duty, and bid us abandon resistance to prevailing evils as useless and betake ourselves to the repose and security of some tempting nest far away from strife. But such counsels are always base, and though they be the result of "prudence," are short-sighted, and leave out precisely the determining factor in the calculation. The enemy may have fitted his arrows to the string, but there is another bow bent which will be drawn before his (Psalm vii. 12). The foundations are not being destroyed, however many and strong the arms that are trying to dig them up. The righteous has done much, and can do more, though his work seem wasted. Self-preservation is not a man's first duty; flight is his last. Better and wiser and infinitely nobler to stand a mark for the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and to stop at our post though we fall there, better infinitely to toil on, even when toil seems vain, than cowardly to keep a whole skin at the cost of a wounded conscience or despairingly to fling up work, because the ground is hard and the growth of the seed imperceptible. Prudent advices, when the prudence is only inspired by sense, are generally foolish; and the only reasonable attitude is obstinate hopefulness and brave adherence to duty.

So the psalm turns, in its second part, from

these creeping counsels, which see but half the field of vision, and that the lower, to soar and gaze on the upper half. "God is in heaven; all's right with the world," and with the good men who are trying to help to make it right. The poet opposes to the picture drawn by fear the vision of the opened heaven and the throned Jehovah. In ver. 4 the former part is not to be taken as a separate affirmation: "The Lord is," etc., but "Jehovah" is a nominative absolute, and the weight of the sentence falls on the last clause. The "holy palace" in which Jehovah is beheld enthroned is not on earth, as the parallelism of the clauses shows. To the eyes that have seen that vision and before which it ever burns, all earthly sorrows and dangers seem small. There is the true asylum of the hunted soul; that is the mountain to which it is wise to flee. If the faint-hearted had seen that sight, their timid counsels would have caught a new tone. They are preposterous to him who does see it. For not only does he behold Jehovah enthroned, but he sees Him scrutinising all men's acts. We bring the eyelids close when minutely examining any small thing. So God is by a bold figure represented as doing, and the word for "beholds" has *to divide* as its root idea, and hence implies a keen discriminating gaze. As fire tries metal, so He tries men. And the result of the trial is twofold, as is described in the two clauses of ver. 5, which each require to be completed from the other: "The Lord trieth the righteous (and finding him approved, loveth), but the wicked" (He trieth, and finding him base metal), His soul "hateth." In the former clause the process of trial is mentioned, and its result omitted; in the latter the process is omitted, and the result described. The strong anthropomorphism which attributes a "soul" to God and "hatred" to His soul is not to be slurred over as due to the imperfection of Hebrew ideas of the Divine nature. There is necessarily in the Divine nature an aversion to evil and to the man who has so completely given himself over to it as to "love" it. Such perverted love can only have turned to it that side of the Divine character which in gravity of disapprobation and recoil from evil answers to what we call hate, but neither desires to harm nor is perturbed by passion. The New Testament is as emphatic as the Old in asserting the reality of "the wrath of God." But there are limitation and imperfection in this psalm in that it does not transcend the point of view which regards man's conduct as determining God's attitude. Retribution, not forgiveness nor the possibility of changing the moral bias of character, is its conception of the relations of man and God.

The Divine estimate, which in ver. 5 is the result of God's trial of the two classes, is carried forward in vv. 6 and 7 to its twofold issues. But the form of ver. 6 is that of a wish, not of a prediction; and here again we encounter the tone which, after all allowances, must be regarded as the result of the lower stage of revelation on which the psalmist stood, even though personal revenge need not be ascribed to him. In the terrible picture of the judgment poured down from the open heavens into which the singer has been gazing, there is a reproduction of the destruction of the cities of the plain, the fate of which stands in the Old Testament as the specimen and prophecy of all subsequent acts of judgment. But the rain from heaven is conceived as consisting of "snares," which is a strangely incongruous idea. Such mingled met-

aphors are less distasteful to Hebrew poets than to Western critics; and the various expedients to smooth this one away, such as altering the text and neglecting the accents and reading "coals of fire," are unnecessary sacrifices to correctness of style. Delitzsch thinks that the "snares" are "a whole discharge of lassoes," *i. e.*, lightnings, the zigzag course of which may be compared to a "noose thrown down from above"! The purpose of the snares is to hold fast the victims so that they cannot escape the fiery rain—a terrible picture, the very incongruity of figure heightening the grim effect. The division of the verse according to the accents parts the snares from the actual components of the fatal shower, and makes the second half of the verse an independent clause, which is probably to be taken, like the former clause, as a wish: "Fire and brimstone and a burning wind [Zornhauch, Hupfeld] be the portion of their cup," again an incongruity making the representation more dreadful. What a draught—flaming brimstone and a hot blast as of the simoom! The tremendous metaphor suggests awful reality.

But the double judgment of ver. 5 has a gentler side, and the reason for the tempest of wrath is likewise that for the blessed hope of the upright, as the "for" of ver. 7 teaches. "Jehovah is righteous." That is the rock foundation for the indomitable faith of the Psalter in the certain ultimate triumph of patient, afflicted righteousness. Because God in his own character is so, He must love righteous acts—His own and men's. The latter seems to be the meaning here, where the fate of men is the subject in hand. The Divine "love" is here contrasted with both the wicked man's "love" of "violence" and God's "hate" (ver. 5), and is the foundation of the final confidence, "The upright shall behold His face." The converse rendering, "His countenance doth behold the upright" (A.V.), is grammatically permissible, but would be flat, tautological—since ver. 4 has already said so—and inappropriate to the close, where a statement as to the upright, antithetical to that as to the wicked, is needed. God looks on the upright, as has been said; and the upright shall gaze on Him, here and now in the communion of that faith which is a better kind of sight and hereafter in the vision of heaven, which the psalmist was on the verge of anticipating. That mutual gaze is blessedness. They who looking up behold Jehovah are brave to front all foes and to keep calm hearts in the midst of alarms. Hope burns like a pillar of fire in them when it is gone out in others; and to all the suggestions of their own timidity or of others they have the answer, "In the Lord have I put my trust; how say ye to my soul, Flee?" "Here I stand; I can do no otherwise. God help me. Amen."

PSALM XII.

- 1 Save, Jehovah, for the godly ceases,
For the trusty have vanished from the sons of men.
- 2 They speak vanity every man with his neighbour;
[With] smooth lip and a heart and a heart do they speak.
- 3 May Jehovah cut off all smooth lips,
The tongue that speaks proud things,

- 4 That says, To our tongues we give strength:
our lips are our own (lit. with us);
Who is lord to us?
- 5 For the oppression of the afflicted, for the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise, saith Jehovah; I will set him in the safety he pants for.
- 6 The words of Jehovah are pure words,
Silver tried in a furnace [and flowing down] to the ground, purified seven times.
- 7 Thou, Jehovah, shalt guard them;
Thou shalt preserve him from this generation for ever.
- 8 All around the wicked swagger,
When vileness is set on high among the sons of men.

ONE penalty of living near God is keen pain from low lives. The ears that hear God's word cannot but be stunned and hurt by the babble of empty speech. This psalm is profoundly melancholy, but without trace of personal affliction. The psalmist is not sad for himself, but sick of the clatter of godless tongues, in which he discerns the outcome of godless lives. His plaint wakes echoes in hearts touched by the love of God and the visions of man's true life. It passes through four clearly marked stages, each consisting of two verses: despondent contemplation of the flood of corrupt talk which seems to submerge all (1, 2); a passionate prayer for Divine intervention, wrung from the psalmist by the miserable spectacle (3, 4); the answer to that cry from the voice of God, with the rapturous response of the psalmist to it (5, 6); and the confidence built on the Divine word, which rectifies the too despondent complaint at the beginning, but is still shaded by the facts which stare him in the face (7, 8).

The cry for help (*Save*, LXX.) abruptly beginning the psalm tells of the sharp pain from which it comes. The psalmist has been brooding over the black outlook till his overcharged heart relieves itself in this single-worded prayer. As he looks round he sees no exceptions to the prevailing evil. Like Elijah, he thinks that he is left alone, and love to God and men and reliability and truth are vanished with their representatives. No doubt in all such despondent thoughts about the rarity of Christian charity and of transparent truthfulness there is an element of exaggeration, which in the present case is, as we shall see, corrected by the process of God-taught meditation. But the clearer the insight into what society should be, the sadder the estimate of what it is. Roseate pictures of it augur ill for the ideal which their painters have. It is better to be too sensitive to evils than to be contented with them. Unless the passionate conviction of the psalmist has burned itself into us, we shall but languidly work to set things right. Heroes and reformers have all begun with "exaggerated estimates" of corruption. The judgment formed of the moral state of this or of any generation depends on the clearness with which we grasp as a standard the ideal realised in Jesus Christ and on the closeness of our communion with God.

As in Psalm v., sins of speech are singled out, and of these "vanity" and "smooth lips with a heart and a heart" are taken as typical. As in Eph. iv. 25, the guilt of falsehood is deduced from the bond of neighbourliness, which it rends. The sin, to which a "high civilisation" is especially

prone, of saying pleasant things without meaning them, seems to this moralist as grave as to most men it seems slight. Is the psalmist right or wrong in taking speech for an even more clear index of corruption than deeds? What would he have said if he had been among us, when the press has augmented the power of the tongue, and floods of "vanity," not only in the form of actual lies, but of inane trivialities and nothings of personal gossip, are poured over the whole nation? Surely, if his canon is right, there is something rotten in the state of this land; and the Babel around may well make good men sad and wise men despondent.

Shall we venture to follow the psalmist in the second turn of his thoughts (vv. 3, 4), where the verb at the beginning is best taken as an optative and rendered, "May Jehovah cut off"? The deepest meaning of his desire every true man will take for his own, namely the cessation of the sin; but the more we live in the spirit of Jesus the more we shall cherish the hope that that may be accomplished by winning the sinner. Better to have the tongue touched with a live coal from the altar than cut out. In the one case there is only a mute in the other an instrument for God's praise. But the impatience of evil and the certainty that God can subdue it, which make the very nerve of the prayer, should belong to Christians yet more than to the psalmist. A new phase of sinful speech appears as provoking judgment even more than the former did. The combination of flattery and boastfulness is not rare, discordant as they seem; but the special description of the "proud things" spoken is that they are denials of responsibility to God or man for the use of lips and tongue. Insolence has gone far when it has formulated itself into definite statements. Twenty men will act on the principle for one who will put it into words. The conscious adoption and cynical avowal of it are a mark of defiance of God. "To our tongues we give strength"—an obscure expression which may be taken in various shades of meaning, *e.g.* as=We have power over, or=Through, or as to, our tongues we are strong, or=We will give effect to our words. Possibly it stands as the foundation of the daring defiance in the last clause of the verse, and asserts that the speaker is the author of his power of speech and therefore responsible to none for its use. "Our lips are with us" may be a further development of the same godless thought. "With us" is usually taken to mean "our allies," or confederates, but signifies rather "in our possession, to do as we will with them." "Who is lord over us?" There speaks godless insolence shaking off dependence, and asserting shamelessly licence of speech and life, unhindered by obligations to God and His law.

With dramatic swiftness the scene changes in the next pair of verses (5, 6). That deep voice, which silences all the loud bluster, as the lion's roar hushes the midnight cries of lesser creatures, speaks in the waiting soul of the psalmist. Like Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter, he spreads before the Lord the "words with which they reproach Thee," and, like Hezekiah, he has immediate answer. The inward assurance that God will arise is won by prayer at once, and changes the whole aspect of the facts which as yet remain unchanged. The situation does not seem so desperate when we know that God is moving. Whatever delay may intervene before the actual Divine act, there is none before the assurance of it calms the soul. Many wintry days may have to be faced, but a breath of spring

has been in the air, and hope revives. The two-fold reason which rouses the Divine activity is very strikingly put first in ver. 5. Not merely the "oppression or spoiling of the meek," but that conjoined with the "sighing of the needy," bring God into the field. Not affliction alone, but affliction which impels to prayer, moves Him to "stir up His strength." "Now will I arise." That solemn "now" marks the crisis, or turning-point, when long forbearance ends and the crash of retribution begins. It is like the whirr of the clock that precedes the striking. The swiftly following blow will ring out the old evil. The purpose of God's intervention is the safety of the afflicted who have sighed to Him; but while that is clear, the condensed language of ver. 5 is extremely obscure. The A.V.'s rendering, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him," requires a too liberal use of supplemental words to eke out the sense; and the rendering of the R.V. (margin), "the safety he panteth for," is most congruous with the run of the sentence and of the thought. What has just been described as a sigh is now, with equal naturalness, figured as a pant of eager desire. The former is the expression of the weight of the affliction, the latter of yearning to escape from it. The latter is vain waste of breath unless accompanied with the former, which is also a prayer; but if so accompanied, the desire of the humble soul is the prophecy of its own fulfilment: and the measure of the Divine deliverance is regulated by His servant's longing. He will always, sooner or later, get "the safety for which he pants." Faith determines the extent of God's gift.

The listening psalmist rapturously responds in ver. 6 to God's great word. That word stands, with strong force of contrast, side by side with the arrogant chatter of irresponsible frivolity, and sounds majestic by the side of the shrill feebleness of the defiance. Now the psalmist lifts his voice in trustful acceptance of the oracle.

The general sense of ver. 6 is clear, and the metaphor which compares God's words to refined silver is familiar, but the precise meaning of the words rendered "in a furnace on the earth" (R. V.) is doubtful. The word for "furnace" occurs only here, and has consequently been explained in very different ways, is omitted altogether by the LXX., and supposed by Cheyne to be a remnant of an ancient gloss. But the meaning of furnace or crucible is fairly made out and appropriate. But what does "tried in a furnace to the earth" mean? The "on the earth" of the R.V. is scarcely in accordance with the use of the preposition "to," and the best course is to adopt a supplement and read "tried in a furnace [and running down] to the earth." The sparkling stream of molten silver as, free from dross, it runs from the melting pot to the mould on the ground, is a beautiful figure of the word of God, clear of all the impurities of men's words, which the psalm has been bewailing and raining down on the world. God's words are a silver shower, precious and bright.

The last turn of the psalm builds hope on the pure words just heard from heaven. When God speaks a promise, faith repeats it as a certitude and prophesies in the line of the revelation. "Thou shalt" is man's answer to God's "I will." In the strength of the Divine word, the despondency of the opening strain is brightened. The godly and faithful shall not "cease from among the children of men," since God will keep them;

and His keeping shall preserve them. "This generation" describes a class rather than an epoch. It means the vain talkers who have been sketched in such dark colours in the earlier part of the psalm. These are "the children of men" among whom the meek and needy are to live, not failing before them because God holds them up. This hope is for the militant Church, whose lot is to stand for God amidst wide-flowing evil, which may swell and rage against the band of faithful ones, but cannot sweep them away. Not of victory which annihilates opposition, but of charmed lives invulnerable in conflict, is the psalmist's confidence. There is no more lamenting of the extinction of good men and their goodness, neither is there triumphant anticipation of present extinction of bad men and their badness, but both are to grow together till the harvest.

But even the pure words which promise safety and wake the response of faith do not wholly scatter the clouds. The psalm recurs very pathetically at its close to the tone of its beginning. Notice the repetition of "the children of men" which links ver. 8 with ver. 1. If the fear that the faithful should fail is soothed by God's promise heard by the psalmist sounding in his soul, the hard fact of dominant evil is not altered thereby. That "vileness is set on high among the sons of men" is the description of a world turned upside down. Beggars are on horseback and princes walking. The despicable is honoured, and corruption is a recommendation to high position. There have been such epochs of moral dissolution; and there is always a drift in that direction, which is only checked by the influence of the "faithful." If "vileness is set on high among the sons of men," it is because the sons of men prefer it to the stern purity of goodness. A corrupt people will crown corrupt men and put them aloft. The average goodness of the community is generally fairly represented by its heroes, rulers, and persons to whom influence is given; and when such topsy-turvydom as the rule of the worst is in fashion, "the wicked walk on every side." Impunity breeds arrogance; and they swagger and swell, knowing that they are protected. Impunity multiplies the number; and on every side they swarm like vermin in a dirty house. But even when such an outlook saddens, the soul that has been in the secret place of the Most High and has heard the words of His mouth will not fall into pessimistic despondency, nor think that the faithful fail, because the wicked strut. When tempted to wail, "I, even I only, am left," such a soul will listen to the still small voice that tells of seven thousands of God's hidden ones, and will be of good cheer, as knowing that God's men can never cease so long as God continues.

PSALM XIII.

- 1 For how long, Jehovah, wilt Thou forget me for ever?
For how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?
- 2 For how long shall I brood on schemes (*i.e.*, of deliverance) in my soul,
Trouble in my heart by day?
For how long shall my foe lift himself above me?
- 3 Look hither, answer me, Jehovah, my God;
Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the death,

4 Lest my foe say, I have overcome him,
And oppressors exult when I am moved.

5 But as for me, in Thy mercy have I trusted;
Let my heart exult in Thy salvation:

6 I will sing to Jehovah, for He has dealt bountifully with me.

THIS little psalm begins in agitation, and ends in calm. The waves run high at first, but swiftly sink to rest, and at last lie peacefully glinting in sunshine. It falls into three strophes, of which the first (vv. 1, 2) is the complaint of endurance strained almost to giving way; the second (vv. 3, 4) is prayer which feeds fainting faith; and the third (vv. 5, 6, which are one in the Hebrew) is the voice of confidence, which in the midst of trouble, makes future deliverance and praise a present experience.

However true it is that sorrow is "but for a moment," it seems to last for an eternity. Sad hours are leaden-footed, and joyful ones winged. If sorrows passed to our consciousness as quickly as joys, or joys lingered as long as sorrows, life would be less weary. That reiterated "How long?" betrays how weary it was to the psalmist. Very significant is the progress of thought in the fourfold questioning plaint, which turns first to God, then to himself, then to the enemy. The root of his sorrow is that God seems to have forgotten him; therefore his soul is full of plans for relief, and the enemy seems to be lifted above him. The "sorrow of the world" begins with the visible evil, and stops with the inward pain; the sorrow which betakes itself first to God, and thinks last of the foe, has trust embedded in its depths, and may unblamed use words which sound like impatience. If the psalmist had not held fast by his confidence, he would not have appealed to God. So the "illogical" combination in his first cry of "How long?" and "for ever" is not to be smoothed away, but represents vividly, because unconsciously, the conflict in his soul from the mingling of the assurance that God's seeming forgetfulness must have an end and the dread that it might have none. Luther, who had trodden the dark places, understood the meaning of the cry, and puts it beautifully when he says that here "hope itself despairs, and despair yet hopes, and only that unspeakable groaning is audible with which the Holy Spirit, who moves over the waters covered with darkness, intercedes for us." The psalmist is tempted to forget the confidence expressed in Psalm ix. 18 and to sink to the denial animating the wicked in Psalms x., xi. The heart wrung by troubles finds little consolation in the mere intellectual belief in a Divine omniscience. An idle remembrance which does not lead to actual help is a poor stay for such a time. No doubt the psalmist knew that forgetfulness was impossible to God; but a God who, though He remembered, did nothing for, His servant, was not enough for him, nor is He for any of us. Heart and flesh cry out for *active* remembrance; and however clear the creed, the tendency of long-continued misery will be to tempt to the feeling that the sufferer is forgotten. It takes much grace to cling fast to the belief that He thinks of the poor suppliant whose cry for deliverance is unanswered. The natural inference is one or other of the psalmist's two here: God has forgotten or has hidden His face in indifference or displeasure. The Evangelist's profound "therefore" is the corrective of the psalmist's temptation: "Jesus

loved" the three sad ones at Bethany; "when therefore He heard that he was sick, He abode still two days in the place where He was."

Left alone, without God's help, what can a man do but think and think, plan and scheme to weariness all night and carry a heavy heart as he sees by daylight how futile his plans are? Probably "by night" should be supplied in ver. 2 *a*; and the picture of the gnawing cares and busy thoughts which banish sleep and of the fresh burst of sorrow on each new morning appeals only too well to all sad souls. A brother laments across the centuries, and his long-silent wail is as the voice of our own griefs. The immediate visible occasion of trouble appears only in the last of the fourfold cries. God's apparent forgetfulness and the psalmist's own subjective agitations are more prominent than the "enemy" who "lifts himself above him." His arrogant airs and oppression would soon vanish if God would arise. The insight which places him last in order is taught by faith. The soul stands between God and the external world, with all its possible calamities; and, if the relation with God is right, and help is flowing unbrokenly from Him, the relation to the world will quickly come right, and the soul be lifted high above the foe, however lofty he be or think himself.

The agitation of the first strophe is somewhat stilled in the second, in which the stream of prayer runs clear without such foam, as the impatient questions of the first part. It falls into four clauses, which have an approximate correspondence to those of strophe 1. "Look hither, answer me, Jehovah, my God." The first petition corresponds to the hiding of God's face, and perhaps the second, by the law of inverted parallelism, may correspond to the *forgetting*, but in any case the noticeable thing is the swift decisiveness of spring with which the psalmist's faith reaches firm ground here. Mark the implied belief that God's look is not an otiose gaze, but brings immediate act answering the prayer; mark the absence of copula between the verbs giving force to the prayer and swiftness to the sequence of Divine acts; mark the outgoing of the psalmist's faith in the addition to the name "Jehovah" (as in ver. 1), of the personal "my God," with all the sweet and reverent appeal hived in the address. The third petition, "Lighten mine eyes," is not for illumination of vision, but for renewed strength. Dying eyes are glazed; a sick man's are heavy and dull. Returning health brightens them. So here the figure of sickness threatening to become death stands for trouble or possibly the "enemy" is a real foe seeking the life, as will be the most natural interpretation if the Davidic origin is maintained. To "sleep death" is a forcible compressed expression, which is only attenuated by being completed. The prayer rests upon the profound conviction that Jehovah is the fountain of life, and that only by His continual pouring of fresh vitality into a man can any eyes be kept from death. The brightest must be replenished from His hand, or they fail and become dim; the dimmest can be brightened by His gift of vigorous health. As in the first strophe the psalmist passed from God to self, and thence to enemies, so he does in the second. His prayer addresses God; its pleas regard, first, himself, and, second, his foe. How is the preventing of the enemy's triumph in his being stronger than the psalmist and of his malicious joy over the latter's misfortune an argument with God to help? It is the plea, so familiar in the Psalter and to de-

vout hearts, that God's honour is identified with His servant's deliverance, a true thought, and one that may reverently be entertained by the humblest lover of God, but which needs to be carefully guarded. We must make very sure that God's cause is ours before we can be sure that ours is His; we must be very completely living for His honour before we dare assume that His honour is involved in our continuing to live. As Calvin says, "Cum eo nobis communis erit hæc precatio, si sub Dei imperio et auspiciis militamus."

The storm has all rolled away in the third strophe, in which faith has triumphed over doubt and anticipates the fulfilment of its prayer. It begins with an emphatic opposition of the psalmist's personality to the foe: "But as for me"—however they may rage—"I have trusted in Thy mercy." Because he has thus trusted, therefore he is sure that that mercy will work for him salvation or deliverance from his present peril. Anything is possible rather than that the appeal of faith to God's heart of love should not be answered. Whoever can say, I have trusted, has the right to say, I shall rejoice. It was but a moment ago that this man had asked, How long shall I have sorrow in my heart? and now the sad heart is flooded with sudden gladness. Such is the magic of faith, which can see an unrisen light in the thickest darkness, and hear the birds singing amongst the branches even while the trees are bare and the air silent. How significant the contrast of the two rejoicings set side by side: the adversaries' when the good man is "moved"; the good man's when God's salvation establishes him in his place! The closing strain reaches forward to deliverance not yet accomplished, and, by the prerogative of trust, calls things that are not as though they were. "He has dealt bountifully with me"; so says the psalmist who had begun with "How long?" No external change has taken place; but his complaint and prayer have helped him to tighten his grasp of God, and have transported him into the certain future of deliverance and praise. He who can thus say, "I will sing," when the hoped-for mercy has wrought salvation, is not far off singing even while it tarries. The sure anticipation of triumph is triumph. The sad minor of "How long?" if coming from faithful lips, passes into a jubilant key, which heralds the full gladness of the yet future songs of deliverance.

PSALM XIV.

- 1 The fool says in his heart, There is no God;
They corrupt; they make abominable their doings;
There is no one doing good.
- 2 Jehovah looketh down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there is any having discernment,
Seeking after God.
- 3 They are all turned aside: together they are become putrid;
There is no one doing good,
There is not even one.
- 4 Do they not know, all the workers of iniquity,
Who devour my people [as] they devour bread?
On Jehovah they do not call.
- 5 There they feared a [great] fear,
For God is in the righteous generation.

- 6 The counsel of the afflicted ye would put to shame,
For God is his refuge.
- 7 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!
When Jehovah brings back the captivity of His people,
May Jacob exult, may Israel be glad!

THIS psalm springs from the same situation as Psalms x. and xii. It has several points of likeness to both. It resembles the former in its attribution to "the fool" of the heart speech, "There is no God," and the latter in its use of the phrases "sons of men" and "generation" as ethical terms and in its thought of a Divine interference as the source of safety for the righteous. We have thus three psalms closely connected, but separated from each other by Psalms xi. and xiii. Now it is observable that these three have no personal references, and that the two which part them have. It would appear that the five are arranged on the principle of alternating a general complaint of the evil of the times with a more personal pleading of an individual sufferer. It is also noticeable that these five psalms—a little group of wailing and sighs—are marked off from the cognate psalms iii.-vii. and xvi., xvii., by two (Psalms viii. and xv.) in an entirely different tone. A second recast of this psalm appears in the Elohistic Book (Psalm liii.), the characteristics of which will be dealt with there. This is probably the original.

The structure of the psalm is simple, but is not carried out completely. It should consist of seven verses each having three clauses, and so having stamped on it the sacred numbers 3 and 7, but vv. 5 and 6 each want a clause, and are the more vehement from their brevity.

The heavy fact of wide-spread corruption presses on the psalmist, and starts a train of thought which begins with a sad picture of the deluge of evil, rises to a vision of God's judgment of and on it, triumphs in the prospect of the sudden panic which shall shake the souls of the "workers of iniquity" when they see that God is with the righteous, and ends with a sigh for the coming of that time. The staple of the poem is but the familiar contrast of a corrupt world and a righteous God who judges, but it is cast into very dramatic and vivid form here.

We listen first (ver. 1) to the psalmist's judgment of his generation. Probably it was very unlike the rosy hues in which a heart less in contact with God and the unseen would have painted the condition of things. Eras of great culture and material prosperity may have a very seamy side, which eyes accustomed to the light of God cannot fail to see. The root of the evil lay, as the psalmist believed, in a practical denial of God; and whoever thus denied Him was "a fool." It does not need formulated atheism in order to say in one's heart, "There is no God." Practical denial or neglect of His working in the world, rather than a creed of negation, is in the psalmist's mind. In effect, we say that there is no God when we shut Him up in a far-off heaven, and never think of Him as concerned in our affairs. To strip Him of His justice and rob Him of His control is the part of a fool. For the Biblical conception of folly is moral perversity rather than intellectual feebleness, and whoever is morally and religiously wrong cannot be in reality intellectually right.

The practical denial of God lies at the root of two forms of evil. Positively, "they have made their doings corrupt and abominable"—rotten in themselves and sickening and loathsome to pure hearts and to God. Negatively, they do no good things. That is the dreary estimate of his contemporaries forced on this sad-hearted singer, because he himself had so thrillingly felt God's touch and had therefore been smitten with loathing of men's low ways and with a passion for goodness. "Sursum corda" is the only consolation for such hearts.

So the next wave of thought (ver. 2) brings into his consciousness the solemn contrast between the godless noise and activity of earth and the silent gaze of God, that marks it all. The strong anthropomorphism of the vivid picture recalls the stories of the Deluge, of Babel, and of Sodom, and casts an emotional hue over the abstract thought of the Divine omniscience and observance. The purpose of the Divine quest is set forth with deep insight, as being the finding of even one good, devout man. It is the anticipation of Christ's tender word to the Samaritan that "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." God's heart yearns to find hearts that turn to Him; He seeks those who seek Him; they who seek Him, and only they, are "wise." Other Scriptures present other reasons for that gaze of God from heaven, but this one in the midst of its solemnity is gracious with revelation of Divine desires.

What is to be the issue of the strongly contrasted situation in these two verses: beneath, a world full of godless lawlessness; above, a fixed eye piercing to the discernment of the inmost nature of actions and characters? Ver. 3 answers. We may almost venture to say that it shows a disappointed God, so sharply does it put the difference between what He desired to see and what He did see. The psalmist's sad estimate is repeated as the result of the Divine search. But it is also increased in emphasis and in compass. For "the whole" (race) is the subject. Universality is insisted on in each clause; "all," "together," "not one," and strong metaphors are used to describe the condition of humanity. It is "turned aside," i.e., from the way of Jehovah; it is become putrid, like a rotting carcase, is rank, and smells to heaven. There is a sad cadence in that "no, not one," as of a hope long cherished and reluctantly abandoned, not without some tinge of wonder at the barren results of such a search. This stern indictment is quoted by St. Paul in Romans as confirmation of his thesis of universal sinfulness; and, however the psalmist had the wickedness of Israel in the foreground of his consciousness, his language is studiously wide and meant to include all "the sons of men."

But this baffled quest cannot be the end. If Jehovah seeks in vain for goodness on earth, earth cannot go on for ever in godless riot. Therefore, with eloquent abruptness, the voice from heaven crashes in upon the "fools" in the full career of their folly. The thunder rolls from a clear sky. God speaks in ver. 4. The three clauses of the Divine rebuke roughly correspond with those of ver. 1 in so far as the first points to ignorance as the root of wrong-doing, the second charges positive sin, and the third refers to negative evil. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" The question has almost a tone of surprise, as if even Omniscience found matter of wonder in men's mysterious love of evil. Jesus "marvelled" at some men's "unbelief"; and cer-

tainly sin is the most inexplicable thing in the world, and might almost astonish God as well as heaven and earth. The meaning of the word "know" here is best learned from ver. 1. "Not to know" is the same thing as to be "a fool." That ignorance, which is moral perversity as well as intellectual blindness, needs not to have a special object stated. Its thick veil hides all real knowledge of God, duty, and consequences from men. It makes evil-doing possible. If the evil-doer could have flashed before him the realities of things, his hand would stay its crime. It is not true that all sin can be resolved into ignorance, but it is true that criminal ignorance is necessary to make sin possible. A bull shuts its eyes when it charges. Men who do wrong are blind in one eye at least, for, if they saw at the moment what they probably know well enough, sin would be impossible.

This explanation of the words seems more congruous with ver. 1 than that of others, "made to know," *i.e.* by experience to rue.

Ver. 4 *b* is obscure from its compressed brevity. "Eating my people, they eat bread." The A.V. and R.V. take their introduction of the "as" of comparison from the old translations. The Hebrew has no term of comparison, but it is not unusual to omit the formal term in rapid and emotional speech, and the picture of the appetite with which a hungry man devours his food may well stand for the relish with which the oppressors swallowed up the innocent. There seems no need for the ingenuities which have been applied to the interpretation of the clause, nor for departing, with Cheyne, from the division of the verse according to the accents. The positive sins of the oppressors, of which we have heard so much in the connected psalms, are here concentrated in their cruel plundering of "my people," by which the whole strain of the psalm leads us to understand the devout kernel of Israel, in contrast with the mass of "men of the earth" in the nation, and not the nation as a whole in contrast with heathen enemies.

The Divine indictment is completed by, "They call not on Jehovah." Practical atheism is, of course, prayerless. That negation makes a dreary silence in the noisiest life, and is in one aspect the crown, and in another the foundation, of all evil-doing.

The thunder-peal of the Divine voice strikes a sudden panic into the hosts of evil. "There they feared a fear." The psalmist conceives the scene and its locality. He does not say, "there" when he means "then," but he pictures the terror seizing the oppressors where they stood when the Divine thunder rolled above their heads; and with him, as with us, "on the spot" implies "at the moment." The epoch of such panic is left vague. Whensoever in any man's experience that solemn voice sounds, conscience wakes fear. The revelation by any means of a God who sees evil and judges it makes cowards of us all. Probably the psalmist thought of some speedily impending act of judgment; but his juxtaposition of the two facts, the audible voice of God and the swift terror that shakes the heart, contains an eternal truth, which men who whisper in their hearts, "There is no God," need to ponder.

This verse 5 is the first of the two shorter verses of our psalm, containing only two clauses instead of the regular three; but it does not therefore follow that anything has dropped out. Rather the framework is sufficiently elastic to allow of such

variation according to the contents, and the shorter verse is not without a certain increase of vigour, derived from the sharp opposition of its two clauses. On the one hand is the terror of the sinner occasioned by and contrasted with the discovery which stands on the other that God is in the righteous generation. The psalmist sets before himself and us the two camps: the panic-stricken and confused mass of enemies ready to break into flight and the little flock of the "righteous generation" at peace in the midst of trouble and foes because God is in the midst of them. No added clause could heighten the effect of that contrast, which is like that of a host of Israel walking in light and safety on one side of the fiery pillar and the army of Pharaoh groping in darkness and dread on the other. The permanent relations of God to the two sorts of men who are found in every generation and community are set forth in that strongly marked contrast.

In ver. 6 the psalmist himself addresses the oppressors, with triumphant confidence born of his previous contemplations. The first clause might be a question, but is more probably a taunting affirmation: "You would frustrate the plans of the afflicted"—and you could not—"for Jehovah is his refuge." Here again the briefer sentence brings out the eloquent contrast. The malicious foe seeking to thwart the poor man's plans is thwarted. His desire is unaccomplished; and there is but one explanation of the impotence of the mighty and the powerfulness of the weak, namely that Jehovah is the stronghold of His saints. Not by reason of his own wit or power does the afflicted baffle the oppressor, but by reason of the strength and inaccessibility of his hiding place. "The conies are a feeble folk, but they make their houses in the rocks," where nothing that has wings can get at them.

So, finally, the whole course of thought gathers itself up in the prayer that the salvation of Israel—the true Israel apparently—were come out of Zion. God's dwelling, from which He comes forth in His delivering power. The salvation longed for is that just described. The voice of the oppressed handful of good men in an evil generation is heard in this closing prayer. It is encouraged by the visions which have passed before the psalmist. The assurance that God will intervene is the very life-breath of the cry to Him that he would. Because we know that He will deliver, therefore we find it in our hearts to pray that He would deliver. The revelation of His gracious purposes animates the longings for their realisation. Such a sigh of desire has no sadness in its longing and no doubt in its expectation. It basks in the light of an unrisen sun, and feels beforehand the gladness of the future joys "when the Lord shall bring again the captivity of His people."

This last verse is by some regarded as a liturgical addition to the psalm; but ver. 6 cannot be the original close, and it is scarcely probable that some other ending has been put aside to make room for this. Besides, the prayer of ver. 7 coheres very naturally with the rest of the psalm, if only we take that phrase "turns the captivity" in the sense which it admittedly bears in Job xlii. 10 and Ezek. xvi. 53, namely that of deliverance from misfortune. Thus almost all modern interpreters understand the words, and even those who most strongly hold the late date of the psalm do not find here any reference to the historical bondage. The devout kernel of the nation

is suffering from oppressors, and that may well be called a captivity. For a good man the present condition of society is bondage, as many a devout soul has felt since the psalmist did. But there is a dawning hope of a better day of freedom, the liberty of the glory of the children of God; and the gladness of the ransomed captives may be in some degree anticipated even now. The psalmist was thinking only of some intervention on the field of history, and we are not to read loftier hopes into his song. But it is as impossible for Christians not to entertain, as it was for him to grasp firmly, the last, mightiest hope of a last, utter deliverance from all evil and of an eternal and perfect joy.

PSALM XV.

- 1 Jehovah, who can be guest in Thy tent?
Who can dwell in Thy holy hill?
- 2 The man walking blamelessly, and doing righteousness,
And speaking truth with his heart.
- 3 He has not slander on his tongue,
He does not harm to his comrade,
And reproach he does not lay on his neighbour.
- 4 A reprobate is despised in his eyes,
But the fearers of Jehovah he honours;
He swears to his own hurt, and will not change.
- 5 His silver he does not give at usury,
And a bribe against the innocent he does not take;
He that does these things shall not be moved for ever.

THE ideal worshipper of Jehovah is painted in this psalm in a few broad outlines. Zion is holy because God's "tent" is there. This is the only hint of date given by the psalm; and all that can be said is that if that consecration of Thy hill was recent, the poet would naturally ponder all the more deeply the question of who were fit to dwell in the new solemnities of the abode of Jehovah. The tone of the psalm, then, accords with the circumstances of the time when David brought the ark to Jerusalem; but more than this cannot be affirmed. Much more important are its two main points: the conception of the guests of Jehovah and the statement of the ethical qualifications of these.

As to structure, the psalm is simple. It has first, the general question and answer in two verses of two clauses each (vv. 1, 2). Then the general description of the guest of God is expanded in three verses of three clauses each, the last of which closes with an assurance of stability, which varies and heightens the idea of dwelling in the tent of Jehovah.

It is no mere poetic apostrophe with which the psalmist's question is prefaced. He does thereby consult the Master of the house as to the terms on which He extends hospitality, which terms it is His right to prescribe. He brings to his own view and to his readers' all that lies in the name of Jehovah, the covenant name, and all that is meant by "holiness," and thence draws the answer to his question, which is none the less Jehovah's answer because it springs in the psalmist's heart and is spoken by his lips. The character of the God de-

termines the character of the worshipper. The roots of ethics are in religion. The Old Testament ideal of the righteous man flows from its revelation of the righteous God. Not men's own fancies, but insight gained by communion with God and docile inquiry of Him, will reliably tell what manner of men they are who can abide in His light.

The thought, expressed so forcibly in the question of the psalm, that men may be God's guests, is a very deep and tender one, common to a considerable number of psalms (v. 5, xxvii. 4, lxxxiv. 5, etc.). The word translated "abide" in the A.V. and "sojourn" in the R.V. originally implied a transient residence as a stranger, but when applied to men's relations to God, it does not always preserve the idea of transiency (see, for instance, lxi. 4: "I will dwell in Thy tent *for ever*"); and the idea of protection is the most prominent. The stranger who took refuge in the tent of the wild Beduin was safe, much more the happy man who crept under the folds of the tent of Jehovah. If the holy hill of Zion were not immediately mentioned, one might be tempted to think that the tent here was only used as a metaphor; but the juxtaposition of the two things seems to set the allusion to the dwelling-place of the Ark on its hill beyond question. In the gracious hospitality of the antique world, a guest was sheltered from all harm; his person was inviolable, his wants all met. So the guest of Jehovah is safe, can claim asylum from every foe and a share in all the bountiful provision of His abode. Taken accurately, the two verbs in ver. 1 differ in that the first implies transient and the second permanent abode, but that difference is not in the psalmist's mind, and the two phrases mean the same thing, with only the difference that the former brings out his conception of the rights of the guest. Clearly, then, the psalmist's question by no means refers only to an outward approach to an outward tabernacle; but we see here the symbol in the very act of melting into the deep spiritual reality signified. The singer has been educated by the husks of ritual to pass beyond these, and has learned that there is a better dwelling-place for Jehovah, and therefore for himself, than that pitched on Zion and frequented by impure and pure alike.

Ver. 2 sums the qualifications of Jehovah's guest in one comprehensive demand, that he should walk uprightly, and then analyses that requirement into the two of righteous deeds and truthful speech. The verbs are in the participial form, which emphasises the notion of habitual action. The general answer is expanded in the three following verses, which each contain three clauses, and take up the two points of ver. 2 in inverted order, although perhaps not with absolute accuracy of arrangement. The participial construction is in them changed for finite verbs. Ver. 2 sketches the figure in outline, and the rest of the psalm adds clause on clause of description as if the man stood before the psalmist's vision. Habits are described as acts.

The first outstanding characteristic of this ideal is that it deals entirely with duties to men, and the second is that it is almost wholly negative. Moral qualities of the most obvious kind and such as can be tested in daily life and are cultivated by rigid abstinence from prevailing evils and not any recondite and impalpable refinements of conduct, still less any peculiar emotions of souls raised high above the dusty levels of common life,

are the qualifications for dwelling, a guarded guest, in that great pavilion. Such a stress laid on homely duties, which the universal conscience recognises, is characteristic of the ethics of the Old Testament as a whole and of the Psalter in particular, and is exemplified in the lives of its saints and heroes. They "come eating and drinking," sharing in domestic joys and civic duties; and however high their aspirations and vows may soar, they have always their feet firmly planted on the ground and, laying the smallest duties on themselves, "tread life's common road in cheerful godliness." The Christian answer to the psalmist's question goes deeper than his, but is fatally incomplete unless it include his and lay the same stress on duties to men which all acknowledge, as that does. Lofty emotions, raptures of communion, aspirations which bring their own fulfilment, and all the experiences of the devout soul, which are sometimes apt to be divorced from plain morality, need the ballast of the psalmist's homely answer to the great question. There is something in a religion of emotion not wholly favourable to the practice of ordinary duties; and many men, good after a fashion, seem to have their spiritual nature divided into watertight and uncommunicating compartments, in one of which they keep their religion, and in the other their morality.

The stringent assertion that these two are inseparable was the great peculiarity of Judaism as compared with the old world religions, from which, as from the heathenism of to-day, the conception that religion had anything to do with conduct was absent. But it is not only heathenism that needs the reminder.

True, the ideal drawn here is not the full Christian one. It is too merely negative for that, and too entirely concerned with acts. Therein it reproduces the limitations of the earlier revelation. It scarcely touches at all the deeper forms of "love to our neighbour"; and above all, it has no answer to the question which instinctively rises in the heart when the psalm has answered its own question. How can I attain to these qualifications? is a second interrogation, raised by the response to the first, and for its answer we have to turn to Jesus. The psalm, like the law which inspired it, is mainly negative, deals mainly with acts, and has no light to show how its requirements may be won. But it yet stands as an unantiquated statement of what a man must be who dwells in the secret place of the Most High. How he may become such a one we must learn from Him who both teaches us the way, and gives us the power, to become such as God will shelter in the safe recesses of His pavilion.

The details of the qualifications as described in the psalm are simple and homely. They relate first to right speech, which holds so prominent a place in the ethics of the Psalter. The triplets of ver. 3 probably all refer to sins of the tongue. The good man has no slander on his tongue; he does not harm his companion (by word) nor heap reproach on his neighbour. These things are the staple of much common talk. What a quantity of brilliant wit and polished sarcasm would perish if this rule were observed! How dull many sparkling circles would become, and how many columns of newspapers and pages of books would be obliterated, if the censor's pencil struck out all that infringed it! Ver. 4 adds as characteristic of a righteous man that in his estimate of character he gives each his own, and judges men by

no other standard than their moral worth. The reprobate may be a millionaire or a prince, but his due is contempt; the devout man may be a pauper or one of narrow culture, but his due is respect, and he gets it. "A terrible sagacity informs" the good man's heart; and he who is, in his own inmost desires, walking uprightly will not be seduced into adulation of a popular idol who is a bad man, nor turned from reverence for lowly goodness. The world will be a paradise when the churl is no more called bountiful.

Apparently the utterance of these estimates is in the psalmist's mind, and he is still thinking of speech. Neither calumny (ver. 3) nor the equally ignoble flattery of evil-doers (ver. 4) pollutes the lips of his ideal good man. If this reference to spoken estimates is allowed, the last clause of ver. 4 completes the references to the right use of speech. The obligation of speaking "truth with his heart" is pursued into a third region: that of vows or promises. These must be conceived as not religious vows, but, in accordance with the reference of the whole psalm to duties to neighbours, as oaths made to men. They must be kept, whatever consequences may ensue. The law prohibited the substitution of another animal sacrifice for that which had been vowed (Lev. xxvii. 10); and the psalm uses the same word for "changeth," with evident allusion to the prohibition, which must therefore have been known to the psalmist.

Usury and bribery were common sins, as they still are in communities on the same industrial and judicial level as that mirrored in the psalm. Capitalists who "bite" the poor (for that is the literal meaning of the words for usurious taking of interest) and judges who condemn the innocent for gain are the blood-suckers of such societies. The avoidance of such gross sin is a most elementary illustration of walking uprightly, and could only have been chosen to stand in lieu of all other neighbourly virtues in an age when these sins were deplorably common. This draft of a God-pleasing character is by no means complete even from the Old Testament ethical point of view. There are two variations of it, which add important elements: that in Psalm xxiv., which seems to have been occasioned by the same circumstances; and the noble adaptation in Isa. xxxiii. 13-16, which is probably moulded on a reminiscence of both psalms. Add to these Micah's answer to the question what God requires of man (ch. vi. 8), and we have an interesting series exhibiting the effects of the Law on the moral judgments of devout men in Israel.

The psalmist's last word goes beyond his question in the clear recognition that such a character as he has outlined not only dwells in Jehovah's tent, but will stand unmoved, though all the world should rock. He does not see how far onward that "for ever" may stretch, but of this he is sure: that righteousness is the one stable thing in the universe, and there may have shone before him the hope that it was possible to travel on beyond the horizon that bounds this life. "I shall be a guest in Jehovah's tent for ever," says the other psalm already quoted; "He shall never be moved," says this one. Both find their fulfilment in the great words of the Apostle who taught a completer ideal of love to men, because he had dwelt close by the perfect revelation of God's love: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

PSALM XVI.

- 1 Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in Thee.
- 2 I have said to Jehovah, Thou art my Lord;
Good for me there is none besides Thee.
- 3 As for the saints which are in the earth,
They are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.
- 4 Their griefs are many who change [Jehovah]
for another.
I will not pour out their drink offerings of
blood,
And will not take their names on my lips.
- 5 Jehovah is my allotted portion and my cup;
Thou art continually my lot.
- 6 The measuring lines have fallen for me in
pleasant places,
And my inheritance is fair to me.
- 7 I will bless Jehovah who has given me counsel;
Yea, in the night seasons my reins instruct me.
- 8 I set Jehovah before me continually,
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be
moved.
- 9 Therefore my heart rejoices, and my glory
exults;
Yea, my flesh dwells in safety.
- 10 For Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol;
Thou wilt not suffer Thy Beloved One to see
the pit.
- 11 Thou wilt make me know the path of life;
Before Thy face is fulness of joys;
Pleasures are in Thy right hand for evermore.

THE progress of thought in this psalm is striking. The singer is first a bold confessor in the face of idolatry and apostasy (vv. 1-4). Then the inward sweetness of his faith fills his soul, as is ever the reward of brave avowal, and he buries himself, bee-like, in the pure delights of communion with Jehovah (vv. 5-8). Finally, on the ground of such experience, he rises to the assurance that "its very sweetness yieldeth proof" that he and it are born for undying life (vv. 9-11). The conviction of immortality is then most vividly felt, when it results from the consciousness of a present full of God. The outpourings of a pure and wholesome mystic religion in the psalm are so entirely independent of the personality and environment of the singer that there is no need to encumber the study of it with questions of date. If we accept the opinion that the conception of resurrection was the result of intercourse with Persia, we shall have to give a post-exilic date to the psalm. But even if the general adoption of that belief was historically so motivated, that does not forbid our believing that select souls, living in touch with God, rose to it long before. The peaks caught the glow while the valleys were filled with mists. The tone of the last section sounds liker that of a devout soul in the very act of grasping a wonderful new thought, which God was then and there revealing to him through his present experience, than of one who was simply repeating a theological truth become familiar to all.

The first turn of thought (vv. 1-4) is clear in its general purport. It is a profession of personal adherence to Jehovah and of attachment to His lovers, in the face of idol worship which had drawn away some. The brief cry for preservation at the beginning does not necessarily imply actual danger, but refers to the possible antago-

nism of the idol worshippers provoked by the psalmist's bold testimony. The two meanings of Martyr, a witness and a sufferer, are closely intertwined in fact. He needs to be preserved, and he has a claim to be so, for his profession of faith has brought the peril.

The remarkable expression in ver. 2 *b* is best understood as unfolding the depth of what lies in saying, My God. It means the cleaving to Him of the whole nature as the all-comprehending supply of every desire and capacity. "Good for me is none besides Thee." This is the same high strain as in the cognate Psalm lxxiii. 25, where, as here, the joy of communion is seen in the very act of creating the confidence of immortality. The purest expression of the loftiest devotion lies in these few words. The soul that speaks thus to Jehovah turns next to Jehovah's friends and then to His foes. To the former it speaks, in ver. 3, of the gnarled obscurity of which the simplest clearing up is that adopted by the R.V. This requires a very small correction of the text, the omission of one letter (*Waw* = and) before "excellent," and the transference to the second clause of "these," which the accents append clumsily to the first. If we regard the "to" at the beginning, as the R.V. does, as marking simply reference ("as for"), the verse is an independent sentence; but it is possible to regard the influence of "I have said" as still continuing, and in that case we should have what the psalmist said to the saints, following on what he said to Jehovah, which gives unity to the whole context, and is probably best. Cheyne would expunge the first clause as a gloss crept in from the margin; and that clears the sense, though the remedy is somewhat drastic, and a fine touch is lost. "I said to Thy loved ones,—these (and not the braggarts who strut as great men) are the truly excellent, in whom is all my delight." When temptations to forsake Jehovah are many, the true worshipper has to choose his company, and his devotion to his only Good will lead to penetrating insight into the unreality of many shining reputations and the modest beauty of humble lives of godliness. Eyes which have been purged to see God, by seeing Him will see through much. Hearts that have learned to love Jehovah will be quick to discern kindred hearts, and, if they have found all good in Him, will surely find purest delight in them. The solitary confessor clasps the hands of his unknown fellows.

With dramatic abruptness he points to the unnamed recreants from Jehovah. "Their griefs are many—they exchange (Jehovah) for another." Apparently, then, there was some tendency in Israel to idolatry, which gives energy to the psalmist's vehement vow that he will not offer their libations of blood, nor take the abhorred names of the gods they pronounced into his lips. This state of things would suit but too much of Israel's history, during which temptations to idol worship were continually present, and the bloody libations would point to such abominations of human sacrifice as we know characterised the worship of Moloch and Chemosh. Cheyne sees in the reference to these a sign of the post-exilic date of the psalm; but was there any period after the exile in which there was danger of relapse to idolatry, and was not rather a rigid monotheism the great treasure which the exiles brought back? The trait seems rather to favour an earlier date.

In the second section (vv. 5-8) the devout soul suns itself in the light of God, and tells itself how rich it is. "The portion of mine inheritance" might mean an allotted share of either food or land, but ver. 6 favours the latter interpretation. "Cup" here is not so much an image for that which satisfies thirst, though that would be beautiful, as for that which is appointed for one to experience. Such a use of the figure is familiar, and brings it into line with the other of inheritance, which is plainly the principal, as that of the cup is dropped in the following words. Every godly man has the same possession and the same prohibitions as the priests had. Like them he is landless, and instead of estates has Jehovah. They presented in mere outward fashion what is the very law of the devout life. Because God is the only true Good, the soul must have none other, and if it have forsaken all other by reason of the greater wealth of even partial possession of Him, it will be growingly rich in Him. He who has said unto the Lord, "Thou art my Lord," will with ever increasing decisiveness of choice and consciousness of sufficiency say, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance." The same figure is continued in ver. 5 b. "My lot" is the same idea as "my portion," and the natural flow of thought would lead us to expect that Jehovah is both. That consideration combines with the very anomalous grammatical form of the word rendered "maintainest" to recommend the slight alteration adopted by Cheyne following Dyserinck and Bickell, by which "continually" is read for it. What God is rather than what He does is filling the psalmist's happy thoughts, and the depth of his blessedness already kindles that confidence in its perpetuity which shoots up to so bright a flame in the closing verses (cf. lxxiii.). The consciousness of perfect rest in perfect satisfaction of need and desires ever follows possession of God. So the calm rapture of ver. 6 is the true utterance of the heart acquainted with God, and of it alone. One possession only bears reflection. Whatever else a man has, if he has not Jehovah for his portion, some part of himself will stand stiffly out, dissentient and unsatisfied, and hinder him from saying "My inheritance is fair to me." That verdict of experience implies, as it stands in the Hebrew, subjective delight in the portion and not merely the objective worth of it. This is the peculiar pre-eminence of a God-filled life, that the Infinitely good is wholly Good to it, through all the extent of capacities and cravings. Who else can say the same? Blessed they whose delights are in God! He will ever delight them.

No wonder that the psalmist breaks into blessing; but it is deeply significant of the freedom from mere sentimental religion which characterises the highest flights of his devotion, that his special ground of blessing Jehovah is not inward peace of communion, but the wise guidance given thereby for daily difficulties. A God whose sweet sufficiency gives satisfaction for all desires and balm for every wound is much, but a God who by these very gifts makes duty plain, is more. The test of inward devotion is its bearing on common tasks. True wisdom is found in fellowship with God. Eyes which look on Him see many things more clearly. The "reins" are conceived of as the seat of the Divine voice. In Old Testament psychology they seem to stand for feelings rather than reason or conscience, and it is no mistake of the psalmist's when he thinks that through

them God's counsel comes. He means much the same as we do when we say that devout instincts are of God. He will purify, ennoble and instruct even the lower propensities and emotions, so that they may be trusted to guide, when the heart is at rest in Him. "Prayer is better than sleep," says the Mohammedan call to devotion. "In the night seasons," says the psalmist, when things are more clearly seen in the dark than by day, many a whisper from Jehovah steals into his ears.

The upshot of all is a firm resolve to make really his what is his. "I set Jehovah always before me"—since He is "always my lot." That effort of faith is the very life of devotion. We have any possession only while it is present to our thoughts. It is all one not to have a great estate and never to see it or think about it. True love is an intense desire for the presence of its object. God is only ours in reality when we are conscious of His nearness, and that is strange love of Him which is content to pass days without ever setting Him before itself. The effort of faith brings an ally and champion for faith, for "He is at my right hand," in so far as I set Him before me. "At my right hand,"—then I am at His left, and the left arm wears the shield, and the shield covers my head. Then He is close by my working hand, to direct its activity and to lay His own great hand on my feeble one, as the prophet did his on the wasted fingers of the sick king to give strength to draw the bow. The ally of faith secures the stability of faith. "I shall not be moved," either by the agitations of passions or by the shocks of fortune. A calm heart, which is not the same thing as a stagnant heart, is the heritage of him who has God at his side; and he who is fixed on that rock stands four-square to all the winds that blow. Foolhardy self-reliance says, I shall never be moved (x. 6), and the end of that boast is destruction. A good man, seduced by prosperity, may forget himself so far as to say it (xxx. 6), and the end of that has to be fatherly discipline, to bring him right. But to say "Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" is but to claim the blessings belonging to the possession of the only satisfying inheritance, even Jehovah Himself.

The heart that expands with such blessed consciousness of possessing God can chant its triumphant song even in front of the grave. So, in his closing strain the psalmist pours out his rapturous faith that his fellowship with God abolishes death. No worthy climax to the profound consciousness of communion already expressed, nor any satisfactory progress of thought justifying the "therefore" of ver. 9, can be made out with any explanation of the final verses, which eliminates the assurance of immortal life from them. The experiences of the devout life here are prophecies. These aspirations and enjoyments are to their possessor, not only authentic proofs "that God is and that He is the rewarder of the heart that seeks Him," but also witnesses of immortality not to be silenced. They "were not born for death," but, in their sweetness and incompleteness alike, point onwards to their own perpetuity and perfecting. If a man has been able to say and has said "My God," nothing will seem more impossible to him than that such a trifle as death should have power to choke his voice or still the outgoings of his heart towards, and its rest in, his God. Whatever may have been the current beliefs of the psalmist's time in regard to

a future life, and whether his sunny confidence here abode with him in less blessed hours of less "high communion with the living God," or ebbed away, leaving him to the gloomier thoughts of other psalms, we need not try to determine. Here, at all events, we see his faith in the act of embracing the great thought, which may have been like the rising of a new sun in his sky—namely, the conviction that this his joy was joy for ever. A like depth of personal experience of the sweetness of communion with God will always issue in like far-seeing assurance of its duration as unaffected by anything that touches only the physical husk of the true self. If we would be sure of immortal life, we must make the mortal a God-filled life.

The psalmist feels the glad certainty in all his complex nature, heart, soul, and flesh. All three have their portion in the joy which it brings. The foundation of the exultation of heart and soul and of the quiet rest of flesh is not so much the assurance that after death there will be life, and after the grave a resurrection, as the confidence that there will be no death at all. To "see the pit" is a synonym for experiencing death, and what is hoped for is exemption from it altogether, and a Divine hand leading him, as Enoch was led, along the high levels on a "path of life" which leads to God's right hand, without any grim descent to the dark valley below. Such an expectation may be called vain, but we must distinguish between the form and the substance of the psalmist's hope. Its essence was—unbroken and perfected communion with God, uninterrupted sense of possessing Him, and therein all delights and satisfactions. To secure these he dared to hope that for him death would be abolished. But he died, and assuredly he found that the unbroken communion for which he longed was persistent through death, and that in dying his hope that he should not die was fulfilled beyond his hope.

The correspondence between his effort of faith in ver. 8 and his final position in ver. 11 is striking. He who sets Jehovah continually before himself will, in due time, come where there are fulness of joys before God's face; and he who here, amid distractions and sorrows, has kept Jehovah at his right hand as his counsellor, defender and companion, will one day stand at Jehovah's right hand, and be satisfied for evermore with the uncloying and inexhaustible pleasures that there abide.

The singer, whose clear notes thus rang above the grave, died and saw corruption. But, as the apostolic use of this psalm as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection has taught us, the apparent contradiction of his triumphal chant by the fact of his death did not prove it to be a vain dream. If there ever should be a life of absolutely unbroken communion, that would be a life in which death would be abolished. Jesus Christ is God's "Beloved" as no other is. He has conquered death as no other has. The psalm sets forth the ideal relation of the perfectly devout man to death and the future, and that ideal is a reality in Him, from whom the blessed continuity, which the psalmist was sure must belong to fellowship so close as was his with God, flows to all who unite themselves with Him. He has trodden the path of life which He shows to us, and it is life, at every step even when it dips into the darkness of what men call death, whence it rises into the light of the Face which it is joy to see, and close to the loving strong Hand which holds and gives pleasures for evermore.

PSALM XVII.

- 1 Hear a righteous cause, Jehovah, attend to my cry;
Give ear to my prayer from no lips of guile.
- 2 From Thy face let my sentence go forth;
Thine eyes behold rightly.
- 3 Thou provest my heart, searchest it by night,
Triest me by fire: Thou findest not [anything];
Should I purpose evil, it shall not pass my mouth (?)
- 4 As for (During) the doings of men, by the word of Thy lips
I have kept [me from] the paths of the violent man.
- 5 My steps have held fast to Thy ways;
My feet have not slipped.
- 6 I, I call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me,
O God;
Incline Thine ear unto me: hear my speech.
- 7 Magnify (Make wonderful) Thy lovingkindnesses, Thou who savest those who seek refuge
From those who rise [against them?] by Thy right hand.
- 8 Keep me as the pupil, the daughter of the eye;
In the shadow of Thy wing hide me
- 9 From the wicked, who lay me waste,
My enemies at heart, [who] ring me round.
- 10 Their heart they have shut up;
With their mouth they speak in arrogance.
- 11 In our steps they already compass us about;
Their eyes they fix, to lay [us] on the ground.
- 12 He is like a lion who longs to rend,
And a young lion crouching in coverts.
- 13 Arise, Jehovah: meet his face: make him crouch;
Deliver my soul from the wicked [with] Thy sword.
- 14 From men [by] Thy hand, Jehovah, from men of the world,
[Having] their portion in [this] life, and [with] Thy hidden treasure Thou fillest their belly;
They are full of sons, and leave their overabundance to their children.
- 15 I, I shall in righteousness behold Thy face;
I shall be satisfied on awaking [with] Thy likeness.

THE investigations as to authorship and date yield the usual conflicting results. Davidic, say one school; undoubtedly post-exilic, say another, without venturing on closer definition; late in the Persian period, says Cheyne. Perhaps we may content ourselves with the modest judgment of Baethgen in his last book ("Handcommentar," 1892, p. 45): "The date of composition cannot be decided by internal indications." The background is the familiar one of causeless foes round an innocent sufferer, who flings himself into God's arms for safety, and in prayer enters into peace and hope. He is, no doubt, a representative of the *Ecclesia pressa*; but he is so just because his cry is intensely personal. The experience of one is the type for all, and a poet's prerogative is to cast his most thoroughly individual emotions into words that fit the universal heart. The psalm is called a "prayer," a title given to only four other psalms, none of which are in the First Book. It has three movements, marked by the repetition of the name of God, which does not appear else-

where, except in the doubtful verse 14. These three are vv. 1-5, in which the cry for help is founded on a strong profession of innocence; vv. 6-12, in which it is based on a vivid description of the enemies; and vv. 13-15, in which it soars into the pure air of mystic devotion, and thence looks down on the transient prosperity of the foe and upwards, in a rapture of hope, to the face of God.

The petition proper, in vv. 1, 2, and its ground, are both strongly marked by conscious innocence, and therefore sound strange to our ears, trained as we have been by the New Testament to deeper insight into sin. This sufferer asks God to "hear righteousness," *i.e.*, his righteous cause. He pleads the *bona fides* of his prayer, the fervour of which is marked by its designation as "my cry," the high-pitched note usually the expression of joy, but here of sore need and strong desire. Boldly he asks for his "sentence from Thy face," and the ground of that petition is that "Thine eyes behold rightly." Was there, then, no inner baseness that should have toned down such confidence? Was this prayer not much the same as the Pharisee's in Christ's parable? The answer is partly found in the considerations that the innocence professed is specially in regard to the occasions of the psalmist's present distress, and that the acquittal by deliverance which he asks is God's testimony that as to these he was slandered and clear. But, further, the strong professions of heart-cleanness and outward obedience which follow are not so much denials of any sin as avowals of sincere devotion and honest submission of life to God's law. They are "the answer of a good conscience towards God," expressed, indeed, more absolutely than befits Christian consciousness, but having nothing in common with Pharisaic self-complacency. The modern type of religion which recoils from such professions, and contents itself with always confessing sins which it has given up hope of overcoming, would be all the better for listening to the psalmist and aiming a little more vigorously and hopefully at being able to say, "I know nothing against myself." There is no danger in such a saying, if it be accompanied by "Yet am I not hereby justified" and by "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

The general drift of vv. 3-5 is clear, but the precise meaning and connection are extremely obscure. Probably the text is faulty. It has been twisted in all sorts of ways, the Masoretic accents have been disregarded, the division of verses set aside, and still no proposed rendering of parts of vv. 3, 4, is wholly satisfactory. The psalmist deals with heart, lips, feet—that is, thoughts, words, and deeds—and declares the innocence of all. But difficulties begin when we look closer. The first question is as to the meaning and connection of the word rendered in the A.V. and R.V., "I am purposed." It may be a first person singular or an infinitive used as a noun or even a noun, meaning, in both the latter cases, substantially the same, *i.e.* my thinking or my thoughts. It is connected by the accents with what follows; but in that case the preceding verb "find" is left without an object, and hence many renderings attach the word to the preceding clause, and so get "Thou shalt find no [evil] thoughts in me." This division of the clauses leaves the words rendered, by A.V. and R.V., "My mouth shall not transgress," standing alone. There is no other instance of the verb standing by itself with that meaning, nor is "mouth" clearly the subject. It may as well be the object, and the clause be, "[It] shall not pass

my mouth." If that is the meaning, we have to look to the preceding word as defining what it is that is thus to be kept unuttered, and so detach it from the verb "find," as the accents do. The knot has been untied in two ways: "My [evil] purpose shall not pass," etc., or, taking the word as a verb and regarding the clause as hypothetical, "Should I think evil, it shall not pass," etc.

Either of these renderings has the advantage of retaining the recognised meaning of the verb and of avoiding neglect of the accent. Such a rendering has been objected to as inconsistent with the previous clause, but the psalmist may be looking back to it, feeling that his partial self-knowledge makes it a bold statement, and thus far limiting it, that *if* any evil thought is found in his heart, it is sternly repressed in silence.

Obscurity continues in ver. 4. The usual rendering, "As for [or, During] the works of men, by the word of Thy mouth I have kept me," etc., is against the accents, which make the principal division of the verse fall after "lips"; but no satisfactory sense results if the accentuation is followed unless we suppose a verb implied, such as *e.g.*, *stand fast* or the like, so getting the profession of steadfastness in the words of God's lips, in face of men's self-willed doings. But this is precarious, and probably the ordinary way of cutting the knot by neglecting the accents is best. In any case the avowal of innocence passes here from thoughts and words to acts. The contrast of the psalmist's closed mouth and God's lips is significant, even if unintended. Only he who silences much that rises in his heart can hear God speaking. "I kept me from," is a very unusual meaning for the word employed, which generally signifies to *guard* or *watch*, but here seems to mean to *take heed so as to avoid*. Possibly the preposition *from*, denoted by a single letter, has fallen out before "paths." This negative avoidance precedes positive walking in God's ways, since the poet's position is amidst evil men. Goodness has to learn to say No to men, if it is ever to say Yes to God. The foot has to be forcibly plucked and vigilantly kept from foul ways before it can be planted firmly in "Thy paths." By holding fast to courses appointed by God stability is ensured. Thus the closing clause of this first part is rather an acknowledgment of the happy result of devoted cleaving to God than an assertion of self-secured steadfastness. "My feet do not slip," not so much because they are strong as because the road is good, and the Guide's word and hand ready.

The second part repeats the prayer for help, but bases it on the double ground of God's character and acts and of the suppliant's desperate straits; and of these two the former comes first in the prayer, though the latter has impelled to the prayer. Faith may be helped to self-consciousness by the sense of danger, but when awakened it grasps God's hand first and then faces its foes. In this part of the psalm the petitions, the aspects of the Divine character and working, and the grim picture of dangers are all noteworthy. The petitions by their number and variety reveal the pressure of trouble, each new prick of fear or pain forcing a new cry and each cry recording a fresh act of faith tightening its grasp. The "I" in ver. 6 is emphatic, and may be taken as gathering up the psalmist's preceding declarations and humbly laying them before God as a plea: "I, who thus cleave to Thy ways, call upon Thee, and my prayer is that of faith, which is sure of answer." But that confidence does not make

petition superfluous, but rather encourages it. The assurance that "Thou wilt answer" is the reason for the prayer, "Incline Thine ear." Naturally at such a moment the name of God springs to the psalmist's lips, but significantly it is not the name found in the other two parts of the psalm. There He is invoked as "Jehovah," here as "God." The variation is not merely rhetorical, but the name which connotes power is appropriate in a prayer for deliverance from peril so extreme. "Magnify [or make wonderful] Thy lovingkindnesses" is a petition containing at once a glimpse of the psalmist's danger, for escape from which nothing short of a wonder of power will avail, and an appeal to God's delight in magnifying His name by the display of His mercy. The prayer sounds arrogant, as if the petitioner thought himself important enough to have miracles wrought for him; but it is really most humble, for the very wonder of the lovingkindness besought is that it should be exercised for such a one. God wins honour by saving a poor man who cries to Him; and it is with deep insight into the heart of God that this man presents himself as offering an occasion, in which God must delight, to flash the glory of His loving power before dull eyes. The petitions grow in boldness as they go on, and culminate in two which occur in similar contiguity in the great Song of Moses in Deut. xxxii.: "Keep me as the pupil of Thy eye." What closeness of union with God that lovely figure implies, and what sedulous guardianship it implores! "In the shadow of Thy wings hide me." What tenderness of fostering protection that ascribes to God, and what warmth and security it asks for man! The combination and order of these two petitions may teach us that, if we are to be "kept," we must be hidden; that if these frail lives of ours are to be dear to God as the apple of His eye, they must be passed nestling close by His side. Deep, secret communion with Him is the condition of His protection of us, as another psalm, using the same image, has it: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

The aspects of the Divine character, which the psalmist employs to move God's heart and to encourage his own, are contained first in the name "God," and next in the reference to His habitual dealings with trusting souls, in ver. 7. From of old it has been His way to be the Saviour of such as take refuge in Him from their enemies, and His right hand has shielded them. That past is a prophecy which the psalmist grasps in faith. He has in view instances enough to warrant an induction absolutely certain. He knows the law of the Divine dealings, and is sure that anything may happen rather than that it shall fail. Was he wrong in thus characterising God? Much in his experience and in ours looks as if he were; but they who most truly understand what help or salvation truly is will most joyously dwell in the sunny clearness of this confidence, which will not be clouded for them, though their own and others' trust is not answered by what sense calls deliverance.

The eye which steadily looks on God can look calmly at dangers. It is with no failure of faith that the poet's thoughts turn to his enemies. Fears that have become prayers are already more than half conquered. The psalmist would move God to help, not himself to despair, by recounting his perils. The enemy "spoil" him or lay him waste,

the word used for the ravages of invaders. They are "enemies in soul"—*i. e.*, deadly—or perhaps "against [my] soul" or life. They are pitiless and proud, closing their hearts, which prosperity has made "fat" or arrogant, against the entrance of compassion, and indulging in gasconading boasts of their own power and contemptuous scoffs at his weakness. They ring him round, watching his steps. The text has a sudden change here from singular to plural, and back again to singular, reading "*our* steps," and "They have compassed *me*," which the Hebrew margin alters to "*us*." The wavering between the singular and plural is accounted for by the upholders of the Davidic authorship by a reference to him and his followers, and by the advocates of the theory that the speaker is the personified Israel by supposing that the mask falls for a moment, and the "*me*," which always means "*us*," gives place to the collective. Ver. 11 *b* is ambiguous in consequence of the absence of an object to the second verb. To "set the eyes" is to watch fixedly and eagerly; and the purpose of the gaze is in the next clause stated by an infinitive with a preposition, not by a participle, as in the A.V. The verb is sometimes transitive and sometimes intransitive, but the former is the better meaning here, and the omitted object is most naturally "*us*" or "*me*." The sense, then, will be that the enemies eagerly watch for an opportunity to cast down the psalmist, so as to lay him low on the earth. The intransitive meaning "to bow down" is taken by some commentators. If that is adopted (as it is by Hupfeld and others), the reference is to "*our steps*" in the previous clause, and the sense of the whole is that eager eyes watch for these "bowing to the ground," that is stumbling. But such a rendering is harsh, since steps are always on the ground. Baethgen ("Handcommentar"), on the strength of Num. xxi. 22, the only place where the verb occurs with the same preposition as here, and which he takes as meaning "to turn aside to field or vineyard—*i. e.*, to plunder them"—would translate, "They direct their eyes to burst into the land," and supposes the reference to be to some impending invasion. A similar variation in number to that in ver. 11 occurs in ver. 12, where the enemies are concentrated into one. The allusion is supposed to be to some one conspicuous leader—*e. g.*, Saul—but probably the change is merely an illustration of the carelessness as to such grammatical accuracy characteristic of emotional Hebrew poetry. The familiar metaphor of the lurking lion may have been led up to in the poet's imagination by the preceding picture of the steadfast gaze of the enemy, like the glare of the green eyeballs flashing from the covert of a jungle.

The third part (vv. 13-15) renews the cry for deliverance, and unites the points of view of the preceding parts in inverted order, describing first the enemies and then the psalmist, but with these significant differences, the fruits of his communion with God, that now the former are painted, not in their fierceness, but in their transitory attachments and low delights, and that the latter does not bemoan his own helplessness nor build on his own integrity, but feeds his soul on his confidence of the vision of God and the satisfaction which it will bring. The smoke clouds that rolled in the former parts have caught fire and one clear shoot of flame aspires heavenward. He who makes his needs known to God gains for immediate answer "the peace of God which passeth understanding," and can wait God's time for the rest. The crouching lion is still ready to spring; but the psalmist

hides himself behind God, whom he asks to face the brute and make him grovel at his feet ("Make him bow down," the same word used for a lion couchant in Gen. xlix. 9 and Num. xxiv. 9). The rendering of ver. 13 *b*, "the wicked, who is Thy sword," introduces an irrelevant thought; and it is better to regard the sword as God's weapon that slays the crouching wild beast. The excessive length of ver. 14 and the entirely pleonastic "from men (by) Thy hand, O Lord," suggest textual corruption. The thought runs more smoothly, though not altogether clearly, if these words are omitted. There remains a penetrating characterisation of the enemy in the sensuous limitations and mistaken aims of his godless being, which may be satiated with low delights, but never satisfied, and has to leave them all at last. He is no longer dreaded, but pitied. His prayer has cleared the psalmist's eyes and lifted him high enough to see his foes as they are. They are "men of the world," belonging, by the set of their lives, to a transitory order of things—an anticipation of New Testament language about "the children of this world." "Their portion is in [this] life," while the psalmist's is God (xvi. 5). They have chosen to have their good things in their lifetime. Hopes, desires, aims, tastes, are all confined within the narrow bounds of time and sense, than which there can be no greater folly. Such limitation will often seem to succeed, for low aims are easily reached; and God sometimes lets men have their fill of the goods at which their perverted choice clutches. But even so the choice is madness and misery, for the man, gorged with worldly good, has yet to leave it, however unwilling to loosen his hold. He cannot use his goods; and it is no comfort to him, sent away naked into darkness of death, that his descendants revel in what was his.

How different the contrasted conditions of the hunted psalmist and his enemies look when the light of such thoughts streams on them! The helpless victim towers above his persecutors, for his desires go up to Him who abides and saturates with His blessed fulness the heart that aspires to Him. Terrors vanish; foes are forgotten; every other wish is swallowed up in one, which is a confidence as well as a desire. The psalmist neither grudges, nor is perplexed by, the prosperity of the wicked. The mysteries of men's earthly lot puzzle those who stand at a lower elevation; but they do not disturb the soul on these supreme heights of mystic devotion, where God is seen to be the only good, and the hungry heart is filled with Him. Assuredly the psalmist's closing expectation embodies the one contrast worth notice: that between the present gross and partial satisfactions of sense-bound lives and the calm, permanent, full delights of communion with God. But does he limit his hopes to such "hours of high communion with the living God" as may be ours, even while the foe rings us round and earth holds us down? Possibly so, but it is difficult to find a worthy meaning for "when I awake" unless it be from the sleep of death. Possibly, too, the allusion to the men of the world as "leaving their substance" makes the reference to a future beatific vision more likely. Death is to them the stripping off of their chosen portion; it is to him whose portion is God the fuller possession of all that he loves and desires. Cheyne ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 407) regards the *awaking* as that from the *sleep* of the intermediate state by "the passing of the soul into a resurrection body." He is led to the recognition of the doctrine of the resurrec-

tion here by his theory of the late date of the psalm and the influence of Zoroastrianism on it. But it is not necessary to suppose an allusion to the resurrection. Rather the psalmist's confidence is the offspring of his profound consciousness of present communion, and we see here the very process by which a devout man, in the absence of a clear revelation of the future, reached up to a conclusion to which he was led by his experience of the inmost reality of friendship with God. The impotence of death on the relation of the devout soul to God is a postulate of faith, whether formulated as an article of faith or not. Probably the psalmist had no clear conception of a future life; but certainly he had a distinct assurance of it, because he felt that the very "sweetness" of present fellowship with God "yielded proof that it was born for immortality."

PSALM XVIII.

- 1 Heartily do I love Thee, Jehovah, my strength!
- 2 Jehovah, my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock in whom I take refuge.
My shield and the horn of my salvation and my high tower!
- 3 I call upon Him who is to be praised, Jehovah;
And from mine enemies am I saved.
- 4 The breakers of death ringed me round,
And streams of destruction terrified me.
- 5 The cords of Sheol encircled me;
The snares of death fronted me.
- 6 In my distress I called on Jehovah,
And to my God I loudly cried;
He heard my voice from His palace-temple,
And my loud crying before Him entered His ears.
- 7 Then the earth rocked and reeled,
And the foundations of the mountains quivered
And rocked again, for He was wroth.
- 8 Smoke went up in His nostrils,
And fire from His mouth devoured;
Brands came blazing from Him.
- 9 And He bowed the heavens and came down,
And cloud gloom [was] below His feet.
- 10 And He rode upon the cherub and flew,
And came swooping on the wings of the wind.
- 11 He made darkness His covert, His tent round about Him,
Darkness of waters and cloud masses of the skies.
- 12 From the brightness before Him there passed through His cloud-masses
Hail and brands of fire.
- 13 And Jehovah thundered in the heavens,
And the Most High gave forth His voice.
- 14 And He sent forth His arrows and scattered them,
And lightnings many, and flung them into panic.
- 15 And the beds of the waters were seen,
And the foundations of the earth bared,
At Thy rebuke, Jehovah,
At the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils.
- 16 He stretched from on high: He took me;
He drew me from many waters.
- 17 He rescued me from my strong enemy
And from my haters, because they were too mighty for me.

- 18 They fell on me in the day of my calamity,
But Jehovah became as a staff to me.
- 19 And He brought me out into a wide place;
He delivered me, because He delighted in me.
- 20 Jehovah treated me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He
returned [recompense] to me.
- 21 For I kept the ways of Jehovah,
And did not part myself by sin from my God.
- 22 For all His judgments were before me,
And His statutes did I not put away from me.
- 23 And I was without fault with Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
- 24 Therefore Jehovah returned [recompense] to
me according to my righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands before
His eyes.
- 25 With the gracious man Thou showest Thyself
gracious;
With the faultless man Thou showest Thyself
faultless.
- 26 With him who purifies himself Thou showest
Thyself pure,
And with the perverse Thou showest Thyself
froward.
- 27 For Thou savest humbled people,
And eyes uplifted Thou dost bring low.
- 28 For Thou lightest my lamp;
Jehovah my God brightens my darkness.
- 29 For by Thee I run down a troop,
And through my God I spring over a rampart.
- 30 As for God, His way is faultless;
The word of Jehovah is tried (as by fire):
A shield is He to all who take refuge in Him.
- 31 For who is God but Jehovah,
And who is a rock besides our God?
- 32 [It is] God who girded me with strength,
And made my way faultless;
- 33 Who made my feet like hinds' [feet],
And made me stand upon my high places;
- 34 Who schooled my hands for war,
So that my arms bend a bow of brass.
- 35 And Thou didst give me the shield of Thy
salvation,
And Thy right hand upheld me,
And Thy humility made me great.
- 36 Thou didst broaden under me [a path for] my
step,
And my ankles did not give.
- 37 I pursued my enemies, and overtook them;
And I did not turn till I had consumed them.
- 38 I shattered them, and they could not rise;
They fell beneath my feet.
- 39 And Thou girdedst me with might for battle;
Thou didst bring my assailants to their knees
under me.
- 40 And my enemies Thou madest to turn their
backs to me,
And my haters—I annihilated them.
- 41 They shrieked, and there was no helper,
To Jehovah, and He answered them not.
- 42 I pounded them like dust before the wind;
Like street mud I emptied them out.
- 43 Thou didst deliver me from the strifes of the
people;
Thou didst set me for a head of the nations;
A people whom I knew not served me.
- 44 At the hearing of the ear they made themselves
obedient to me;
The children of the foreigner came feigning
to me.
- 45 The children of the foreigner faded away,
And came trembling from their strongholds.
- 46 Jehovah lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
- 47 The God who gave me revenges
And subdued peoples under me,
- 48 My deliverer from my enemies:
Yea, from my assailants Thou didst set me on
high,
From the man of violence didst Thou rescue
me.
- 49 Therefore will I give Thee thanks among the
nations, Jehovah;
And to Thy name will I sing praise.
- 50 He magnifies salvations for His king,
And works lovingkindness for His anointed,
For David and for his seed for evermore.

THE description of the theophany (vv. 7-19) and that of the psalmist's God-won victories (vv. 32-46) appear to refer to the same facts, transfigured in the former case by devout imagination and presented in the latter in their actual form. These two portions make the two central masses round which the psalm is built up. They are connected by a transitional section, of which the main theme is the power of character to determine God's aspect to a man as exemplified in the singer's experience; and they are preceded and followed by an introduction and a conclusion, throbbing with gratitude and love to Jehovah, the Deliverer.

The Davidic authorship of this psalm has been admitted even by critics who are slow to recognise it. Cheyne asks, as if sure of a negative answer, "What is there in it that suggests the history of David?" ("Orig. of Psalter," p. 205). Baethgen, who "suspects" that a Davidic psalm has been "worked over" for use in public worship, may answer the question: "The following points speak for the Davidic authorship. The poet is a military commander and king, who wages successful wars, and subdues peoples whom he hitherto did not know. There is no Israelite king to whom the expressions in question in the psalm apply so closely as is the case with David." To these points may be added the allusions to earlier trials and perils, and the distinct correspondence, in a certain warmth and inwardness of personal relation to Jehovah, with the other psalms attributed to David, as well as the pregnant use of the word *to flee to a refuge*, applied to the soul's flight to God, which we find here (ver. 2) and in the psalms ascribed to him. If the clear notes of the psalm be the voice of personal experience, there is but one author possible—namely, David—and the glow and intensity of the whole make the personification theory singularly inadequate. It is much easier to believe that David used the word "temple" or "palace" for Jehovah's heavenly dwelling, than that the "I" of the psalm, with his clinging sense of possession in Jehovah, his vivid remembrance of sorrows, his protestations of integrity, his wonder at his own victories, and his triumphant praise, is not a man, but a frosty personification of the nation.

The prelude invocation in vv. 1-3 at once touches the high-water mark of Old Testament devotion, and is conspicuous among its noblest utter-

ances. Nowhere else in Scripture is the form of the word employed which is here used for "love." It has special depth and tenderness. How far into the centre this man had penetrated, who could thus isolate and unite Jehovah and himself, and could feel that they two were alone and knit together by love! The true estimate of Jehovah's ways with a man will always lead to that resolve to love, based on the consciousness of God's love to him. Happy they who learn that lesson by retrospect; happier still if they gather it from their sorrows while these press! Love delights in addressing the beloved and heaping tender names on its object, each made more tender and blessed by that appropriating "my." It seems more accordant with the fervent tone of the psalm to regard the reiterated designations in ver. 2 as vocatives, than to take "Jehovah" and "God" as subjects and the other names as predicates. Rather the whole is one long, loving accumulation of dear names, a series of invocations, in which the restful heart murmurs to itself how rich it is and is never wearied of saying, "my delight and defence." As in Psalm xvii., the name of Jehovah occurs twice, and that of God once. Each of these is expanded, as it were, by the following epithets, and the expansion becomes more extended as it advances, beginning with one member in ver. 1, having three in ver. 2 *a* and four in ver. 2 *b*. Leaving out the Divine names proper, there are seven in ver. 2, separated into two groups by the name of God. It may be observed there is a general correspondence between the two sets, each beginning with "rock" (though the word is different in the two clauses), each having the metaphor of a fortress, and "shield and horn of salvation," roughly answering to "Deliverer." The first word for *rock* is more properly *crag* or *cliff*, thus suggesting inaccessibility, and the second a *rock mass*, thus giving the notion of firmness or solidity. The shade of difference need not be pressed, but the general idea is that of safety, or by elevation above the enemy and by reason of the unchangeable strength of Jehovah. In that lofty cry, a man may look down on all the armies of earth, idly active on the plain. That great Rock towers unchangeable above fleeting things. The river at its base runs past, the woods nestling at its feet bud and shed their leaves, but it stands the same. David had many a time found shelter among the hills and caves of Judah and the South land, and it may not be fancy that sees reminiscences of these experiences in his song. The beautiful figure for trust embodied in the word in 2 *b* belongs to the metaphor of the rock. It is found with singular appropriateness in Psalm lvii., which the title ascribes to David "in the cave," the sides of which bent above him and sheltered him, like a great pair of wings, and possibly suggested the image, "In the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge." The difference between "fortress" and "high tower" is slight, but the former gives more prominence to the idea of strength, and the latter to that of elevation, both concurring in the same thought as was expressed by "rock," but with the additional suggestion of Jehovah as the home of the soul. Safety, then, comes through communion. Abiding in God is seclusion from danger. "Deliverer" stands last in the first set, saying in plain words what the preceding had put in figures. "My shield and the horn of my salvation" come in the centre of the second set, in obedience to the law of variety in reiteration which the poet's artistic instincts impose. They shift the figure to that of a

warrior in actual conflict. The others picture a fugitive from enemies, these a fighter. The shield is a defensive weapon; horns are offensive ones, and the combination suggests that in conflict we are safe by the interposition of God's covering power, and are armed by the same power for striking at the foe. That power ensures salvation, whether in the narrower or wider sense. Thus Jehovah is all the armour and all the refuge of His servant. To trust Him is to have His protection cast around and His power infused for conflict and victory. The end of all life's experience is to reveal Him in these characters, and they have rightly learned its lessons whose song of retrospect begins with "I will love Thee, Jehovah," and pours out at His feet all happy names expressive of His sufficiency and of the singer's rest in possessing Him. Ver. 3 is not a resolution for the future—"I will call; . . . so shall I be saved"—but the summing up of experience in a great truth: "I call, . . . and I am saved." It unfolds the meaning of the previous names of God, and strikes the key-note for the magnificent sequel.

The superb idealisation of past deliverances under the figure of a theophany is prepared for by a retrospect of dangers, which still palpitates with the memory of former fears. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things," and a joy's crown of joy is remembering past perils. No better description of David's early life could have been given than that contained in the two vivid figures of vv. 4 and 5. If we adopt the more congruous reading of the other recension of the psalm in 2 Sam. xxii., we have in both members of ver. 4 a parallel metaphor. Instead of "sorrows" or "cords" (both of which renderings are possible for the text of the psalm here), it reads "breakers," corresponding with "floods" in the second clause. "Destruction" is better than *ungodly men* as the rendering of the unusual word "Belial." Thus the psalmist pictures himself as standing on a diminishing bit of solid ground, round which a rising flood runs strong, breaking on its crumbling narrowness. Islanded thus, he is all but lost. With swift transition he casts the picture of his distress into another metaphor. Now he is a hunted creature, surrounded and confronted by cords and snares. Sheol and Death have marked him for their prey, and are drawing their nets round him. What is left for him? One thing only. He has a voice, and he has a God. In his despair one piercing cry breaks from him; and, wonder of wonders, that thin shoot of prayer rises right into the heavenly palace-temple and the ears of God. The repetition of "I called upon the Lord" connects this with ver. 3 as the experience on which the generalisation there is based. His extremity of peril had not paralysed the psalmist's grasp of God as still "my God," and his confidence is vindicated. There is an eloquent contrast between the insignificance of the cause and the stupendous grandeur of the effect: one poor man's shrill cry and a shaking earth and all the dread pomp attending an interposing God. A cupful of water poured into a hydraulic ram sets in motion power that lifts tons; the prayer of faith brings the dread magnificence of Jehovah into the field. The reading of 2 Samuel is preferable in the last clause of ver. 6, omitting the superfluous "before Him."

The phenomena of a thunderstorm are the substratum of the grand description of Jehovah's delivering self-manifestation. The garb is lofty

poetry; but a definite fact lies beneath, namely some deliverance in which the psalmist saw Jehovah's coming in storm and lightning flash to destroy, and therefore to save. Faith sees more truly because more deeply than sense. What would have appeared to an ordinary looker-on as merely a remarkable escape was to its subject the manifestation of a present God. Which eye sees the "things that are,"—that which is cognisant only of a concatenation of events, or that which discerns a Person directing these? The cry of this hunted man has for first effect the kindling of the Divine "wrath," which is represented as flaming into action in the tremendous imagery of vv. 7 and 8. The description of the storm in which God comes to help the suppliant does not begin with these verses, as is commonly understood. The Divine power is not in motion yet, but is, as it were, gathering itself up for action. The complaining prayer is boldly treated as bringing to God's knowledge His servant's straits, and the knowledge as moving Him to wrath towards the enemies of one who takes shelter beneath His wings. "What have I here that my"—servant is thus bestead? saith the Lord. The poet can venture to paint a picture with the pen, which the painter dare not attempt with the pencil. The anger of Jehovah is described in words of singular daring, as rising like smoke from His nostrils and pouring in fire from His lips, from which blazing brands issue. No wonder that the earth reels even to the roots of the mountains, as unable to endure that wrath! The frank anthropomorphism of the picture, of which the features are taken from the hard breathing of an angry man or animal (compare Job's crocodile in Job xli. 10-13), and the underlying conception are equally offensive to many; but as for the former, the more "gross" the humanising of the picture, the less likely is it to be mistaken for prose fact, and the more easy to apprehend as symbol; and as for the latter, the New Testament endorses the conception of the "wrath of God," and bids us take heed lest, if we cast it away, we main his love. This same psalm hymns Jehovah's "gentleness"; and the more deeply His love is apprehended, the more surely will His wrath be discerned as its necessary accompaniment. The dark orb and its radiant sister move round a common centre.

Thus kindled, God's wrath flashes into action, as is wonderfully painted in that great storm piece in vv. 9-15. The stages of a violent thunder tempest are painted with unsurpassable force and brevity.

First we see the low clouds: far nearer the trembling earth than the hidden blue was, and seeming to press down with leaden weight, their boding blackness is above us; but

"Whose foot shall we see emerge,
Whose from the straining topmost dark?"

Their low gathering is followed by the sudden rush of wind, which breaks the awful calm. In its "sound," the psalmist hears the winnowing of mighty wings: those of the cherub on whom, as a living chariot, Jehovah sits throned. This is called "mythology." Is it not rather a poetic personification of elemental powers, which gives emphasis to their being God's instruments? The cherubim are in Scripture represented in varying forms and with different attributes. In Ezekiel they assume a composite form due apparently to Babylonian influences; but here there is no trace

of that, and the absence of such strongly supports a pre-exilic date.

Blacker grows the gloom, in which awed hearts are conscious of a present Deity shrouded behind the livid folds of the thunder-clouds, as in a tent. Down rushes the rain; the darkness is "a darkness of waters," and also "thick clouds of the skies," or "cloud masses," a mingled chaos of rain and cloud. Then lightning tears a way through the blackness, and the language becomes abrupt, like the flash. In vv. 12 and 13 the fury of the storm rages. Blinding brightness and deafening thunder-claps gleam and rattle through the broken words. Probably ver. 12 should be rendered, "From the brightness before Him there came through His clouds hail and brands of fire." Hidden in the cloudy tent is the light of Jehovah's presence, sparkles from which, flung forth by Him, pierce the solid gloom; and men call them lightnings. Then thunder rolls, the voice of the Most High. The repetition in ver. 13 of "hail and brands of fire" gives much abrupt force and one is unwilling to part with it. The reason for omitting it from the text is the want of grammatical connection, but that is rather a reason for retaining it, as the isolated clause breaks in on the continuity of the sentence, just as the flash shoots suddenly out of the cloud. These lightnings are God's arrows; and, as they are showered down in flights, the psalmist's enemies, unnamed since ver. 3, scatter in panic. The ideal character of the whole representation is plain from the last element in it—the description in ver. 15 of laying bare the sea's depths, as the waters were parted at the Exodus. That voice and the fierce blast from these fire-breathing nostrils have dried the streams, and the oozy bed is seen. God's "re-buke" has power to produce physical changes. The earthquake at the beginning and the empty ocean bed at the end are both somewhat outside the picture of the storm, and complete the representation of all nature as moved by the theophany.

Then comes the purpose of all the dread magnificence, strangely small except to the psalmist. Heaven and earth have been shaken, and lightnings set leaping through the sky, for nothing greater than to drag one half-drowned man from the floods. But the result of the theophany is small only in the same fashion as its cause was small. This same poor man cried, and the cry set Jehovah's activity in motion. The deliverance of a single soul may seem a small thing, but if the single soul has prayed it is no longer small, for God's good name is involved. A nation is disgraced if its meanest subject is left to die in the hands of foreign enemies, and blood and treasure are not wasted if poured out lavishly for his rescue. God cannot let a suppliant who has taken shelter in His tent be dragged thence. Therefore there is no disproportion between the theophany and the individual deliverance which is its sole result.

The psalmist lays aside the figure in vv. 17, 18, and comes to the bare fact of his deliverance from enemies, and perhaps from one especially formidable ("my enemy," ver. 17). The prose of the whole would have been that he was in great danger and without means of averting it, but had a hair-breadth escape. But the outside of a fact is not all of it; and in this mystical life of ours poetry gets nearer the heart of things than does prose, and religion nearer than either. It is no miracle, in the narrow meaning of that word, which the psalmist sings; but his eye has seen the

unseen force which moves all visible events. We may see the same apocalypse of a present Jehovah, if our eyes are purged, and our hearts pure. It is always true that the cry of a trustful soul pierces heaven and moves God; it is always true that He comes to His servant sinking and crying, "Lord, save me; I perish." The scene on the Galilean lake when Christ's strong grasp held Peter up, because his fear struck out a spark of faith, though his faith was darkened with fear, is ever being repeated.

The note slightly touched at the close of the description of the deliverance dominates the second part of the psalm (vv. 20-31), of which the main theme is the correspondence of God's dealings with character, as illustrated in the singer's experience, and thence generalised into a law of the Divine administration. It begins with startling protestations of innocence. These are rounded into a whole by the repetition, at the beginning and end, of the same statement that God dealt with the psalmist according to his righteousness and clean-handedness. If the author is David, this voice of a good conscience must have been uttered before his great fall, after which he could, indeed, sing of forgiveness and restoring grace, but never again of integrity. Unlike as the tone of these verses is to that deeper consciousness of sin which is not the least of Christ's gifts, the truth which they embody is as much a part of the Christian as of the earlier revelation. True, penitence must now mingle with conscious rectitude more abundantly than it does in this psalm; but it is still and for ever true that God deals with His servants according to their righteousness. Cherished sin separates from Him, and forces His love to leave cries for help many times unanswered, in order that, filled with the fruit of their doings, His people may have a wholesome fear of again straying from the narrow way. Unless a Christian can say, "I keep myself from mine iniquity," he has no right to look for the sunshine of God's face to gladden his eyes, nor for the strength of God's hand to pluck his feet from the net. In noble and daring words, the psalmist proclaims as a law of God's dealings his own experience generalised (vv. 25-27). It is a bold reversal of the ordinary point of view to regard man as taking the initiative and God as following his lead. And yet is not life full of solemn facts confirmatory of the truth that God is to a man what the man is to God? That is so, both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, our conceptions of God vary with our moral nature, and objectively the dealings of God are moulded according to that nature. There is such a thing as colour blindness in regard to the Divine character, whereby some men cannot see the green of faithful love or the red of wrath, but each beholds that in God which his vision fits him to see; and the many-sided dealings of God are different in their incidence upon different characters, so that the same heat melts wax and hardens clay; and further the actual dealings are accurately adapted to the state of their objects, so that each gets what he needs most: the loving heart, sweet love tokens from the Divine Lover; the perverse, thwartings which come from a God "contrary" to them who are contrary to Him. "The history of the world is the judgment of the world." But the first of the designations of character in ver. 25 hints that before man's initiative had been God's; for "merciful" is the pregnant word occurring so often in the Psalter, and so impossible to translate by any one

word. It means, as we have already had occasion to point out, one who is the subject of the Divine lovingkindness, and who therefore loves God in return. Here it seems rather to be taken in the sense of loving than of beloved. He who exercises this lovingkindness, whether towards God or man, shall find in God One who exercises it to him. But the word itself regards man's lovingkindness towards God as being the echo of God's, and so the very first step in determining the mutual relations is God's, and but for it there would never have been that in man which God could answer by showing Himself as loving. The contrasted dealings and characters are summed up in the familiar antithesis of ver. 27. The "afflicted" or humble are the type of God-pleasing character, since humility, such as befits dependent creatures, is the mother of all goodness, and "high looks" the master sin, and the whole drift of Providence is to lift the lowly and abase the proud.

The psalmist's swift thought vibrates throughout this part of the song between his own experience and the general truths exemplified in it. He is too full of his own deliverance to be long silent about it, and, on the other hand, is continually reminded by it of the wide sweep of the beneficent laws which have been so fruitful of good to him. The most precious result of individual mercy is the vision obtained through it of the universal Lover of souls. "My God" will be widened into "our God," and "our God" will rest upon "my God," if either is spoken from the heart's depths. So in vv. 27-29 the personal element comes again to the front. The individualising name "My God" occurs in each verse, and the deliverance underlying the theophany is described in terms which prepare for the fuller celebration of victory in the last part of the psalm. God lights the psalmist's lamp, by which is meant not the continuance of his family (as the expression elsewhere means), but the preservation of his own life, with the added idea, especially in ver. 28 *b*, of prosperity. Ver. 29 tells how the lamp was kept alight, namely by the singer's victory in actual battle, in which his swift rush had overtaken the enemy, and his agile limbs had scaled their walls. The parallelism of the clauses is made more complete by the emendation adopted by Lagarde, Cheyne, Bachtgen, etc., who read ver. 29 *a*, "I [can] break down a fence," but this is unnecessary. The same combination of running and climbing occurs in Joel ii. 7, and the two clauses of ver. 33 seem to repeat those of ver. 29. The swift, agile warrior, then, traces these physical powers to God, as he does more at large in later verses.

Once more, the song passes, in ver. 30, to the wider truths taught by the personal deliverance. "Our God" takes the place of "my God"; and "all who take refuge in Him" are discerned as gathering, a shadowy crowd, round the solitary psalmist, and as sharing in his blessings. The large truths of these verses are the precious fruit of distress and deliverance. Both have cleared the singer's eyes to see, and tuned his lips to sing, a God whose doings are without a flaw, whose word is like pure gold without alloy or falsehood, whose ample protection shields all who flee to its shelter, who alone is God, the fountain of strength, who stands firm for ever, the inexpugnable defence and dwelling-place of men. This burst of pure adoration echoes the tones of the glorious beginning of the psalm. Happy they who, as the result of

life's experience, solve "the riddle of this painful earth," with these firm and jubilant convictions as the very foundation of their being.

The remainder of the psalm (ver. 32 to end) describes the victorious campaign of the psalmist and the establishment of his kingdom. There is difficulty in determining the tenses of the verbs in some verses, and interpreters vary between pasts and futures. The inclination of the greater number of recent commentators is to carry the historical retrospect uninterruptedly through the whole context, which, as Hupfeld acknowledges, "allerdings das bequemste ist," and those who suppose occasional futures interspersed (as the R. V. and Hupfeld) differ in the places of their introduction. "Everything here is retrospective," says Delitzsch, and certainly that view is simplest and gives unity to the whole. The name of God is never mentioned in the entire section, except as vainly invoked by the flying foe. Not till the closing doxologies does it appear again, with the frequency which marks the middle part of the psalm. A similar sparse use of it characterises the description of the theophany. In both cases there is a peculiar force given by the stream of verbs without expressed nominatives. The hurrying clauses here vividly reproduce the haste of battle, and each falls like the blow of a battle mace wielded by a strong arm. The equipment of the king for the fight (vv. 32-36), the fierce assault, flight of the foe and their utter annihilation (vv. 37-42), the extension by conquest of the singer's kingdom (vv. 43, 44), successively pass before us as we listen to the panting words with the heat of battle in them; and all rises at last into exuberant praise, which re-echoes some strains of the introductory burst of thanksgiving.

Many mythologies have told how the gods arm their champions, but the psalmist reaches a loftier height than these. He ventures to think of God as doing the humble office of bracing on his girdle, but the girdle is itself strength. God, whose own "way is perfect" (ver. 30), makes His servant's "way" in some measure like His own; and though, no doubt, the figure must be interpreted in a manner congruous with its context, as chiefly implying "perfection" in regard to the purpose in hand—namely, warfare—we need not miss the deeper truth that God's soldiers are fitted for conflict by their "ways" being conformed to God's. This man's "strength was as the strength of ten, because his heart was pure." Strength and swiftness are the two characteristics of antique heroes, and God's gift bestowed both on the psalmist. Light of foot as a deer and able to climb to the robber forts perched on crags, as a chamois would, his hands deft, and his muscular arms strong to bend the bow which others could not use, he is the ideal of a warrior of old; and all these natural powers he again ascribes to God's gift. A goddess gave Achilles his wondrous shield, but what was it to that which God binds upon this warrior's arm? As his girdle was strength, and not merely a means of strength, his shield is salvation, and not merely a means of safety. The fact that God purposes to save and does act for saving is the defence against all dangers and enemies. It is the same deep truth as the prophet expresses by making "salvation" the walls and bulwarks of the strong city where the righteous nation dwells in peace. God does not thus arm His servant and then send him out alone to fight as he can, but "Thy right hand holds me up." What assailant can beat him down, if that hand

is under his armpit to support him? The beautiful rendering of the A.V., "Thy gentleness," scarcely conveys the meaning, and weakens the antithesis with the psalmist's "greatness," which is brought out by translating "Thy lowliness," or even more boldly "Thy humility." There is that in God which answers to the peculiarly human virtue of lowliness; and unless there were, man would remain small and unclothed with God-given strength. The devout soul thrills with wonder at God's stooping love, which it discerns to be the foundation of all His gifts and therefore of its blessedness. This singer saw deep into the heart of God, and anticipated the great word of the one Revealer, "I am meek and lowly in heart." But God's care for him does not merely fit him for the fight: it also orders circumstances so as to give him a free course. Having made his "feet like hinds' feet," God then prepares paths that he should walk in them. The work is only half done when the man is endowed for service or conflict: a field for his powers must be forthcoming, and God will take care that no strength given by Him lies idle for want of a wrestling ground. Sooner or later feet find the road.

Then follow six verses (37-42) full of the stir and tumult of battle. There is no necessity for the change to futures in the verbs of vv. 37, 38, which the R.V. adopts. The whole is a picture of past conflict, for which the psalmist had been equipped by God. It is a literal fight, the triumph of which still glows in the singer's heart and flames in his vivid words. We see him in swift pursuit, pressing hard on the enemy, crushing them with his fierce onset, trampling them under foot. They break and flee, shrieking out prayers, which the pursuer has a stern joy in knowing to be fruitless. His blows fall like those of a great pestle, and crush the fleeing wretches, who are scattered by his irresistible charge, like dust whirled by the storm. The last clause of the picture of the routed foe is better given by the various reading in 2 Samuel, which requires only a very slight alteration in one letter: "I did stamp them as the mire of the streets." Such delight in the enemy's despair and destruction, such gratification at hearing their vain cries to Jehovah, are far away from Christian sentiments; and the gulf is not wholly bridged by the consideration that the psalmist felt himself to be God's anointed, and enmity to him to be treason against God. Most natural as his feelings were, perfectly consistent with the level of religion proper to the then stage of revelation, capable of being purified into that triumph in the victory of good and ruin of evil without which there is no vigorous sympathy with Christ's battle, and kindling as they do by their splendid energy and condensed rapidity an answering glow in even readers so far away from their scene as we are, they are still of "another spirit" from that which Christ has breathed into the Church, and nothing but confusion and mischief can come of slurring over the difference. The light of battle which blazes in them is not the fire which Jesus longed to kindle upon earth.

Thus far the enemies seem to have been native foes rebelling against God's anointed or, if the reference to the Sauline persecution is held by, seeking to prevent his reaching his throne. But, in the concluding verses of this part (43-45), a transition is made to victory over "strangers," i.e. foreign nations. "The strivings of the people" seems to point back to the war described already, while "Thou hast made me the head of the nations"

refers to external conquests. In 2 Samuel the reading is "my people," which would bring out the domestic reference more strongly; but the suffix for "my" may be a defective form of writing the plural; if so, the peoples in ver. 43 *a* are the "nations" of 43 *b*. In any case the royal singer celebrates the extension of his dominion. The tenses in vv. 44, 45, which the R.V. again gives as futures (as does Hupfeld), are better regarded, like all the others, as pasts. The wider dominion is not inconsistent with Davidic origin, as his conquests were extended beyond the territory of Israel. The picture of the hasty surrender of the enemy at the very sound of the conqueror's name is graphic. "They lied unto me," as the words in ver. 44 *b* are literally, gives forcibly the feigned submission covering bitter hate. "They fade away," as if withered by the simoom, the hot blast of the psalmist's conquering power. "They come trembling [or, as 2 Samuel reads, come limping] from their strongholds."

Vv. 46 to end make a noble close to a noble hymn, in which the singer's strong wing never flags nor the rush of thought and feeling slackens. Even more absolutely than in the rest of the psalm every victory is ascribed to Jehovah. He alone acts; the psalmist is simply the recipient. To have learned by life's struggles and deliverances that Jehovah is a living God and "my Rock" is to have gathered life's best fruit. A morning of tempest has cleared into sunny calm, as it always will, if tempest drives to God. He who cries to Jehovah when the floods of destruction make him afraid will in due time have to set to his seal that Jehovah liveth. If we begin with "The Lord is my Rock," we shall end with "Blessed be my Rock." Thankfulness does not weary of reiterating acknowledgments; and so the psalmist gathers up once more the main points of the psalm in these closing strains and lays all his mass of blessings at the feet of the Giver. His deliverance from his domestic foes and his conquests over external enemies are wholly God's work, and therefore supply both impulse and material for praises which shall sound out beyond the limits of Israel. The vow to give thanks among the nations has been thought fatal to the Davidic origin of the psalm. Seeing, however, that some foreign peoples were conquered by him, there was opportunity for its fulfilment. His function to make known the name of Jehovah was the reason for his victories. David had learned the purpose of his elevation, and recognised in an extended kingdom a wider audience for his song. Therefore Paul penetrates to the heart of the psalm when he quotes ver. 49 in Rom. xv. 9 as a proof that the evangelising of the Gentiles was an Old Testament hope. The plain lesson from the psalmist's vow is that God's mercies bind, and if felt aright will joyfully impel, the receiver to spread His name as far as his voice can reach. Love is sometimes silent, but gratitude must speak. The most unmusical voice is tuned to melody by thankfulness, and they need never want a theme who can tell what the Lord has done for their soul.

The last verse of the psalm is sometimes regarded as a liturgical addition, and the mention of David gratuitously supposed to be adverse to his authorship, but there is nothing unnatural in a king's mentioning himself in such a connection nor in the reference to his dynasty, which is evidently based upon the promise of perpetual dominion given through Nathan. The Christian reader

knows how much more wonderful than the singer knew was the mercy granted to the king in that great promise, fulfilled in the Son of David, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and who bears God's name to all the nations.

PSALM XIX.

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
And the work of His hands the firmament
makes known.
- 2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night shows knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech and no words;
Not heard is their voice.
- 4 In all the earth their line goes forth, and in
the end of the world their words;
For the sun has He set a tent in them.
- 5 And he is like a bridegroom going out from
his chamber;
He rejoices like a hero to run (his) course.
- 6 From the end of the heavens is his going forth,
and his circuit unto their ends;
And nothing is hid from his heat.
- 7 The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the
soul;
The testimony of Jehovah is trusty, making
wise the simple.
- 8 The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing
the heart;
The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlight-
ening the eyes.
- 9 The fear of Jehovah is clean, standing for
ever;
The judgments of Jehovah are truth: they are
righteous altogether.
- 10 They are more to be desired than gold and
than abundant [gold] refined,
And they are sweeter than honey and the drop-
pings of the honeycomb.
- 11 Moreover, Thy servant is warned by them;
In keeping them is reward abundant.
- 12 Inadvertencies who can discern?
From hidden sins absolve me.
- 13 Also from presumptuous [sins] keep back Thy
servant: let them not rule over me;
Then shall I be guiltless, and I shall be ab-
solved from great transgression.
- 14 Accepted be the words of my mouth and medi-
tation of my heart in Thy sight,
Jehovah, my Rock and my Kinsman-redeemer!

Is this originally one psalm or bits of two, pieced together to suggest a comparison between the two sources of knowledge of God, which the authors did not dream of? The affirmative is strongly maintained, but, we may venture to say, not so strongly sustained. The two parts are said to differ in style, rhythm, and subject. Certainly they do, but the difference in style accounts for the difference in structure. It is not an unheard-of phenomenon that cadence should change with theme; and if the very purpose of the song is to set forth the difference of the two witnesses to God, nothing can be more likely than such a change in measure. The two halves are said to be put together abruptly without anything to smooth the transition. So they are, and so is ver. 4 put by the side of ver. 3; and so does the last turn of thought (vv. 12-14) follow the second. Cyclopean architecture without mortar has a certain impressiveness. The abruptness is rather an

argument for than against the original unity, for a compiler would have been likely to try to make some sort of glue to hold his two fragments together, while a poet, in the rush of his afflatus, would welcome the very abruptness which the manufacturer would avoid. Surely the thought that binds the whole into a unity—that *Jehovah* is *El*, and that nature and law witness to the same Divine Person, though with varying clearness—is not so strange as that we should have to find its author in some late editor unknown.

Vv. 1-6 hymn the silent declaration by the heavens. The details of exposition must first be dealt with. "Declare" and "makes known" are participles, and thus express the continuity of the acts. The substance of the witness is set forth with distinct reference to its limitations, for "glory" has here no moral element, but simply means what Paul calls "eternal power and Godhead," while the Divine name of God ("*El*") is used in intended contrast to "*Jehovah*" in the second half, a *nuance* which must be obliterated if this is a conglomerate psalm. "His handiwork," in like manner, limits the revelation. The heavens by day are so marvellously unlike the heavens by night that the psalmist's imagination conjures up two long processions, each member of which passes on the word entrusted to him to his successor—the blazing days with heaven naked but for one great light, and the still nights with all their stars. Ver. 3 has given commentators much trouble in attempting to smooth its paradox. Tastes are curiously different, for some critics think that the familiar interpretation gives a flat, prosaic meaning, while Cheyne takes the verse to be a gloss for dull readers, and exclaims, "How much the brilliant psalm fragment gains by its omission!" *De gustibus*, etc. Some of us may still feel that the psalmist's contrast of the awful silence in the depths of the sky and of the voice that speaks to opened ears thrills us with something very like the electric touch of poetry. In ver. 4 the thought of the great voices returns. "Their line" is usually explained as meaning their sphere of influence, marked out, as it were, by a measuring cord. If that rendering is adopted, ver. 4 *b* would in effect say, "Their words go as far as their realm." Or the rendering "sound" may be deduced, though somewhat precariously, from that of *line*, since a line stretched is musical. But the word is not used as meaning the string of an instrument, and the very slight conjectural emendation which gives "voice" instead of "line" has much to recommend it. In any case the teaching of the verse is plain from the last clause, namely the universality of the revelation. It is singular that the mention of the sun should come in the close of the verse; and there may be some error in the text, though the introduction of the sun here may be explained as completing the picture of the heavens, of which it is the crowning glory. Then follows the fuller delineation of his joyous energy, of his swift strength in his course, of his penetrating beams, illuminating and warming all. Why should the glowing metaphors, so natural and vigorous, of the sun coming forth from his bridal chamber and, hero-like, running his race, be taken to be traces of ancient myths now innocently reclaimed from the service of superstition? To find in these two images a proof that the first part of the psalm belongs to the post-exilic "literary revival of Hebrew mythology" is surely to lay more on them than they can bear.

The scientific contemplation of nature is wholly absent from Scripture, and the picturesque is very rare. This psalmist knew nothing about solar spectra or stellar distances, but he heard a voice from out of the else waste heavens which sounded to him as if it named God. Comte ventured to say that the heavens declare the glory of the astronomer, not of God; but, if there be an order in them, which it is a man's glory to discover, must there not be a mind behind the order, and must not the Maker have more glory than the investigator? The psalmist is protesting against stellar worship, which some of his neighbours practised. The sun was a creature, not a god; his "race" was marked out by the same hand which in depths beyond the visible heavens had pitched a "tent" for his nightly rest. We smile at the simple astronomy; the religious depth is as deep as ever. Dull ears do not hear these voices; but whether they are stopped with the clay of earthly tastes and occupations, or stuffed with scientific wadding of the most modern kind, the ears that do not hear God's name sounded from the abysses above, have failed to hear the only word which can make man feel at home in nature. Carlyle said that the sky was "a sad sight." The sadness and awfulness are taken away when we hear the heavens telling the glory of God. The unscientific psalmist who did hear them was nearer the very heart of the mystery than the scientist who knows everything else about them but that.

With an abrupt transition which is full of poetical force, the singer turns to the praises of the better revelation of *Jehovah*. Nature speaks in eloquent silence of the strong God, but has no witness to His righteous will for men or His love to them which can compare with the clear utterances of His law. The rhythm changes, and in its cadence expresses the psalmist's exuberant delight in that law. In vv. 7-11 the clauses are constructed on a uniform plan, each containing a name for the law, an attribute of it, and one of its effects. The abundance of synonyms indicates familiarity and clear views of the many sides of the subject. The psalmist had often brooded on the thought of what that law was, because, loving its Giver, he must needs love the gift. So he calls it "law," or teaching, since there he found the best lessons for character and life. It was "testimony," for in it God witnessed what He is and what we should be, and so witnessed against sin; it was a body of "precepts" (statutes, A.V.) giving rich variety of directions; it was "commandment," blessedly imperative; it was "fear of the Lord," the effect being put for the cause; it was "judgments," the decisions of infinite truth concerning duty.

These synonyms have each an attribute attached, which, together, give a grand aggregate of qualities discerned by a devout heart to inhere in that law which is to so many but a restraint and a foe. It is "perfect," as containing without flaw or defect the ideal of conduct; "sure" or reliable, as worthy of being absolutely followed and certain to be completely fulfilled; "right," as prescribing the straight road to man's true goal; "pure" or bright, as being light like the sun, but of a higher quality than that material brilliance; "clean," as contrasted with the foulness bedaubing false faiths and making idol worship unutterably loathsome; "true" and "wholly righteous," as corresponding accurately to the mind of *Jehovah* and the facts of humanity

and as being in full accordance with the justice which has its seat in the bosom of God.

The effects are summed up in the latter clauses of these verses, which stand, as it were, a little apart, and by the slight pause are made more emphatic. The rhythm rises and falls like the upspringing and sinking of a fountain. The law "restores the soul," or rather refreshes the life, as food does; it "makes the simple wise" by its sure testimony, giving practical guidance to narrow understandings and wills open to easy beguiling by sin; it "rejoices the heart," since there is no gladness equal to that of knowing and doing the will of God; it "enlightens the eyes" with brightness beyond that of the created light which rules the day. Then the relation of clauses changes slightly in ver. 9 and a second attribute takes the place of the effect. It "endures for ever," and, as we have seen, is "wholly righteous." The Old Testament law was relatively imperfect and destined to be done away, but the moral core of it abides. Being more valuable than all other treasures, there is wealth in the very desire after it more than in possessing these. Loved, it yields sweetness in comparison with which the delights of sense are bitter; done, it automatically rewards the doer. If obedience had no results except its inward consequences, it would be abundantly repaid. Every true servant of Jehovah will be willing to be warned by that voice, even though it rebuke and threaten.

All this rapture of delight in the law contrasts with the impatience and dislike which some men entertain for it. To the disobedient that law spoils their coarse gratifications. It is as a prison in which life is wearisomely barred from delights; but they who dwell behind its fences know that these keep evils off, and that within are calm joys and pure pleasures.

The contemplation of the law cannot but lead to self-examination, and that to petition. So the psalmist passes into prayer. His shortcomings appeal, for "by the law is the knowledge of sin," and he feels that beyond the sin which he knows, there is a dark region in him where foul things nestle and breed fast. "Secret faults" are those hidden, not from men, but from himself. He discovers that he has hitherto undiscovered sins. Lurking evils are most dangerous because, like aphides on the under-side of a rose leaf, they multiply so quickly unobserved; small deeds make up life, and small, unnoticed sins darken the soul. Mud in water, at the rate of a grain to a glassful, will make a lake opaque. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Conscience needs educating; and we have to compare ourselves with the ideal of perfect life in Jesus, if we would know our faults, as young artists go over their copies in front of the masterpiece. But the psalmist knows that, servant of God though he is, he is in danger from another class of sins, and so prays to be held back from "presumptuous sins," *i. e.* wilful conscious transgressions. Such deliberate contraventions of law tend to become habitual and despotic; so the prayer follows that they may not "have dominion." But even that is not the lowest depth. Deliberate sin, which has gained the upper hand, is but too apt to end in apostacy: "Great transgression" is probably a designation for casting off the very pretence of worshipping Jehovah. That is the story of many a fall. First, some unsuspected evil habit gnaws away the substance of the life, as white ants do wood, leaving the shell apparently intact; then come sins open and palpable,

and these enslave the will, becoming habits, and then follows entire abandonment of the profession of religion. It is a slippery, dark stairway, and the only safety is in not setting foot on the top step. God, and God only, can "keep us back." He will, if we cling to Him, knowing our weakness. Thus clinging, we may unblamed cherish the daring hope that we shall be "upright and innocent," since nothing less than entire deliverance from sin in all its forms and issues can correspond to the will of God concerning us and the power of God in us, nor satisfy our deepest desires.

The closing aspiration is that Jehovah would accept the song and prayer. There is an allusion to the acceptance of a sacrifice, for the phrase "be acceptable" is frequent in connection with the sacrificial ritual. When the words of the mouth coincide with the meditation of the heart, we may hope that prayers for cleansing from, and defence against, sin, offered to Him whom our faith recognises as our "strength" and our "Redeemer," will be as a sacrifice of a sweet smell, well-pleasing to God. He best loves the law of Jehovah who lets it teach him his sin, and send him to his knees; he best appreciates the glories of the silent heavens who knows that their witness to God is but the prelude of the deeper music of the Scriptures' declaration of the heart and will of Jehovah, and who grasps Him as his "strength and his Redeemer" from all evil, whether evil of sin or evil of sorrow.

PSALM XX.

- 1 Jehovah answer thee in the day of trouble,
The name of the God of Jacob set thee on high;
- 2 Send thy help from the holy place,
And from Zion hold thee up;
- 3 Remember all thy meal offerings,
And thy burnt offerings may He find fat;
Selah.
- 4 Give thee according to thy heart,
And all thy counsel may He fulfil.
- 5 May we exult in thy salvation, and in the name
of our God wave our standards;
Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions!
- 6 Now I know that Jehovah saves His anointed;
He will answer him from his Holy heaven, with
mighty deeds of the salvation of His right
hand.
- 7 These boast in chariots, and these in horses;
And we—in the name of Jehovah our God we
boast.
- 8 They—they are bowed down, and fall;
And we—we are risen, and stand firm.
- 9 Jehovah, save!
May the King hear us in the day when we call.

THIS is a battle song followed by a chant of victory. They are connected in subject and probably in occasion, but fight and triumph have fallen dim to us, though we can still feel how hotly the fire once glowed. The passion of loyalty and love for the king, expressed in these psalms, fits no reign in Judah so well as the bright noonday of David's, when "whatever the king did pleased all the people." Cheyne, indeed, would bring them down to the Maccabean period, and suggests Simon Maccabæus as the ruler referred to. He has to put a little gentle pressure on "king" to contract it to fit the man of his choice, and appeals to the "good old Semitic sense" of "consul." But

would not an appeal to Hebrew usage have been more satisfactory? If "king" means "king," great or small, the psalm is not post-exilic, and the Davidic date will not seem impossible. It does not seem impossible that a poet-king should have composed a national hymn praying for his own victory, which was the nation's also.

The psalm has traces of the alternation of chorus and solo. The nation or army first pours out its united prayer for victory in vv. 1-5, and is succeeded by a single voice (possibly that of the officiating priest or the king himself) in ver. 6, expressing confidence that the prayer is answered, which, again, is followed by the closing chorus of many voices throbbing with the assurance of victory before a blow is struck, and sending one more long-drawn cry to God ere battle is joined.

The prayer in vv. 1-5 breathes self-distrust and confidence in Jehovah, the temper which brings victory, not only to Israel, but to all fighters for God. Here is no boasting of former victories, nor of man's bravery and strength, nor of a captain's skill. One name is invoked. It alone rouses courage and pledges triumph. "The name of the God of Jacob set thee on high." That name is almost regarded as a person, as is often the case. Attributes and acts are ascribed to it which properly belong to the Unnameable whom it names, as if with some diminking that the agent of revealing a person must be a person. The name is the revealed character, which is contemplated as having existence in some sense apart from Him whose character it is. Possibly there is a reference to Gen. xxxv. 3, where Jacob speaks of "the God who answered me in the day of my distress." That ancient instance of His power to hear and help may have floated before the singer's mind as heartening faith for this day of battle. To "set on high" is a familiar natural figure for deliverance. The earthly sanctuary is Jehovah's throne; and all real help must come thence, of which help His dwelling there is a pledge. So in these two verses the extremity of need, the history of past revelation, and the special relation of Jehovah to Israel are woven into the people's prayer for their king. In vv. 3, 4, they add the incense of their intercession to his sacrifices. The background of the psalm is probably the altar on which the accustomed offerings before a battle were being presented (1 Sam. xiii. 9). The prayer for acceptance of the burnt offering is very graphic, since the word rendered "accept" is literally "esteem fat."

One wish moved the sacrificing king and the praying people. Their common desire was victory, but the people are content to be obscure, and their loyal love so clings to their monarch and leader that they only wish the fulfilment of his wishes. This unity of feeling culminates in the closing petitions in ver. 6, where self-oblivion wishes "May we exult in thy salvation," arrogating none of the glory of victory to themselves, but ascribing all to him, and vows "In the name of our God we will wave our standards," ascribing victory to Him, its ultimate cause. An army that prays, "Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions," will be ready to obey all its captain's commands and to move in obedience to his impulse as if it were part of himself. The enthusiastic community of purpose with its chief and absolute reliance on Jehovah, with which this prayer throbs, would go far towards securing victory anywhere. They should find their highest exemplification in that union between Christ and us in which all human relationships find theirs, since, in the deepest sense, they are

all Messianic prophecies, and point to Him who is all the good that other men and women have partially been, and satisfies all the cravings and necessities which human relationships, however blessed, but incompletely supply.

The sacrifice has been offered; the choral prayer has gone up. Silence follows, the worshippers watching the curling smoke as it rises; and then a single voice breaks out into a burst of glad assurance that sacrifice and prayer are answered. Who speaks? The most natural answer is, "The king"; and the fact that he speaks of himself as Jehovah's anointed in the third person does not present a difficulty. What is the reference in that "now" at the beginning of ver. 6? May we venture to suppose that the king's heart swelled at the exhibition of his subjects' devotion and hailed it as a pledge of victory? The future is brought into the present by the outstretched hand of faith, for this single speaker knows that "Jehovah has saved," though no blow has yet been struck. The prayer had asked for help from Zion; the anticipation of answer looks higher; to the holier sanctuary, where Jehovah indeed dwells. The answer now waited for in sure confidence is "the mighty deeds of salvation of His right hand," some signal forthputting of Divine power scattering the foe. A whisper may start an avalanche. The prayer of the people has set Omnipotence in motion. Such assurance that petitions are heard is wont to spring in the heart that truly prays, and comes as a forerunner of fulfilment, shedding on the soul the dawn of the yet unrisen sun. He has but half prayed who does not wait in silence, watching the flight of his arrow and not content to cease till the calm certainty that it has reached its aim fills his heart.

Again the many voices take up the song, responding to the confidence of the single speaker and, like him, treating the victory as already won. Looking across the field to the masses of the enemy's cavalry and chariots, forces forbidden to Israel, though employed by them in later days, the song grandly opposes to these "the name of Jehovah our God." There is a world of contempt and confidence in the juxtaposition. Chariots and horses are very terrible, especially to raw soldiers unaccustomed to their whirling onset; but the Name is mightier, as Pharaoh and his array proved by the Red Sea. This reference to the army of Israel as unequipped with cavalry and chariots is in favour of an early date, since the importation and use of both began as soon as Solomon's time. The certain issue of the fight is given in ver. 8 in a picturesque fashion, made more vigorous by the tenses which describe completed acts. When the brief struggle is over, this is what will be seen—the enemy prone, Israel risen from subjection and standing firm. Then comes a closing cry for help, which, according to the traditional division of the verse, has one very short clause and one long drawn out, like the blast of the trumpet sounding the charge. The intensity of appeal is condensed in the former clause into the one word "save" and the renewed utterance of the name, thrice referred to in this short psalm as the source at once of strength and confidence. The latter clause, as in the A. V. and R. V. transfers the title of King from the earthly shadow to the true Monarch in the heavens, and thereby suggests yet another plea for help. The other division of the verse, adopted in the LXX. and by some moderns, equalises the clauses by transferring "the king" to the former ("O Lord, save the king, and answer us," etc.). But this involves

a violent change from the second person imperfect in the first clause to the third person imperfect in the second. It would be intolerably clumsy to say, "Do Thou save; may He hear," and therefore the LXX. has had recourse to inserting "and" at the beginning of the second clause, which somewhat breaks the jolt, but is not in the Hebrew. The text, as it stands, yields a striking meaning, beautifully suggesting the subordinate office of the earthly monarch and appealing to the true King to defend His own army and go forth with it to the battle which is waged for His name. When we are sure that we are serving Jehovah and fighting for Him, we may be sure that we go not a warfare at our own charges nor alone.

PSALM XXI.

- 1 Jehovah, in Thy strength the king rejoices,
And in Thy salvation how greatly he exults!
- 2 The desire of his heart Thou hast given to him,
And the request of his lips Thou hast not refused.
- 3 For Thou meetest him with blessings of good;
Thou settest on his head a crown of pure gold.
- 4 Life he asked from Thee; Thou gavest it to him,
Length of days for ever and ever.
- 5 Great is his glory through Thy salvation;
Honour and majesty Thou layest upon him.
- 6 For Thou dost set him [to be] blessings for ever,
Dost gladden him in joy with Thy face.
- 7 For the king trusts in Jehovah,
And in the lovingkindness of the Most High
he shall not be moved.
- 8 Thine hand shall reach towards all thy foes;
Thy right hand shall reach all thy haters.
- 9 Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire at
the time of thine appearance (face);
Jehovah in His wrath shall swallow them up:
fire shall devour them.
- 10 Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth,
And their seed from the sons of men.
- 11 For they cause evil to hang over thee;
They meditate mischief: they will achieve
nothing.
- 12 For thou shalt make them turn their back,
On thy bowstrings wilt aim [arrows] at their
faces.
- 13 Lift Thyself up, Jehovah, in Thy strength;
We will sing and harp, [praising] Thy might.

THIS psalm is a pendant to the preceding. There the people prayed for the king; here they give thanks for him: there they asked that his desires might be fulfilled; here they bless Jehovah, who has fulfilled them: there the battle was impending; here it has been won, though foes are still in the field: there the victory was prayed for; here it is prophesied. Who is the "king"? The superscription points to David. Conjecture has referred to Hezekiah, principally because of his miraculous recovery, which is supposed to be intended in ver. 4. Cheyne thinks of Simon Maccabæus, and sees his priestly crown in ver. 3. But there are no individualising features in the royal portrait, and it is so idealised, or rather spiritualised, that it is hard to suppose that any single monarch was be-

fore the singer's mind. The remarkable greatness and majesty of the figure will appear as we read. The whole may be cast into two parts, with a closing strain of prayer. In the first part (ver. 1-7), the people praise Jehovah for His gifts to the king; in the second (vv. 8-12) they prophesy to the king complete victory; in ver. 13 they end, as in xx., with a short petition, which, however, here is, in accordance with the tone of the whole, more jubilant than the former and less shrill.

The former psalm had asked for strength to be given to the king; this begins with thanks for the strength in which the king rejoices. In the former the people had anticipated triumph in the king's salvation or victory; here they celebrate his exceeding exultation in it. It was his, since he was victor, but it was Jehovah's, since He was Giver of victory. Loyal subjects share in the king's triumph, and connect it with him; but he himself traces it to God. The extraordinarily lofty language in which Jehovah's gifts are described in the subsequent verses has, no doubt, analogies in the Assyrian hymns to which Cheyne refers; but the abject reverence and partial deification which these breathe were foreign to the relations of Israel to its kings, who were not separated from their subjects by such a gulf as divided the great sovereigns of the East from theirs. The mysterious Divinity which hedges "the king" in the royal psalms is in sharp contrast with the democratic familiarity between prince and people exhibited in the history. The phenomena common to these psalms naturally suggest that "the king" whom they celebrate is rather the ideal than the real monarch. The office rather than the individual who partially fulfils its demands and possesses its endowments seems to fill the singer's canvas. But the ideal of the office is destined to be realised in the Messiah, and the psalm is in a true sense Messianic, inasmuch as, with whatever mixture of conceptions proper to the then stage of revelation, it still ascribes to the ideal king attributes which no king of Judah exhibited. The transcendent character of the gifts of Jehovah enumerated here is obvious, however the language may be pared down. First, we have the striking picture of Jehovah coming forth to meet the conqueror with "blessings of goodness," as Melchizedek met Abraham with refreshments in his hand; and benedictions on his lips. Victory is naturally followed by repose and enjoyment, and all are Jehovah's gift. The subsequent endowments may possibly be regarded as the details of these blessings, the fruits of the victory. Of these the first is the coronation of the conqueror, not as if he had not been king before, but as now more fully recognised as such. The supporters of the Davidic authorship refer to the crown of gold won at the capture of Rabbath of Ammon, but there is no need to seek historical basis for the representation. Then comes a signal instance of the king's closeness of intercourse with Jehovah and of his receiving his heart's desire in that he asked for "life" and received "length of days for ever and ever." No doubt the strong expression for perpetuity may be paralleled in such phrases as "O king, live for ever," and others which are obviously hyperbolic and mean not perpetual, but indefinitely protracted, duration; but the great emphasis of expression here and its repetition in ver. 6 can scarcely be disposed of as mere hyperbole. If it is the ideal king who is meant, his undying life is substantially synonymous

with the continuance of the dynasty which 2 Sam. vii. represents as the promise underlying the Davidic throne. The figure of the king is then brought still nearer to the light of Jehovah, and words which are consecrated to express Divine attributes are applied to him in ver. 5. "Glory," "honour and majesty," are predicated of him, not as if there were an apotheosis, as would have been possible in Assyrian or Roman flattery, but the royal recipient and the Divine Giver are clearly separated, even while the lustre raying from Jehovah is conceived of as falling in brightness upon the king. These flashing emanations of the Divine glory make their recipient "blessings for ever," which seems to include both the possession and the communication of good. An eternal fountain of blessing and himself blessed, he is cheered with joy which comes from Jehovah's face, so close is his approach and so gracious to him is that countenance. Nothing higher could be thought of than such intimacy and friendliness of access. To dwell in the blaze of that face and to find only joy therein is the crown of human blessedness (Psalm xvi. 11). Finally the double foundation of all the king's gifts is laid in ver. 7: he trusts and Jehovah's lovingkindness gives, and therefore he stands firm, and his throne endures, whatever may dash against it. These daring anticipations are too exuberant to be realised in any but One, whose victory was achieved in the hour of apparent defeat; whose conquest was both His salvation and God's; who prays knowing that He is always heard; who is King of men because He endured the cross,—and wears the crown of pure gold because He did not refuse the crown of thorns; who liveth for evermore, having been given by the Father to have life in Himself; who is the outshining of the Father's glory, and has all power granted unto Him; who is the source of all blessing to all, who dwells in the joy to which He will welcome His servants; and who Himself lived and conquered by the life of faith, and so became the first Leader of the long line of those who have trusted and therefore have stood fast. Whomsoever the psalmist saw in his vision, he has gathered into one many traits which are realised only in Jesus Christ.

The second part (vv. 8-12) is, by Hupfeld and others, taken as addressed to Jehovah; and that idea has much to recommend it, but it seems to go to wreck on the separate reference to Jehovah in ver. 9, on the harshness of applying "evil against thee" and "a mischievous device" (ver. 11) to Him, and on the absence of a sufficient link of connection between the parts if it is adopted. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the king is addressed in these verses, there is the same dramatic structure as in Psalm xx.; and the victory which has been won is now taken as a pledge of future ones. The expectation is couched in terms adapted to the horizon of the singer, and on his lips probably meant stern extermination of hostile nations. The picture is that of a fierce conqueror, and we must not seek to soften the features, nor, on the other hand, to deny the prophetic inspiration of the psalmist. The task of the ideal king was to crush and root out opposition to his monarchy, which was Jehovah's. Very terrible are the judgments of his hand, which sound liker those of Jehovah than those inflicted by a man, as Hupfeld and others have felt. In ver. 8 the construction is slightly varied in the two clauses, the verb "reach" having a preposition attached in the former, and not in the latter, which difference may be reproduced by the distinction between

"reach towards" and "reach." The seeking hand is stretched out after, and then it grasps, its victims. The comparison of the "fiery oven" is inexact in form, but the very negligence helps the impression of agitation and terribleness. The enemy are not likened to a furnace, but to the fuel cast into it. But the phrase rendered in A.V. "in the time of thine anger" is very remarkable, being literally "in the time of thy face." The destructive effect of Jehovah's countenance (xxxiv. 17) is here transferred to His king's, into whose face has passed, as he gazed in joy on the face of Jehovah, some of the lustre which kills where it does not gladden. Compare "everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord" (2 Thess. i. 9). The king is so completely representative of Jehovah that the destruction of the enemy is the work of the one fire of wrath common to both. The destruction extends to the whole generation of enemies, as in the ferocious warfare of old days, when a nation was wiped off the earth. The psalmist sees in the extremest vengeance the righteous and inevitable consequence of hostility condemned by the nature of the case to be futile, and yet criminal: "They cause evil to hang over thee: they meditate mischief; they will achieve nothing." Then, in ver. 12, the dread scene is completed by the picture of the flying foe and the overtaking pursuer, who first puts them to flight, and then, getting in front of them, sends his arrows full in their faces. The ideal of the king has a side of terror; and while his chosen weapon is patient love, he has other arrows in his quiver. The pictures of the destroying conqueror are taken up and surpassed in the New Testament. They do not see the whole Christ who do not see the Warrior Christ, nor have they realised all His work who slur over the solemn expectation that one day men shall call on rocks and hills to cover them from "the steady whole of the Judge's face."

As in Psalm xx., the close is a brief petition, which asks the fulfilment of the anticipations in vv. 8-12, and traces, as in ver. 1, the king's triumph to Jehovah's strength. The loyal love of the nation will take its monarch's victory as its own joy, and be glad in the manifestation thereby of Jehovah's power. That is the true voice of devotion which recognises God, not man, in all victories, and answers the forthflashing of His delivering power by the thunder of praise.

PSALM XXII.

- 1 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
[Why art Thou] afar from my help, from the words of my roar?
- 2 My God, I cry to Thee by day, and Thou answerest not;
And by night, but there is no rest for me.
- 3 Yet Thou art Holy,
Throned upon the praises of Israel.
- 4 In Thee our fathers trusted;
They trusted and Thou deliveredst them.
- 5 To Thee they cried and were delivered;
In Thee they trusted and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm, and not a man;
A reproach of men and despised of people.
- 7 All who see me mock at me;
They draw open the lips, they nod the head.

- 8 "Roll [thy cares] on Jehovah—let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, for He delights in him."
- 9 Yea, Thou art He who didst draw me from the womb.
Didst make me trust when on my mother's breasts.
- 10 Upon Thee was I thrown from birth;
From my mother's womb art Thou my God.
- 11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is no helper.
- 12 Many bulls have surrounded me,
Strong ones of Bashan have encircled me.
- 13 They gape upon me with their mouth,
[Like] a lion tearing and roaring.
- 14 Like water I am poured out.
And all my bones are out of joint
My heart has become like wax,
Melted in the midst of my bowels.
- 15 My strength (palate?) is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my gums,
And Thou layest me in the dust of death.
- 16 For dogs have surrounded me,
A pack of evil-doers closed round me,
They pierced my hands and my feet.
- 17 I can count all my bones,
These—they gaze, upon me they look.
- 18 They divide my garments among them,
And on my vesture they cast lots.
- 19 But Thou, Jehovah, be not far off;
My Strength, haste to my help.
- 20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only [life] from the paw of the dog.
- 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion,
And from the horns of the wild oxen—Thou hast answered me.
- 22 I will declare Thy name to my brethren,
In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee.
- 23 Ye that fear Jehovah, praise Him,
All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him,
And stand in awe of Him, all ye the seed of Israel.
- 24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted one,
And has not hid His face from him,
And when he cried has hearkened to him.
- 25 From Thee [comes] my praise in the great congregation;
My vows will I pay before them that fear Him.
- 26 The humble shall eat and be satisfied,
They shall praise Jehovah that seek Him:
Let your heart live for ever.
- 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Jehovah.
And all the families of the nations shall bow before Thee.
- 28 For the kingdom is Jehovah's;
And He is ruler among the nations.
- 29 All the fat ones of the earth eat and bow down;
Before His face kneel all they who were going down to the dust,
And he [who] could not keep his soul alive.

- 30 A seed shall serve Him;
And it shall be told of Jehovah unto the [next] generation.
- 31 They shall come and declare His righteousness
Unto a people that shall be born, that He has done [this].

WHO is the sufferer whose wail is the very voice of desolation and despair, and who yet dares to believe that the tale of his sorrow will be a gospel for the world? The usual answers are given. The title ascribes the authorship to David, and is accepted by Delitzsch and others. Hengstenberg and his followers see in the picture the ideal righteous man. Others think of Hezekiah, or Jeremiah, with whose prophecies and history there are many points of connection. The most recent critics find here "the personalised Genius of Israel, or more precisely the followers of Nehemiah, including the large-hearted psalmist" (Cheyne, "Orig. of Psalt.," 264). On any theory of authorship, the startling correspondence of the details of the psalmist's sufferings with those of the Crucifixion has to be accounted for. How startling that correspondence is, both in the number and minuteness of its points, need not be insisted on. Not only does our Lord quote the first verse on the cross, and so show that the psalm was in his heart then, but the gestures and words of mockery were verbally reproduced, as Luke significantly indicates by using the LXX.'s word for "laugh to scorn" (ver. 7.) Christ's thirst is regarded by John as the fulfilment of "scripture," which can scarcely be other than ver. 15. The physical effects of crucifixion are described in the ghastly picture of vv. 14, 15. Whatever difficulty exists in determining the true reading and meaning of the allusion to "my hands and my feet," some violence or indignity to them is intended. The peculiar detail of dividing the raiment was more than fulfilled, since the apparently parallel and synonymous clauses were resolved into two distinct acts. The recognition of these points in the psalm as prophecies is one thing; the determination of their relation to the psalmist's own experience is quite another. It is taken for granted in many quarters that every such detail in prophecy must describe the writer's own circumstances, and the supposition that they may transcend these is said to be "psychologically impossible." But it is somewhat hazardous for those who have not been subjects of prophetic inspiration to lay down canons of what is possible and impossible in it, and there are examples enough to prove that the relation of the prophets' speech to their consciousness and circumstances was singularly complex, and not to be unravelled by any such *obiter dicta* as to psychological possibilities. They were recipients of messages, and did not always understand what the "Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify." Theories which neglect that aspect of the case do not front all the facts. Certainty as to the authorship of this psalm is probably unattainable. How far its words fitted the condition of the singer must therefore remain unsettled. But that these minute and numerous correspondences are more than coincidences, it seems perverse to deny. The present writer, for one, sees shining through the shadowy personality of the psalmist the figure of the Prince of Sufferers, and believes that whether the former's complaints applied in all their particulars to him, or whether there is in them a certain "element of hyperbole" which

becomes simple fact in Jesus' sufferings, the psalm is a prophecy of Him and them. In the former case the psalmist's experience, in the latter case his utterances, were divinely shaped so as to prefigure the sacred sorrows of the Man of Sorrows.

To a reader who shares in this understanding of the psalm, it must be holy ground, to be trodden reverently and with thoughts adoringly fixed on Jesus. Cold analysis is out of place. And yet there is a distinct order even in the groans, and a manifest contrast in the two halves of the psalm (vv. 1-21 and 22-31). "Thou answerest not" is the key-note of the former; "Thou hast answered me," of the latter. The one paints the sufferings, the other the glory that should follow. Both point to Jesus: the former by the desolation which it breathes; the latter by the world-wide consequences of these solitary sufferings which it foresees.

Surely opposites were never more startlingly blended in one gush of feeling than in that plaint of mingled faith and despair, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" which by its thus addressing God clings fast to Him, and by its wondering question discloses the dreary consciousness of separation from Him. The evidence to the psalmist that he was forsaken was the apparent rejection of his prayers for deliverance; and if David be the speaker, we may suppose that the pathetic fate of his predecessor hovered before his thoughts: "I am sore distressed. . . . God is departed from me and answereth me no more." But, while lower degrees of this conflict of trust and despair belong to all deep religious life, and are experienced by saintly sufferers in all ages, the voice that rang through the darkness on Calvary was the cry of Him who experienced its force in supreme measure and in altogether unique manner. None but He can ask that question "Why?" with conscience void of offence. None but He have known the mortal agony of utter separation from God. None but He have clung to God with absolute trust even in the horror of great darkness. In Christ's consciousness of being forsaken by God lie elements peculiar to it alone, for the separating agent was the gathered sins of the whole world, laid on Him and accepted by Him in the perfection of His loving identification of Himself with men. Unless in that dread hour He was bearing a world's sin, there is no worthy explanation of His cry, and many a silent martyr has faced death for Him with more courage derived from Him than He manifested on His cross.

After the introductory strophe of two verses, there come seven strophes, of which three contain 3 verses each (vv. 3-11) followed by two of 2 verses each (vv. 12-15) and these again by two with 3 verses each. Can a soul agitated as this singer's was regulate its sobs thus? Yes, if it is a singer's, and still more if it is a saint's. The fetters make the limbs move less violently; and there is soothing in the ordered expression of disordered emotion. The form is artistic, not artificial; and objections to the reality of the feelings on the ground of the regularity of the form ignore the witness of the masterpieces of literature in all tongues.

The desolation rising from unanswered prayer drives to the contemplation of God's holiness and past responses to trusting men, which are in one aspect an aggravation and in another an alleviation. The psalmist partly answers his own question "Why?" and preaches to Himself that the

reason cannot be in Jehovah, whose character and former deeds bind Him to answer trust by help. God's holiness is primarily His separation from, by elevation above, the creature, both in regard of His freedom from limitations and of His perfect purity. If He is thus "holy," He will not break His promise, nor change His ways with those who trust. It takes some energy of faith to believe that a silent and apparently deaf God is "holy," and the effect of the belief may either be to crush or to lift the spirit. Its first result with this psalmist seems to have been to crush, as the next strophe shows, but the more blessed consequence is won before the end. Here it is partly a plea urged with God, as is that beautiful bold image of God enthroned "on the praises of Israel." These praises are evoked by former acts of grace answering prayers, and of them is built a yet nobler throne than the outstretched wings of the Cherubim. The daring metaphor penetrates deeply into God's delight in men's praise, and the power of Israel's voice to exalt Him in the world. How could a God thus throned cease to give mercies like those which were perpetually commemorated thereby? The same half-wistful, half-confident retrospect is continued in the remaining verses of this strophe (vv. 4, 5), which look back to the "grey fathers'" experience. Mark the plaintive reiteration of "trust" and "deliver," the two inseparables, as the days of old attested, which had now become so sadly parted. Not more certainly the flow of water in a pipe answers the application of thirsty lips to its opening than did God's rescuing act respond to the father's trust. And now!—

The use of "Our" in reference to the fathers has been laid hold of as favouring the hypothesis that the speaker is the personified nation; but no individual member of a nation would speak of the common ancestors as "My fathers." That would mean his own family progenitors, whereas the psalmist means the Patriarchs and the earlier generations. No argument for the national theory, then, can be drawn from the phrase. Can the reference to Jesus be carried into this strophe? Assuredly it may, and it shows us how truly He associated Himself with His nation, and fed His faith by the records of the past. "He also is a son of Abraham."

Such remembrances make the contrast of present sufferings and of a far-off God more bitter; and so a fresh wave of agony rolls over the psalmist's soul. He feels himself crushed and as incapable of resistance as a worm bruised in all its soft length by an armed heel. The very semblance of manhood has faded. One can scarcely fail to recall "his visage was so marred more than any man" (Isa. lii. 14), and the designation of Jehovah's servant Israel as "thou worm" (Isa. xli. 14). The taunts that wounded the psalmist so sorely have long since fallen dumb, and the wounds are all healed; but the immortal words in which he wails the pain of misapprehension and rejection are engraved for ever on the heart of the world. No suffering is more acute than that of a sensitive soul, brimming with love and eagerness to help, and met with scorn, rejection and ferocious mockery of its sacredest emotions. No man has ever felt that pang with the intensity with which Jesus felt it, for none has ever brought such wealth of longing love to be thrown back on itself, nor been so devoid of the callousness with which selfishness is shielded. His pure nature was tender as an infant's hand, and felt the keen edge

of the spear as none but He can have done. They are His sorrows that are painted here, so vividly and truly that the evangelist Luke takes the very word of the LXX. version of the psalm to describe the rulers' mockery (Luke xxiii. 35). "They draw open the lips," grinning with delight or contempt; "they nod the head" in mockery and assent to the suffering inflicted; and then the savage hate bursts into irony which defiles the sacredest emotions and comes near to blaspheming God in ridiculing trust in Him. The mockers thought it exquisite sarcasm to bid Jesus roll His troubles on Jehovah, and to bid God deliver Him since He delighted in Him. How little they knew that they were thereby proclaiming Him as the Christ of prophecy, and were giving the unimpeachable testimony of enemies to His life of devout trust and His consciousness of Divine favour! "Roll (it) on God," sneered they; and the answer was, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." "Let Him deliver Him, since He delighteth in Him," they impiously cried, and they knew not that God's delight in Him was the very reason why He did not deliver Him. Because He was His Son in whom He was well pleased, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." The mockery of opponents brings into clear light the deepest secrets of that cross.

Another wave of feeling follows in the next strophe (vv. 9-11). Backwards and forwards, from trust to complaint and from complaint to trust, rolls the troubled sea of thought, each mood evoking its opposite. Now reproach makes the psalmist tighten his grasp on God, and plead former help as a reason for present hearing. Faith turns taunts into prayers. This strophe begins with a "Yea," and, on the relationship with God which the enemies had ridiculed and which his heart knows to be true, pleads that God would not remain, as ver. 1 had wailed that He was, far off from His help. It goes back to the beginning of life, and in the mystery of birth and the dependence of infancy finds arguments with God. They are the personal application of the wide truth that God by His making us men gives us a claim on Him, that He has bound Himself by giving life to give what is needful for its development and well-being. He will not stultify Himself by making a man and then leaving him to struggle alone, as birds do with their young, as soon as they can fly. He is "a faithful Creator." May we venture to find special reference here to the mystery of the Incarnation? It is noticeable that "my mother" is emphatically mentioned, while there is no reference to a father. No doubt the cast of the thought accounts for that, but still the special agency of Divine power in the birth of Jesus gives special force to His prayer for Divine help in the life so peculiarly the result of the Divine hand. But while the plea had singular force on Christ's lips, it is valid for all men.

The closing verse of this strophe takes the complaint of ver. 1 and turns it into prayer. Faith does not rest with plaintively crying "Why art Thou so far?" but pleads "Be not far"; and makes the nearness of trouble and the absence of all other help its twofold pleas. So much the psalmist has already won by his communing with God. Now he can face environing sorrows and solitary defencelessness, and feel them to be reasons for God's coming, not tokens of His distance.

We now come to two strophes of two verses each (vv. 12-15), of which the former describes the encircling foes and the latter the psalmist's

failure of vital power. The metaphor of raging wild animals recurs in later verses, and is common to many psalms. Bashan was a land of pastures over which herds of half wild cattle roamed. They "have surrounded me" is a picturesque touch, drawn direct from life, as any one knows who has ever found himself in the midst of such a herd. The gaping mouth is rather characteristic of the lion than of the bull. The open jaws emit the fierce roar which precedes the fatal spring and the "ravening" on its prey. The next short strophe passes from enemies around to paint inward feebleness. All vital force has melted away; the very bones are dislocated, raging thirst has supervened. These are capable of being construed as simply strong metaphors, parallels to which may be found in other psalms; but it must not be left unnoticed that they are accurate transcripts of the physical effects of crucifixion. That torture killed by exhaustion, it stretched the body as on a rack, it was attended with agonies of thirst. It requires considerable courage to brush aside such coincidences as accidental, in obedience to a theory of interpretation. But the picture is not completed when the bodily sufferings are set forth. A mysterious attribution of them all to God closes the strophe. "Thou hast brought me to the dust of death." Then, it is God's hand that has laid all these on him. No doubt this may be, and probably was in the psalmist's thought, only a devout recognition of Providence working through calamities; but the words receive full force only by being regarded as parallel with those of Isa. liii. 10, "He hath put Him to grief." In like manner the apostolic preaching regards Christ's murders as God's instruments.

The next strophe returns to the three-verse arrangement, and blends the contents of the two preceding, dealing both with the assailing enemies and the enfeebled sufferer. The former metaphor of wild animals encircling him is repeated with variations. A baser order of foes than bulls and lions, namely a troop of cowardly curs, are snarling and snapping round him. The contemptuous figure is explained in ver. 16 *b*, as meaning a mob of evildoers, and is then resumed in the next clause, which has been the subject of so much dispute. It seems plain that the Masoretic text is corrupt. "Like a lion, my hands and my feet" can only be made into sense by violent methods. The difference between the letters which yield "like a lion" and those which give "they pierced" is only in the length of the upright stroke of the final one. LXX. Vulg. Syr. translate *they dug* or *pierced*, and other ancient versions attest that they read the word as a verb. The spelling of the word is anomalous, if we take it to mean *dig*, but the irregularity is not without parallels, and may be smoothed away either by assuming an unusual form of a common verb or a rare root cognate with the more common one. The word would then mean "they dug" rather than *pierced*, but the shade of difference in meaning is not so great as to forbid the later rendering. In any case "it is the best attested reading. It is to be understood of the gaping wounds which are inflicted on the sufferer's hands and feet, and which stare at him like holes" (Baethgen, "Hand Comment.," p. 65). "Behold my hands and my feet," said the risen Lord, and that calm word is sufficient proof that both bore the prints of nails. The words might be written over this psalm. Strange and sad that so many should look on it and not see Him!

The picture of bodily sufferings has one more

touch in "I can count all my bones." Emaciation would produce that effect. But so would crucifixion which extended the frame and threw the bones of the thorax into prominence. Then the sufferer turns his eyes once more to his enemies, and describes the stony gaze, protracted and unfeeling, with which they feed upon his agonies. Crucifixion was a slow process, and we recall the long hours in which the crowd sated their hatred through their eyes.

It is extremely unlikely that the psalmist's garments were literally parted among his foes, and the usual explanation of the singular details in ver. 18 is that they are either a metaphor drawn from plundering the slain in battle or a proverbial expression. What reference the words had to the original speaker of them must, in our ignorance of his circumstances, remain uncertain. But they at all events depict his death as so sure that his enemies regard his dress as their perquisite. Surely this is a distinct instance of Divine guidance moulding a psalmist's words so as to fill them with a deeper meaning than the speaker knew. He who so shaped them saw the soldiers dividing the rest of the garments and gambling for the seamless cloak; and He was "the Spirit of Christ which was in" the singer.

The next strophe closes the first part with petition which, in the last words, becomes thanksgiving, and realises the answer so fervently besought. The initial complaint of God's distance is again turned into prayer, and the former metaphors of wild beasts are gathered into one long cry for deliverance from the dangerous weapons of each, the dog's paw, the lion's mouth, the wild oxen's horns. The psalmist speaks of his "soul" or life as "my only one," referring not to his isolation, but to his life as that which, once lost, could never be regained. He has but one life, therefore he clings to it, and cannot but believe that it is precious in God's eyes. And then, all at once, up shoots a clear light of joy, and he knows that he has not been speaking to a deaf or remote God, but that his cry is answered. He had been brought to the dust of death, but even thence he is heard and brought out with no soil of it upon him. Such suddenness and completeness of deliverance from such extremity of peril may, indeed, have been experienced by many, but receives its fullest meaning in its Messianic application. "From the horns of the wild oxen," says he, as if the phrase were still dependent, like the preceding ones, on the prayer, "deliver me." But, as he thus cries, the conviction that he is heard floods his soul, and he ends, not with a cry for help, but with that one rapturous word, "Thou hast answered me." It is like a parting burst of sunshine at the end of a day of tempest. A man already transfixed by a buffalo's horns has little hope of escape, but even thence God delivers. The psalmist did not know, but the Christian reader should not forget that the Prince of sufferers was yet more wondrously delivered from death by passing through death, and that by His victory all who cleave to Him are, in like manner, saved from the horns even while these gore them, and are then victors over death when they fall beneath its dart.

The consequences of the psalmist's deliverance are described in the last part (vv. 22-31) in language so wide that it is hard to suppose that any man could think his personal experiences so important and far-reaching. The whole congregation of Israel are to share in his thanksgiving and to

learn more of God's name through him (vv. 22-6). Nor does that bound his anticipations, for they traverse the whole world and embrace all lands and ages, and contemplate that the story of his sufferings and triumph will prove a true gospel, bringing every country and generation to remember and turn to Jehovah. The exuberant language becomes but one mouth. Such consequences, so wide-spread and age-long, can follow from the story of but one life. If the sorrows of the preceding part can only be a description of the passion, the glories of the second can only be a vision of the universal and eternal kingdom of Christ. It is a gospel before the Gospels and an Apocalypse before Revelations.

In the first strophe (vv. 22-6) the delivered singer vows to make God's name known to His brethren. The epistle to the Hebrews quotes the vow as not only expressive of our Lord's true manhood, but as specifying its purpose. Jesus became man that men might learn to know God; and the knowledge of His name streams most brightly from the cross. The death and resurrection, the sufferings and glory of Christ open deeper regions in the character of God than even His gracious life disclosed. Rising from the dead and exalted to the throne, He has "a new song" in His immortal lips, and more to teach concerning God than He had before.

The psalm calls Israel to praise with the singer, and tells the ground of their joyful songs (vv. 23, 24). Here the absence of any reference to the relation which the New Testament reveals between these sufferings and that praise is to be noted as an instance of the gradual development of prophecy. "We are not yet on the level of Isaiah liii." (Kirkpatrick, "Psalms," 122). The close of this part speaks of a sacrifice of which "the humble shall eat and be satisfied"—"I will pay my vows"—i.e. the thankofferings vowed when in trouble. The custom of feasting on the "sacrifices for peace-offering for thanksgiving" (Lev. vii. 15) is here referred to, but the ceremonial garb covers spiritual truth. The condition of partaking in this feast is humility, that poverty of spirit which knows itself to be hungry and unable to find food for itself. The consequence of partaking is satisfaction—a deep truth reaching far beyond the ceremonial emblem. A further result is that "your heart shall live for ever"—an unmeaning hyperbole, but in one application of the words. We penetrate to the core of the psalm in this part, when we read it in the light of Christ's words, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed," and when we connect it with the central act of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper.

The universal and perpetual diffusion of the kingdom and knowledge of God is the theme of the closing strain (vv. 27-31). That diffusion is not definitely stated as the issue of the sufferings or deliverance, but the very fact that such a universal knowledge comes into view here requires that it should be so regarded, else the unity of the psalm is shattered. While, therefore, the ground alleged in ver. 28 for this universal recognition of God is only His universal dominion we must suppose that the history of the singer as told to the world is the great fact which brings home to men the truth of God's government over and care for them. True, men know God apart from revelation and from the gospel, but He is to them a forgotten God, and the great influence which helps them to "remember and turn to Jehovah"

is the message of the Cross and the Throne of Jesus.

The psalm had just laid down the condition of partaking in the sacrificial meal as being lowliness, and (ver. 29) it prophesies that the "fat" shall also share in it. That can only be, if they become "humble." Great and small, lofty and low must take the same place and accept the food of their souls as a meal of charity. The following words are very difficult, as the text stands. There would appear to be a contrast intended between the obese self-complacency of the prosperous and proud, and the pauper-like misery of "those who are going down to the dust" and who "cannot keep their soul alive," that is, who are in such penury and wretchedness that they are all but dead. There is a place for ragged outcasts at the table side by side with the "fat on earth." Others take the words as referring to those already dead, and see here a hint that the dim regions of Sheol receive beams of the great light and some share in the great feast. The thought is beautiful, but too remote from anything else in the Old Testament to be adopted here. Various attempts at conjectural emendations and redivision of clauses have been made in order to lighten the difficulties of the verse. However attractive some of these are, the existing reading yields a not unworthy sense, and is best adhered to.

As universality in extent, so perpetuity in duration is anticipated for the story of the psalmist's deliverance and for the praise to God thence accruing. "A seed shall serve Him." That is one generation of obedient worshippers. "It shall be told of Jehovah unto the [next] generation." That is, a second, who shall receive from their progenitors, the seed that serves, the blessed story. "They. . . shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born." That is, a third, which in its turn receives the good news from parents' lips. And what is the word which thus maintains itself living amid dying generations, and blesses each, and impels each to bequeath it as their best treasure to their successors? "That He hath done." Done what? With eloquent silence the psalm omits to specify. What was it that was meant by that word on the cross which, with like reticence, forbore to tell of what it spoke? "He hath done." "It is finished." No one word can express all that was accomplished in that sacrifice. Eternity will not fully supply the missing word, for the consequences of that finished work go on unfolding for ever, and are for ever unfinished, because for ever increasing.

PSALM XXIII.

- 1 Jehovah is my Shepherd, I do not want.
- 2 In pastures of fresh grass He leads me;
By waters of rest He makes me lie.
- 3 My soul He refreshes;
He guides me in paths of righteousness
[straight paths] for His name's sake.
- 4 Even if I walk in a gorge of gloom, I fear not
evil, for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff—thy comfort me.
- 5 Thou spreadest before me a table in presence
of my foes;
Thou anointest with oil my head: my cup is
overflowing.

5—Vol. III.

6 Only good and mercy shall follow me all the
days of my life,

And my dwelling shall be in the house of Jehovah for length of days.

THE world could spare many a large book better than this sunny little psalm. It has dried many tears and supplied the mould into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith. To suppose that the speaker is the personified nation chills the whole. The tone is too intense not to be the outcome of personal experience, however admissible the application to the nation may be as secondary. No doubt Jehovah is the Shepherd of Israel in several Asaphite psalms and in Jeremiah; but, notwithstanding great authorities, I cannot persuade myself that the voice which comes so straight to the heart did not come from the heart of a brother speaking across the centuries his own personal emotions, which are universal just because they are individual. It is the pure utterance of personal trust in Jehovah, darkened by no fears or complaints and so perfectly at rest that it has nothing more to ask. For the time desire is stilled in satisfaction. One tone, and that the most blessed which can sound in a life, is heard through the whole. It is the psalm of quiet trust, undisturbed even by its joy, which is quiet too. The fire glows, but does not flame or crackle. The one thought is expanded in two kindred images: that of the shepherd and that of the host. The same ideas are substantially repeated under both forms. The lovely series of vivid pictures, each but a clause long, but clear-cut in that small compass, like the fine work incised on a gem, combines with the depth and simplicity of the religious emotion expressed, to lay this sweet psalm on all hearts.

Vv. 1-4 present the realities of the devout life under the image of the Divine Shepherd and His lamb.

The comparison of rulers to shepherds is familiar to many tongues, and could scarcely fail to occur to a pastoral people like the Jews, nor is the application to Jehovah's relation to the people so recondite that we need to relegate the psalms in which it occurs to a late era in the national history. The psalmist lovingly lingers on the image, and draws out the various aspects of the shepherd's care and of the flock's travels, with a ripeness and calmness which suggests that we listen to a much-experienced man. The sequence in which the successive pictures occur is noteworthy. Guidance to refreshment comes first, and is described in ver. 2, in words which fall as softly as the gentle streams of which they speak. The noontide is fierce, and the land lies baking in the sun-blaze: but deep down in some wady runs a brook, and along its course the herbage is bright with perpetual moisture, and among the lush grass are cool lairs where the footsore, panting flock may couch. The shepherd's tenderness is beautifully hinted at in the two verbs: he "leads," not drives, but in Eastern wise precedes and so draws the trustful sheep; he "makes me to lie down," taking care that the sheep shall stretch weary limbs in full enjoyment of repose. God thus guides to rest and lays to rest the soul that follows Him. Why does the psalmist begin with this aspect of life? Because it is fittest to express the shepherd's care, and because it is, after all, the predominant aspect of the devout heart. Life is full of trial and effort, but it is an unusually rainy region where rain falls on more than half the

days of the year. We live so much more vividly and fully in the moments of agony or crisis that they seem to fill more space than they really do. But they are only moments, and the periods of continued peaceful possession of blessings are measured by years. But the sweet words of the psalm are not to be confined to material good. The psalmist does not tell us whether he is thinking more of the outer or of the inner life, but both are in his mind, and while his confidence is only partially warranted by the facts of the former, it is unlimitedly true in regard to the latter. In that application of the words the significance of the priority given to the pastures of fresh springing grass and the waters of repose is plain, for there the rest of trust and the drinking of living water must precede all walking in paths of righteousness.

Food and drink and rest refresh fainting powers, and this reinvigoration is meant by "restoring my soul" or life.

But the midday or nightly rest is intended to fit for effort, and so a second little picture follows in ver. 3, presenting another aspect of the shepherd's care and of the sheep's course. Out again on to the road, in spite of heat and dust, the flock goes. "Paths of righteousness," is perhaps best taken as "straight paths," as that rendering keeps within the bounds of the metaphor; but since the sheep are men, straight paths for them must needs be paths of righteousness. That guidance is "for His name's sake." God has regard to His revealed character in shepherding His lamb, and will give direction because He is what He is, and in order that He may be known to be what He has declared himself. The psalmist had learned the purpose of repose and refreshment which, in all regions of life, are intended to prepare for tasks and marches. We are to "drink for strength, and not for drunkenness." A man may lie in a bath till strength is diminished, or may take his plunge and come from it braced for work. In the religious life it is possible to commit an analogous error, and to prize so unwisely peaceful hours of communion, as to waive imperative duty for the sake of them; like Peter with his "Let us make here three tabernacles," while there were devil-ridden sufferers waiting to be healed down on the plain. Moments of devotion, which do not prepare for hours of practical righteousness, are very untrustworthy. But, on the other hand, the paths of righteousness will not be trodden by those who have known nothing of the green pastures and waters where the wearied can rest.

But life has another aspect than these two—rest and toil; and the guidance into danger and sorrow is as tender as its other forms are. The singular word rendered "shadow of death" should probably simply be "gloomy darkness," such, for instance, as in the shaft of a mine (Job xxviii. 3). But even if the former rendering is retained, it is not to be interpreted as meaning actual death. No wise forward look can ignore the possibility of many sorrows and the certainty of some. Hope has ever something of dread in her eyes. The road will not be always bright and smooth, but will sometimes plunge down into grim cañons, where no sunbeams reach. But even that anticipation may be calm. "Thou art with me" is enough. He who guides into the gorge will guide through it. It is not a *cul de sac*, shut in with precipices, at the far end; but it opens out on shining tablelands, where there is greener pasture. The

rod and staff seem to be two names for one instrument, which was used both to beat off predatory animals and to direct the sheep. The two synonyms and the appended pronoun express by their redundancy the full confidence of the psalmist. He will not fear, though there are grounds enough for terror, in the dark valley; and though sense prompts him to dread, he conquers fear because he trusts. "Comfort" suggests a struggle, or, as Calvin says, "*Quorsum enim consolatio ipsa, nisi quia metus eum sollicitat?*"

The second image of the Divine Host and His guest is expanded in vv. 5, 6. The ideas are substantially the same as in the first part. Repose and provision, danger and change, again fill the foreground; and again there is forecast of a more remote future. But all is intensified, the need and the supply being painted in stronger colours and the hope being brighter. The devout man is God's guest while he marches through foes, and travels towards perpetual repose in the house of Jehovah.

Jehovah supplies his servants' wants in the midst of conflict. The table spread in the sight of the enemy is a more signal token of care and power than the green pastures are. Life is not only journey and effort, but conflict; and it is possible not only to have seasons of refreshment interspersed in the weary march, but to find a sudden table spread by the same unseen hand which holds back the foes, who look on with grim eyes, powerless to intercept the sustenance or disturb the guests. This is the condition of God's servant—always conflict, but always a spread table. Joy snatched in the face of danger is specially poignant. The flowers that bloom on the brink of a cataract are bright, and their tremulous motion adds a charm. Special experiences of God's sufficiency are wont to come in seasons of special difficulty, as many a true heart knows. It is no scanty meal that waits God's soldier under such circumstances, but a banquet accompanied with signs of festivity, viz., the head anointed with oil and the cup which is "fulness." God's supplies are wont to surpass the narrow limits of need and even to transcend capacity, having a something over which as yet we are unable to take in, but which is not disproportioned or wasted, since it widens desire and thereby increases receptivity.

In the last verse we seem to pass to pure anticipation. Memory melts into hope, and that brighter than the forecast which closed the first part. There the psalmist's trust simply refused to yield to fear, while keenly conscious of evil which might warrant it; but here he has risen higher, and the alchemy of his happy faith and experience has converted evil into something fairer. "*Only good and mercy shall follow me.*" There is no evil for the heart wedded to Jehovah; there are no foes to pursue, but two bright-faced angels walk behind him as his rear-guard. It is much when the retrospect of life can, like Jacob on his death-bed, see "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil"; but it is perhaps more when the else fearful heart can look forward and say that not only will it fear no evil, but that nothing but blessings, the outcome of God's mercy, will ever reach it.

The closing hope of dwelling in the house of Jehovah to length of days rises above even the former verse. The singer knew himself a guest of God's at the table spread before the foe, but that was, as it were, refreshment on the march, while this is continual abiding in the home. Such an unbroken continuity of abode in the house of Je-

hovah is a familiar aspiration in other psalms, and is always regarded as possible even while hands are engaged in ordinary duties and cares. The psalms which conceive of the religious life under this image are marked by a peculiar depth and inwardness. They are wholesomely mystical. The hope of this guest of God's is that, by the might of fixed faith and continual communion, he may have his life so hid in God that wherever he goes he may still be in His house, and whatever he does he may still be "inquiring in His temple." The hope is here confined to the earthly present, but the Christian reading of the psalm can scarcely fail to transfer the words to a future. God will bring those whom He has fed and guided in journeying and conflict to an unchanging mansion in a home beyond the stars. Here we eat at a table spread with pilgrim's food, manna from heaven and water from the rock. We eat in haste and with an eye on the foe, but we may hope to sit down at another table in the perfected kingdom. The end of the fray is the beginning of the feast. "We shall go no more out."

PSALM XXIV.

- 1 Jehovah's is the earth, and what fills it,
The world and the dwellers therein.
- 2 For He—upon the seas He founded it,
And upon the floods established it.
- 3 Who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah,
And who may stand in His holy place?
- 4 The clean-handed and pure-hearted,
Who lifts not his desire to vanity,
And swears not to falsehood.
- 5 He shall receive blessing from Jehovah
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
- 6 This is the generation of them that seek Him,
That seek Thy face; [this is] Jacob. Selah.
- 7 Lift up, O gates, your heads,
Yea, lift up yourselves, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.
- 8 Who then is the King of glory?
Jehovah, strong and a Champion,
Jehovah, a Champion in battle.
- 9 Lift up, O gates, your heads,
Yea, lift them up, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.
- 10 Who is He, then, the King of glory?
Jehovah of hosts,
He is the King of glory. Selah.

EWALD'S widely accepted view that this psalm is a composite of two fragments rests on a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the differences in tone and structure of the parts. These are obvious, but do not demand the hypothesis of compilation; and the original author has as good a right to be credited with the uniting thought as the supposed editor has. The usually alleged occasion of the psalm fits its tone so well and gives such appropriateness to some of its phrases that stronger reasons than are forthcoming are required to negative it. The account in 2 Sam. vi. tells of exuberant enthusiasm and joy, of which some echo sounds in the psalm. It is a processional hymn, celebrating Jehovah's entrance to His house; and

that one event, apprehended on its two sides, informs the whole. Hence the two halves have the same interchange of question and answer, and the two questions correspond, the one inquiring the character of the men who dare dwell with God, the other the name of the God who dwells with men. The procession is climbing the steep to the gates of the ancient Jebusite fortress, recently won by David. As it climbs, the song proclaims Jehovah as the universal Lord, basing the truth of His special dwelling in Zion upon that of His world-wide rule. The question, so fitting the lips of the climbers, is asked, possibly in solo, and the answer describing the qualifications of true worshippers, and possibly choral (vv. 3-6), is followed by a long-drawn musical interlude. Now the barred gates are reached. A voice summons them to open. The guards within, or possibly the gates themselves, endowed by the poet with consciousness and speech, ask who thus demands entrance. The answer is a triumphant shout from the procession. But the question is repeated, as if to allow of the still fuller reiteration of Jehovah's name, which shakes the grey walls; and then, with clang of trumpets and clash of cymbals, the ancient portals creak open, and Jehovah "enters into His rest, He and the ark of His strength." Jehovah's dwelling on Zion did not mean His desertion of the rest of the world, nor did His choice of Israel imply His abdication of rule over, or withdrawal of blessings from, the nations. The light which glorified the bare hilltop, where the Ark rested, was reflected thence over all the world. "The glory" was there concentrated, not confined. This psalm guards against all superstitious misconceptions, and protests against national narrowness, in exactly the same way as Exod. xix. 5 bases Israel's selection from among all peoples on the fact that "all the earth is Mine."

"Who may ascend?" was a picturesquely appropriate question for singers toiling upwards, and "who may stand?" for those who hoped presently to enter the sacred presence. The Ark which they bore had brought disaster to Dagon's temple, so that the Philistine lords had asked in terror, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" and at Beth-shemesh its presence had been so fatal that David had abandoned the design of bringing it up and said, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" The answer, which lays down the qualifications of true dwellers in Jehovah's house, may be compared with the similar outlines of ideal character in Psalm xv. and Isa. xxxiii. 14. The one requirement is purity. Here that requirement is deduced from the majesty of Jehovah, as set forth in vv. 1, 2 and from the designation of His dwelling as "holy." This is the postulate of the whole Psalter. In it the approach to Jehovah is purely spiritual, even while the outward access is used as a symbol; and the conditions are of the same nature as the approach. The general truth implied is that the character of the God determines the character of the worshippers. Worship is supreme admiration, culminating in imitation. Its law is always "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." A god of war will have warriors, and a god of lust sensualists, for his devotees. The worshippers in Jehovah's holy place must be holy. The details of the answer are but the echoes of a conscience enlightened by the perception of His character. In ver. 4 it may be noted that of the four aspects of purity enume-

rated the two central refer to the inward life (*pure heart; lifts not his desire unto vanity*), and these are embedded, as it were, in the outward life of deeds and words. Purity of act is expressed by "clean hands"—neither red with blood, nor foul with grubbing in dunghills for gold and other so-called good. Purity of speech is condensed into the one virtue of truthfulness (*savors not to a falsehood*). But the outward will only be right if the inward disposition is pure, and that inward purity will only be realised when desires are carefully curbed and directed. As is the desire, so is the man. Therefore the prime requisite for a pure heart is the withdrawal of affection, esteem, and longing from the solid-seeming illusions of sense. "Vanity" has, indeed, the special meaning of idols, but the notion of earthly good apart from God is more relevant here.

In ver. 5 the possessor of such purity is represented as receiving "a blessing, even righteousness," from God, which is by many taken to mean beneficence on the part of God. "inasmuch as, according to the Hebrew religious view of the world, all good is regarded as reward from God's retributive righteousness, and consequently as that of man's own righteousness or right conduct" (Hupfeld). The expression is thus equivalent to "salvation" in the next clause. But while the word has this meaning in some places, it does not seem necessary to adopt it here, where the ordinary meaning is quite appropriate. Such a man as is described in ver. 4 will have God's blessing on his efforts after purity, and a Divine gift will furnish him with that which he strives after. The hope is not lit by the full sunshine of New Testament truth, but it approximates thereto. It dimly anticipates "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness"; and it feels after the great thought that the highest righteousness is not to be won, but to be accepted, even while it only asserts that man's effort after must precede his possession of righteousness. We can give the words a deeper meaning, and see in them the dawn of the later teaching that righteousness must be "received" from "the God of salvation."

Ver. 6 seems to carry the adumbration of truth not yet disclosed a step further. A great planet is trembling into visibility, and is divined before it is seen. The emphasis in ver. 6 is on "seek," and the implication is that the men who seek find. If we seek God's face, we shall receive purity. There the psalm touches the foundation. The Divine heart so earnestly desires to give righteousness that to seek is to find. In that region a wish brings an answer, and no outstretched hand remains empty. Things of less worth have to be toiled and fought for; but the most precious of all is a gift, to be had for the asking. That thought did not stand clearly before the Old Testament worshippers, but it struggles towards expression in many a psalm, as it could not but do whenever a devout heart pondered the problems of conduct. We have abundant warnings against the anachronism of thrusting New Testament doctrine into the Psalms, but it is no less one-sided to ignore anticipations which could not but spring up where there was earnest wrestling with the thoughts of sin and of the need of purity.

Are we to adopt the supplement, "O God of," before the abrupt "Jacob"? The clause is harsh in any construction. The preceding "thy" seems to require the addition, as God is not directly addressed elsewhere in the psalm. On the other

hand, the declaration that such seekers are the true people of God is a worthy close of the whole description, and the reference to the "face" of God verbally recalls Peniel and that wonderful incident when Jacob became Israel. The seeker after God will have that scene repeated, and be able to say, "I have seen God." The abrupt introduction of "Jacob" is made more emphatic by the musical interlude which closes the first part.

There is a pause, while the procession ascends the hill of the Lord, revolving the stringent qualifications for entrance. It stands before the barred gates, while possibly part of the choir is within. The advancing singers summon the doors to open and receive the incoming Jehovah. Their portals are too low for Him to enter, and therefore they are called upon to lift their lintels. They are grey with age, and round them cluster long memories; therefore they are addressed as "gates of ancient time." The question from within expresses ignorance and hesitation, and dramatically represents the ancient gates as sharing the relation of the former inhabitants to the God of Israel, whose name they did not know, and whose authority they did not own. It heightens the force of the triumphant shout proclaiming His mighty name. He is Jehovah, the self-existent God, who has made a covenant with Israel, and fights for His people, as these grey walls bear witness. His warrior might had wrested them from their former possessors, and the gates must open for their Conqueror. The repeated question is pertinacious and animated: "Who then is He, the King of Glory?" as if recognition and surrender were reluctant. The answer is sharp and authoritative, being at once briefer and fuller. It peals forth the great name "Jehovah of hosts." There may be reference in the name to God's command of the armies of Israel, thereby expressing the religious character of their wars; but the "hosts" includes the angels, "His ministers who do His pleasure," and the stars, of which He brings forth the hosts by number. In fact, the conception underlying the name is that of the universe as an ordered whole, a disciplined army, a cosmos obedient to His voice. It is the same conception which the centurion had learned from his legion, where the utterance of one will moved all the stern, shining ranks. That mighty name, like a charge of explosives, bursts the gates of brass asunder, and the procession sweeps through them amid yet another burst of triumphant music.

PSALM XXV.

- 1 (8) Unto Thee, Jehovah, I uplift my soul;
[On Thee I wait all the day. O my God!].
- 2 (2) On Thee I hang: let me not be put to shame;
Let not my enemies exult over me.
- 3 (2) Yea, all who wait on Thee shall not be put to shame;
Put to shame shall they be who faithlessly forsake Thee without cause.
- 4 (7) Thy ways, Jehovah, make me to know;
Thy paths teach Thou me.
- 5 (7) Make me walk in Thy truth, and teach me,
For Thou art the God of my salvation.
- 6 (1) Remember Thy compassions, Jehovah, and
Thy lovingkindnesses,
For from of old are they.

- 7 (נ) Sins of my youth and my transgression
remember not;
According to Thy lovingkindness remember me,
For Thy goodness' sake, Jehovah.
- 8 (ז) Good and upright is Jehovah;
Therefore He instructs sinners in the way.
- 9 (י) He will cause the meek to walk in that
which is right,
And will teach the meek His way.
- 10 (כ) All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkind-
ness and troth
To keepers of His covenant and His testimo-
nies.
- 11 (ח) For Thy name's sake, Jehovah,
Pardon my iniquity, for great is it.
- 12 (יב) Who, then, is the man who fears Jeho-
vah?
He will instruct him in the way he should
choose.
- 13 (יג) Himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his seed shall possess the land.
- 14 (יד) The secret of Jehovah is [told] to them
that fear Him,
And His covenant He makes them know.
- 15 (טו) My eyes are continually toward Jehovah,
For He, He shall bring out my feet from the
net.
- 16 (טז) Turn Thee unto me, and be gracious to
me,
For solitary and afflicted am I.
- 17 (יז) The straits of my heart do Thou en-
large (?),
And from my distresses bring me out.
- 18 (יח) Look on my affliction and my travail,
And lift away all my sins.
- 19 (יט) Look on my enemies, for they are many,
And they hate me with cruel hate.
- 20 (כ) Keep my soul and deliver me;
Let me not be put to shame, for I have taken
refuge in Thee.
- 21 (כא) Let integrity and uprightness guard me,
For I wait on Thee.
- 22 Redeem Israel, O God,
From all his straits.

THE recurrence of the phrase "lift up the soul" may have determined the place of this psalm next to Psalm xxiv. It is acrostic, but with irregularities. As the text now stands, the second, not the first, word in ver. 2 begins with Beth; Vav is omitted or represented in the "and teach me" of the He verse (ver. 5); Qoph is also omitted, and its place taken by a supernumerary Resh, which letter has thus two verses (18, 19); and ver. 22 begins with Pe, and is outside the scheme of the psalm, both as regards alphabetic structure and subject. The same peculiarities of deficient Vav and superfluous Pe verses reappear in another acrostic psalm (xxxiv.), in which the initial word of the last verse is, as here, "redeem." Possibly the two psalms are connected.

The fetters of the acrostic structure forbid freedom and progress of thought, and almost compel repetition. It is fitted for meditative reiteration of favourite emotions or familiar axioms, and results in a loosely twined wreath rather than in a column with base, shaft, and capital. A slight trace of consecution of parts may be noticed in the division of the verses (excluding ver. 22) into three sevens, of which the first is prayer, the second meditation on the Divine character and the blessings secured by covenant to them who fear Him, and the third is bent round, wreath-like, to meet

the first, and is again prayer. Such alternation of petition and contemplation is like the heart's beat of the religious life, now expanding in desire, now closing in possession. The psalm has no marks of occasion or period. It deals with the permanent elements in a devout man's relation to God.

The first prayer-section embraces the three standing needs: protection, guidance, and forgiveness. With these are intertwined their pleas according to the logic of faith—The suppliant's uplifted desires and God's eternal tenderness and manifested mercy. The order of mention of the needs proceeds from without inwards, for protection from enemies is superficial as compared with illumination as to duty, and deeper than even that, as well as prior in order of time (and therefore last in order of enumeration), is pardon. Similarly the pleas go deeper as they succeed each other; for the psalmist's trust and waiting is superficial as compared with the plea breathed in the name of "the God of my salvation"; and that general designation leads to the gaze upon the ancient and changeless mercies, which constitute the measure and pattern of God's working (*according to*, ver. 7), and upon the self-originated motive, which is the deepest and strongest of all arguments with Him (*for Thy goodness' sake*, ver. 7).

A qualification of the guest in God's house was in Psalm xxiv. the negative one that he did not lift up his soul—i.e., set his desires—on the emptinesses of time and sense. Here the psalmist begins with the plea that he has set his on Jehovah, and, as the position of "Unto Thee, Jehovah," at the beginning shows, on Him alone. The very nature of such aspiration after God demands that it shall be exclusive. "All in all or not at all" is the requirement of true devotion, and such completeness is not attained without continual withdrawal of desire from created good. The tendrils of the heart must be untwined from other props before they can be wreathed round their true stay. The irregularity in ver. 2, where the second, not the first, word of the verse begins with Beth, may be attenuated by treating the Divine name as outside the acrostic order. An acute conjecture, however, that the last clause of ver. 5 really belongs to ver. 1 and should include "my God" now in ver. 2, has much in its favour. Its transposition restores to both verses the two-clause structure which runs through the psalm, gets rid of the acrostical anomaly, and emphasises the subsequent reference to those who wait on Jehovah in ver. 3.

In that case ver. 2 begins with the requisite letter. It passes from plea to petition: "Let me not be shamed." Trust that was not vindicated by deliverance would cover the face with confusion. "Hopes that breed not shame" are the treasure of him whose hope is in Jehovah. Foes unnamed threaten; but the stress of the petitions in the first section of the psalm is less on enemies than on sins. One cry for protection from the former is all that the psalmist utters, and then his prayer swiftly turns to deeper needs. In the last section the petitions are more exclusively for deliverance from enemies. Needful as such escape is, it is less needful than the knowledge of God's ways, and the man in extremest peril orders his desires rightly, if he asks holiness first and safety second. The cry in ver. 2 rests upon the confidence nobly expressed in ver. 3, in which the verbs are not optatives, but futures, declaring a truth certain to be realised in the psalmist's experience, because it is true for all who, like him, wait on

Jehovah. True prayer is the individual's sheltering himself under the broad folds of the mantle that covers all who pray. The double confidence as to the waiters on Jehovah and the "treacherous without cause" is the summary of human experience as read by faith. Sense has much to adduce in contradiction, but the dictum is nevertheless true, only its truth does not always appear in the small arc of the circle which lies between cradle and grave.

The prayer for deliverance glides into that for guidance, since the latter is the deeper need, and the former will scarcely be answered unless the suppliant's will docilely offers the latter. The soul lifted to Jehovah will long to know His will and submit itself to His manifold teachings. "Thy ways" and "Thy paths" necessarily mean here the ways in which Jehovah desires that the psalmist should go. "In Thy truth" is ambiguous, both as to the preposition and the noun. The clause may either present God's truth (*i. e.*, faithfulness) as His motive for answering the prayer, or His truth (*i. e.*, the objective revelation) as the path for men. Predominant usage inclines to the former signification of the noun, but the possibility still remains of regarding God's faithfulness as the path in which the psalmist desires to be led, *i. e.*, to experience it. The cry for forgiveness strikes a deeper note of pathos, and, as asking a more wondrous blessing, grasps still more firmly the thought of what Jehovah is and always has been. The appeal is made to "Thy compassions and lovingkindnesses," as belonging to His nature, and to their past exercise as having been "from of old." Emboldened thus, the psalmist can look back on his own past, both on his outbursts of youthful passion and levity, which he calls "failures," as missing the mark, and on the darker evils of later manhood, which he calls "rebellions," and can trust that Jehovah will think upon him *according to His mercy*, and *for the sake of His goodness* or love. The vivid realisation of that Eternal Mercy as the very mainspring of God's actions, and as setting forth, in many an ancient deed, the eternal pattern of His dealings, enables a man to bear the thought of his own sins.

The contemplation of the Divine character prepares the way for the transition to the second group of seven verses, which are mainly meditation on that character and on God's dealings and the blessedness of those who fear Him (vv. 8-14). The thought of God beautifully draws the singer from himself. How deeply and lovingly he had pondered on the name of the Lord before he attained to the grand truth that His goodness and very uprightness pledged Him to show sinners where they should walk! Since there is at the heart of things an infinitely pure and equally loving Being, nothing is more impossible than that He should wrap Himself in thick darkness and leave men to grope after duty. Revelation of the path of life in some fashion is the only conduct consistent with His character. All presumptions are in favor of such Divine teaching; and the fact of sin makes it only the more certain. That fact may separate men from God, but not God from men, and if they transgress, the more need both in their characters and in God's, is there that He should speak. But while their being sinners does not prevent His utterance, their disposition determines their actual reception of His teaching, and "the meek" or lowly of heart are His true scholars. His instruction is not wasted on them,

and, being welcomed, is increased. A fuller communication of His will rewards the humble acceptance of it. Sinners are led *in* the way; the meek are taught His way. Here the conception of God's way is in transition from its meaning in ver. 4 to that in ver. 10, where it distinctly must mean His manner of dealing with men. They who accept His teaching, and order their paths as He would have them do, will learn that the impulse and meaning of all which He does to them are "mercy and truth," the two great attributes to which the former petitions appealed, and which the humble of heart, who observe the conditions of God's covenant which is witness of His own character and of their duty, will see gleaming with lambent light even in calamities.

The participators, then, in this blessed knowledge have a threefold character: sinners humble; keepers of the covenant and testimonies. The thought of these requirements drives the psalmist back on himself, as it will do all devout souls, and forces from him a short ejaculation of prayer, which breaks with much pathos and beauty the calm flow of contemplation. The pleas for forgiveness of the "iniquity" which makes him feel unworthy of Jehovah's guidance are remarkable. "For Thy name's sake" appeals to the revealed character of God, as concerned in the suppliant's pardon, inasmuch as it will be honoured thereby, and God will be true to Himself in forgiving. "For it is great" speaks the boldness of helplessness. The magnitude of sin demands a Divine intervention. None else than God can deal with it. Faith makes the very greatness of sin and extremity of need a reason for God's act of pardon.

Passing from self, the singer again recurs to his theme, reiterating in vivid language and with some amplification the former thoughts. In vv. 8-10 the character of Jehovah was the main subject, and the men whom He blessed were in the background. In vv. 12-14 they stand forward. Their designation now is the wide one of "those who fear Jehovah," and the blessings they receive are, first, that of being taught the way, which has been prominent thus far, but here has a new phase, as being "the way that he should choose"; *i. e.*, God's teaching illuminates the path, and tells a man what he ought to do, while his freedom of choice is unfringed. Next, outward blessings of settled prosperity shall be his, and his children shall have the promises to Israel fulfilled in their possession of the land. These outward blessings belong to the Old Testament epoch, and can only partially be applied to the present stage of Providence. But the final element of the good man's blessedness (ver. 14) is eternally true. Whether we translate the first word "secret" or "friendship," the sense is substantially the same. Obedience and the true fear of Jehovah directly tend to discernment of His purposes, and will besides be rewarded by whispers from heaven. God would not hide from Abraham what he would do, and still His friend will know His mind better than the disobedient. The last clause of ver. 14 is capable of various renderings. "His covenant" may be in the accusative, and the verb a periphrastic future, as the A.V. takes it, or the former word may be nominative, and the clause be rendered, "And His covenant [is] to make them to know." But the absolute use of the verb without a specification of the object taught is somewhat harsh, and probably the former rendering is to be preferred. The deeper

teaching of the covenant which follows on the fear of the Lord includes both its obligations and blessings, and the knowledge is not mere intellectual perception, but vital experience. In this region life is knowledge, and knowledge life. Who-so "keeps His covenant" (ver. 10) will ever grow in appropriation of its blessings and apprehension of its obligations by his submissive will.

The third heptad of verses returns to simple petition, and that, with one exception (ver. 18 *b*), for deliverance from enemies. This recurrence, in increased intensity, of the consciousness of hostility is not usual, for the psalms which begin with it generally pray themselves out of it. "The peace which passeth understanding," which is the best answer to prayer, has not fully settled on the heaving sea. A heavy ground swell runs in these last short petitions, which all mean substantially the same thing. But there is a beginning of calm; and the renewed petitions are a pattern of that continual knocking of which such great things are said and recorded in Scripture. The section begins with a declaration of patient expectance: "Mine eyes are ever towards Jehovah," with wistful fixedness which does not doubt though it has long to look. Nets are wrapped round his feet, inextricably but for one hand. We can bear to feel our limbs entangled and fettered, if our eyes are free to gaze, and fixed in gazing, upwards. The desired deliverance is thrice presented (ver. 16, "turn unto"; ver. 18, "look upon"; ver. 19, "consider," lit. look upon) as the result of Jehovah's face being directed towards the psalmist.

When Jehovah turns to a man, the light streaming from His face makes darkness day. The pains on which He "looks" are soothed; the enemies whom He beholds shrivel beneath His eye. The psalmist believes that God's presence, in the deeper sense of that phrase, as manifested partly through delivering acts and partly through inward consciousness, is his one need, in which all deliverances and gladnesses are enwrapped. He plaintively pleads, "For I am alone and afflicted." The soul that has awakened to the sense of the awful solitude of personal being, and stretched out yearning desires to the only God, and felt that with Him it would know no pain in loneliness, will not cry in vain. In ver. 17 a slight alteration in the text, the transference of the final Vav of one word to the beginning of the next, gets rid of the incongruous phrase "are enlarged" as applied to troubles (lit. straits), and gives a prayer which is in keeping with the familiar use of the verb in reference to afflictions: "The troubles of my heart do Thou enlarge [cf. iv. 2; xviii. 36], and from my distresses," etc. Ver. 18 should begin with Qoph, but has Resh, which is repeated in the following verse, to which it rightly belongs. It is at least noteworthy that the anomaly makes the petition for Jehovah's "look" more emphatic, and brings into prominence the twofold direction of it. The "look" on the psalmist's affliction and pain will be tender and sympathetic, as a mother eagle's on her sick eaglet; that on his foes will be stern and destructive, many though they be. In ver. 11 the prayer for pardon was sustained by the plea that the sin was "great"; in ver. 19 that for deliverance from foes rests on the fact that "they are many," for which the verb cognate with the adjective of ver. 11 is used. Thus both dangers without and evils within are regarded as crying out, by their multitude, for God's intervention. The wreath is

twined so that its end is brought round to its beginning. "Let me not be ashamed, for I trust in Thee," is the second petition of the first part repeated; and "I wait on Thee," which is the last word of the psalm, omitting the superfluous verse, echoes the clause which it is proposed to transfer to ver. 1. Thus the two final verses correspond to the two initial, the last but one to the first but one, and the last to the first. The final prayer is that "integrity (probably complete devotion of heart to God) and uprightness" (in relation to men) may preserve him, as guardian angels; but this does not assert the possession of these, but is a petition for the gift of them quite as much as for their preserving action. The implication of that petition is that no harm can imperil or destroy him whom these characteristics guard. That is true in the whole sweep of human life, however often contradicted in the judgment of sense.

Like Psalm xxxiv., this concludes with a supplementary verse beginning with Pe, a letter already represented in the acrostic scheme. This may be a later addition for liturgical purposes.

PSALM XXVI.

- 1 Judge me, Jehovah, for I—in my integrity do I walk.
And in Jehovah do I trust unwavering.
- 2 Test me, Jehovah, and try me,
My reins and my heart.
- 3 For Thy lovingkindness is before my eyes,
And I walk in Thy truth.
- 4 I sit not with men of vanity,
And with those who mask themselves do I not go.
- 5 I hate the congregation of evil-doers,
And with the wicked I do not sit.
- 6 I will wash my hands in innocence,
That I may compass Thine altar, Jehovah,
- 7 To cause the voice of praise to be heard,
And to tell forth all Thy wonders.
- 8 Jehovah, I love the shelter of Thy house,
And the place of the dwelling of Thy glory.
- 9 Take not away with sinners my soul,
Nor with men of blood my life,
- 10 In whose hands is outrage,
And their right hand is full of bribery.
- 11 But I—in my integrity will I walk;
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.
- 12 My foot stands on level ground;
In the congregations will I bless Jehovah.

THE image of "the way" which is characteristic of Psalm xxv. reappears in a modified form in this psalm, which speaks of "walking in integrity" and truth and of "feet standing in an even place." Other resemblances to the preceding psalm are the use of "redeem," "be merciful"; the references to God's lovingkindness and truth, in which the psalmist walks, and to his own integrity. These similarities may or may not indicate common authorship, but probably guided the compilers in placing the psalm here. It has not clear marks of date or of the writer's circumstances. Its two ground tones are profession of integrity and of revulsion from the society of the wicked and prayer for vindication of

innocence by the fact of deliverance. The verses are usually grouped in couples, but with some irregularity.

The two key-notes are both struck in the first group of three verses, in which vv. 2 and 3 are substantially an expansion of ver. 1. The prayer, "Judge me," asks for a Divine act of deliverance based upon a Divine recognition of the psalmist's sincerity and unwavering trust. Both the prayer and its ground are startling. It grates upon ears accustomed to the tone of the New Testament that a suppliant should allege his single-eyed simplicity and steadfast faith as pleas with God, and the strange tone sounds on through the whole psalm. The threefold prayer in ver. 2 courts Divine scrutiny, as conscious of innocence, and bares the inmost recesses of affection and impulse for testing, proving by circumstances, and smelting by any fire. The psalmist is ready for the ordeal, because he has kept God's "lovingkindness" steadily in sight through all the glamour of earthly brightnesses, and his outward life has been all, as it were, transacted in the sphere of God's truthfulness; *i.e.*, the inward contemplation of His mercy and faithfulness has been the active principle of his life. Such self-consciousness is strange enough to us, but, strange as it is, it cannot fairly be stigmatised as Pharisaic self-righteousness. The psalmist knows that all goodness comes from God, and he clings to God in childlike trust. The humblest Christian heart might venture in similar language to declare its recoil from evil-doers and its deepest spring of action as being trust. Such professions are not inconsistent with consciousness of sin, which is, in fact, often associated with them in other psalms (xxv. 20, 21 and vii. 11, 18). They do indicate a lower stage of religious development, a less keen sense of sinfulness and of sins, a less clear recognition of the worthlessness before God of all man's goodness, than belong to Christian feeling. The same language when spoken at one stage of revelation may be childlike and lowly, and be swelling arrogance and self-righteous self-ignorance, if spoken at another.

Such high and sweet communion cannot but breed profound distaste for the society of evil-doers. The eyes which have God's lovingkindness ever before them are endowed with penetrative clearness of vision into the true hollowness of most of the objects pursued by men, and with a terrible sagacity which detects hypocrisy and shams. Association with such men is necessary, else we must needs go out of the world, and heaven must be in contact with dough in order to do its transforming work; but it is impossible for a man whose heart is truly in touch with God not to feel ill at ease when brought into contact with those who have no share in his deepest convictions and emotions. "Men of vanity" is a general designation for the ungodly, pronouncing on every such life the sentence that it is devoted to empty unrealities and partakes of the nature of that to which it is given up. One who has Jehovah's lovingkindness before his eyes cannot "sit" with such men in friendly association, as if sharing their ways of thinking, nor "go" with them in their course of conduct. "Those who mask themselves" are another class, namely hypocrites who conceal their pursuit of vanity under the show of religion. The psalmist's revulsion is intensified in ver. 5 into "hate," because the evil-doers and sinners spoken of there are of a deeper tint of blackness, and are banded

together in a "congregation," the opposite and parody of the assemblies of the righteous, whom he feels to be his kindred. No doubt separateness from evil-doers is but part of a godly man's duty, and has often been exaggerated into selfish withdrawal from a world which needs good men's presence all the more the worse it is; but it is a part of his duty, and "Come out from among them and be separate" is not yet an abrogated command. No man will ever mingle with "men of vanity," so as to draw them from the shadows of earth to the substance in God, unless his loving association with them rests on profound revulsion from their principles of action. None comes so near to sinful men as the sinless Christ; and if He had not been ever "separate from sinners," He would never have been near enough to redeem them. We may safely imitate His free companionship, which earned Him His glorious name of their Friend, if we imitate His remoteness from their evil.

From the uncongenial companionship of the wicked the psalmist's yearnings instinctively turn to his heart's home, the sanctuary. The more a man feels out of sympathy with a godless world, the more longingly he presses into the depths of communion with God; and, conversely, the more he feels at home in still communion, the more does the tumult of sense-bound crowds grate on his soul. The psalmist, then, in the next group of verses (6, 7), opposes access to the house of God and the solemn joy of thankful praises sounding there to the loathed consorting with evil. He will not sit with men of vanity because he will enter the sanctuary. Outward participation in its worship may be included in his vows and wishes, but the tone of the verses rather points to a symbolical use of the externalities of ritual. Cleansing the hands alludes to priestly lustration; compassing the altar is not known to have been a Jewish practice, and probably is to be taken as simply a picturesque way of describing himself as one of the joyous circle of worshippers; the sacrifice is praise. The psalmist rises to the height of the true Israelite's priestly vocation, and ritual has become transparent to him. None the less may he have clung to the outwardnesses of ceremonial worship, because he apprehended them in their highest significance and had learned that the qualification of the worshipper was purity, and the best offering praise. Well for those who, like him, are driven to the sanctuary by the revulsion from vanities and from those who pursue them!

Ver. 8 is closely connected with the two preceding, but is perhaps best united with the following verse, as being the ground of the prayer there. Hate of the congregation of evil-doers has love to God's house for its complement or foundation. The measure of attachment is that of detachment. The designations of the sanctuary in ver. 8 show the aspects in which it drew the psalmist's love. It was "the shelter of Thy house," where he could hide himself from the strife of tongues and escape the pain of herding with evil-doers; it was "the place of the dwelling of Thy glory," the abode of that symbol of Divine presence which flamed between the cherubim and lit the darkness of the innermost shrine. Because the singer felt his true home to be there, he prayed that his soul might not be gathered with sinners, *i.e.*, that he might not be involved in their fate. He has had no fellowship with them in their evil, and there-

fore he asks that he may be separate from them in their punishment. To "gather the soul" is equivalent to taking away the life. God's judgments sort out characters and bring like to like, as the tares are bound in bundles or as, with so different a purpose, Christ made the multitudes sit down by companies on the green sward. General judgments are not indiscriminate. The prayer of the psalmist may not have looked beyond exemption from calamities or from death, but the essence of the faith which it expresses is eternally true: that distinction of attitude towards God and goodness must secure distinction of lot, even though external circumstances are identical. The same things are not the same to men so profoundly different. The picture of the evil-doers from whom the psalmist recoils is darker in these last verses than before. It is evidently a portrait and points to a state of society in which violence, outrage, and corruption were rampant. The psalmist washed his hands in innocency, but these men had violence and bribes in theirs. They were therefore persons in authority, prostituting justice. The description fits too many periods too well to give a clue to the date of the psalm.

Once more the consciousness of difference and the resolve not to be like such men break forth in the closing couple of verses. The psalm began with the profession that he had walked in his integrity; it ends with the vow that he will. It had begun with the prayer "Judge me"; it ends with the expansion of it into "Redeem me"—i.e., from existing dangers, from evil-doers, or from their fate—and "Be gracious unto me," the positive side of the same petition. He who purposes to walk uprightly has the right to expect God's delivering and giving hand to be extended to him. The resolve to walk uprightly unaccompanied with the prayer for that hand to hold up is as rash as the prayer without the resolve is vain. But if these two go together, quiet confidence will steal into the heart; and though there be no change in circumstances, the mood of mind will be so soothed and lightened that the suppliant will feel that he has suddenly emerged from the steep gorge where he had been struggling and shut up, and stands on the level ground of the "shining table-lands, whereof our God Himself is sun and moon." Such peaceful foretaste of coming security is the forerunner which visits the faithful heart. Gladdened by it, the psalmist is sure that his desire of compassing God's altar with praise will be fulfilled, and that, instead of compulsory association with the "congregation of evil-doers," he will bless Jehovah "in the congregations" where His name is loved and find himself among those who, like himself, delight in His praise.

PSALM XXVII.

- 1 Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?
Jehovah is the fortress of my life; for whom should I tremble?
- 2 When evil-doers drew near against me, to devour my flesh,
My oppressors and my foes, they stumbled and fell.
- 3 Though a host encamp against me,
My heart fears not;
Though war rises against me,
Even then am I confident.

- 4 One thing have I asked from Jehovah; that will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life.
To gaze upon the pleasantness of Jehovah and to meditate in His palace.
- 5 For He will hide me in a bower in the day of evil;
He will secrete me in the secret of His tent;
On a rock will He lift me.
- 6 And now shall my head be lifted above my foes around me,
And I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices of joy;
I will sing and I will harp to Jehovah.
- 7 Hear, Jehovah, when I cry with my voice;
And be gracious to me, and answer me.
- 8 To Thee hath my heart said, (when Thou saidst) "Seek ye my face";
That face of Thine, Jehovah, will I seek.
- 9 Hide not Thy face from me:
Repulse not Thy servant in anger;
My help Thou hast been:
Cast me not off, and forsake me not, O God of my salvation.
- 10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me;
But Jehovah will take me up.
- 11 Show me, Jehovah, Thy way,
And lead me in a level path, because of those who lie in wait for me.
- 12 Give me not up to the desire of my oppressors,
For false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence.
- 13 If I had not believed that I should see the goodness of Jehovah
In the land of the living—!
- 14 Wait on Jehovah;
Be strong, and let thine heart take courage,
and wait on Jehovah.

THE hypothesis that two originally distinct psalms or fragments are here blended has much in its favour. The rhythm and style of the latter half (ver. 7 to end) are strikingly unlike those of the former part, and the contrast of feeling is equally marked, and is in the opposite direction from that which is usual, since it drops from exultant faith to at least plaintive, if not anxious petition. But while the phenomena are plain and remarkable, they do not seem to demand the separation suggested. Form and rhythm are elastic in the poet's hands, and change in correspondence with his change of mood. The flowing melody of the earlier part is the natural expression of its sunny confidence, and the harsher strains of the later verses fit no less well their contents. Why may not the key change to a minor, and yet the voice be the same? The fall from jubilant to suppliant faith is not unexampled in other psalms (cf. ix. and xxv.), nor in itself unnatural. Dangers, which for a moment cease to press, do recur, however real the victory over fear has been, and in this recrudescence of the consciousness of peril, which yet does not loosen, but tighten, the grasp of faith, this ancient singer speaks the universal experience; and his song becomes more precious and more fitted for all lips than if it had been unmingled triumph. One can better understand the original author passing in swift transition from the one to the other tone, than a later editor deliberately appending to a pure

burst of joyous faith and aspiration a tag which flattened it. The more unlike the two halves are, the less probable is it that their union is owing to any but the author of both. The fire of the original inspiration could fuse them into homogeneity; it is scarcely possible that a mechanical patcher should have done so. If, then, we take the psalm as a whole, it gives a picture of the transitions of a trustful soul surrounded by dangers, in which all such souls may recognise their own likeness.

The first half (vv. 1-6) is the exultant song of soaring faith. But even in it there sounds an undertone. The very refusal to be afraid glances sideways at outstanding causes for fear. The very names of Jehovah as "Light, Salvation," "the Stronghold of my life," imply darkness, danger, and besetting foes. The resolve to keep alight the fire of courage and confidence in the face of encamping foes and rising wars is much too energetic to be mere hypothetical courage. The hopes of safety in Jehovah's tent, of a firm standing on a rock, and of the head being lifted above surrounding foes are not the hopes of a man at ease, but of one threatened on all sides, and triumphant only because he clasps Jehovah's hand. The first words of the psalm carry it all in germ. By a noble dead-lift of confidence, the singer turns from foes and fears to stay himself on Jehovah, his light and salvation, and then, in the strength of that assurance, bids back his rising fears to their dens. "I will trust, and not be afraid," confesses the presence of fear, and, like our psalm, unveils the only reasonable counteraction of it in the contemplation of what God is. There is much to fear unless He is our light, and they who will not begin with the psalmist's confidence have no right to repeat his courage.

To a devout man the past is eloquent with reasons for confidence, and in ver. 2 the psalm points to a past fact. The stumbling and falling of former foes, who came open-mouthed at him, is not a hypothetical case, but a bit of autobiography, which lives to nourish present confidence. It is worth notice that the language employed has remarkable correspondence with that used in the story of David's fight with Goliath. There the same word as here is twice employed to describe the Philistine's advance (1 Sam. xvii. 41, 48). Goliath's vaunt, "I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field," may have supplied the mould for the expression here, and the fall of the giant, with his face to the earth and the smooth stone in his brain, is narrated with the same word as occurs in the psalm. It might well be that when David was a fugitive before Saul the remembrance of his victory over Goliath should have cheered him, just as that of his earlier prowess against bear and lion heartened him to face the Philistine bully; and such recollections would be all the more natural since jealousy of the fame that came to him from that feat had set the first light to Saul's hatred. Ver. 3 is not to be left swinging *in vacuo*, a cheap vow of courage in hypothetical danger. The supposed case is actual fact, and the expressions of trust are not only assertions for the future, but statements of the present temper of the psalmist: "I do not fear; I am confident."

The confidence of ver. 3 is rested not only on Jehovah's past acts, but on the psalmist's past and present set of soul towards Him. That seems to be the connecting link between vv. 1-3 and 4-6. Such desire, the psalmist is sure, cannot but be an-

swered, and in the answer all safety is included. The purest longing after God as the deepest, most fixed yearning of a heart, was never more nobly expressed. Clearly the terms forbid the limitation of meaning to mere external presence in a material sanctuary. "All the days of my life" points to a continuance inward and capable of accomplishment, wherever the body may be. The exclusiveness and continuity of the longing, as well as the gaze on God which is its true object, are incapable of the lower meaning, while, no doubt, the externals of worship supply the mould into which these longings are poured. But what the psalmist wants is what the devout soul in all ages and stages has wanted: the abiding consciousness of the Divine presence; and the prime good which makes that presence so infinitely and exclusively desirable to him is the good which draws all such souls in yearning, namely the vision of God. The lifelong persistence and exclusiveness of the desire are such as all must cherish if they are to receive its fruition. Blessed are they who are delivered from the misery of multiplied and transient aims which break life into fragments by steadfastly and continually following one great desire, which binds all the days each to each, and in its single simplicity encloses and hallows and unifies the else distracting manifoldness! That life is filled with light, however it may be ringed round with darkness, which has the perpetual vision of God, who is its light. Very beautifully does the psalm describe the occupation of God's guest as "gazing upon the pleasantness of Jehovah." In that expression the construction of the verb with a preposition implies a steadfast and penetrating contemplation, and the word rendered "beauty" or "pleasantness" may mean "friendliness," but is perhaps better taken in a more general meaning, as equivalent to the whole gathered delightfulness of the Divine character, the supremely fair and sweet. "To inquire" may be rendered "to consider"; but the rendering "meditate [or contemplate] in" is better, as the palace would scarcely be a worthy object of consideration; and it is natural that the gaze on the goodness of Jehovah should be followed by loving meditation on what that earnest look had seen. The two acts complete the joyful employment of a soul communing with God: first perceiving and then reflecting upon His uncreated beauty of goodness.

Such intimacy of communion brings security from external dangers. The guest has a claim for protection. And that is a subsidiary reason for the psalmist's desire as well as a ground of his confidence. Therefore the assurance of ver. 5 follows the longing of ver. 4. "A pavilion," as the Hebrew text reads, has been needlessly corrected in the margin into "His pavilion" (A.V.). "It is not God's dwelling, as the following 'tent' is, but a booth . . . as an image of protection from heat and inclemency of weather (Isa. iv. 6)" (Hupfeld). God's dwelling is a "tent," where he will shelter His guests. The privilege of asylum is theirs. Then, with a swift change of figure, the psalmist expresses the same idea of security by elevation on a rock, possibly conceiving the tent as pitched there. The reality of all is that communion with God secures from perils and enemies, an eternal truth, if the true meaning of security is grasped. Borne up by such thoughts, the singer feels himself lifted clear above the reach of surrounding foes and with the triumphant "now" of ver. 6, stretches out his hand to

bring future deliverance into the midst of present distress. Faith can blend the seasons, and transport June and its roses into December's snows. Deliverance suggests thankfulness to a true heart, and its anticipation calls out prophetic "songs in the night."

But the very brightness of the prospect recalls the stern reality of present need, and the firmest faith cannot keep on the wing continually. In the first part of the psalm it sings and soars; in the second the note is less jubilant, and it sings and sinks; but in both it is faith. Prayer for deliverance is as really the voice of faith as triumph in the assurance of deliverance is, and he who sees his foes and yet "believes to see the goodness of Jehovah" is not far below him who gazes only on the beauty of the Lord. There is a parallelism between the two halves of the psalm worth noting. In the former part the psalmist's confidence reposed on the two facts of past deliverance and of his past and continuous "seeking after" the one good; in the second his prayers repose on the same two grounds, which occur in inverted order. "That will I seek after" (ver. 4), is echoed by "Thy face will I seek" (ver. 8). To seek the face is the same substantially as to desire to "gaze on the pleasantness of Jehovah." The past experience of the fall of foes (ver. 2) is repeated in "Thou hast been my help." On these two pleas the prayer in which faith speaks itself founds. The former is urged in vv. 8 and 9 with some harshness of construction, which is smoothed over, rightly as regards meaning, in the A.V. and R.V. But the very brokenness of the sentence adds to the earnestness of the prayer: "To Thee my heart has said, Seek ye my face; Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek." The answering heart repeats the invitation which gave it courage to seek before it responds with its resolve. The insertion of some such phrase as "in answer to Thy word" before "seek ye" helps the sense in a translation, but mars the vigour of the original. The invitation is not quoted from any Scripture, but is the summary of the meaning of all God's self-revelation. He is ever saying, "Seek ye my face." Therefore He cannot but show it to a man who takes Him at His word and pleads that word as the warrant for his petition. "I have never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." The consistency of the Divine character ensures His satisfying the desires which He has implanted. He will neither stultify Himself nor tantalise men by setting them on quests which end in disappointment. In a similar manner, the psalm urges the familiar argument from God's past, which reposes on the confidence of unalterable grace and inexhaustible resources. The psalmist had no cold abstract doctrine of immutability as a Divine attribute. His conception was intensely practical. Since God has helped in the past, He will help in the future, because He is God, and because He is "the God of my salvation." He cannot reverse His action nor stay His hand until His dealings with His servants have vindicated that name by completing the process to which it binds Him.

The prayer "Forsake me not" is based upon a remarkable ground in ver. 10: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me." That seems a singular plea for a mature man, who has a considerably varied experience of life behind him, to urge. It is generally explained as a proverbial expression, meaning no more than the frequent complaints in the Psalter of desertion by friends

and lovers. Cheyne (Commentary in loc.) sees in it a clear indication that the speaker is the afflicted nation, comparing itself to a sobbing child deserted by its parents. But it is at least noteworthy that, when David was hard pressed at Adullam, he bestowed his father and mother for safety with the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxi. 3, 4). It is objected that this was not their "forsaking" him, but it was, at least, their "leaving" him, and might well add an imaginative pang as well as a real loss to the fugitive. So specific a statement as that of the psalm can scarcely be weakened down into proverb or metaphor. The allusion may be undiscoverable, but the words sound uncommonly like the assertion of a fact, and the fact referred to is the only known one which in any degree fits them.

The general petitions of vv. 7-10 become more specific as the song nears its close. As in Psalm xxv., guidance and protection are the psalmist's needs now. The analogy of other psalms suggests an ethical meaning for "the plain path" of ver. 11; and that signification, rather than that of a safe road, is to be preferred, for the sake of preserving a difference between this and the following prayer for deliverance. The figures of his enemies stand out more threateningly than before (ver. 12). Is that all his gain from his prayer? Is it not a faint-hearted descent from ver. 6, where, from the height of his Divine security, he looked down on them far below, and unable to reach him? Now they have "risen up," and he has dropped down among them. But such changes of mood are not inconsistent with unchanged faith, if only the gaze which discerns the precipice at either side is not turned away from the goal ahead and above, nor from Him who holds up His servant. The effect of that clearer sight of the enemies is very beautifully given in the abrupt half-sentence of ver. 13: "If I had not believed to see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living!" As he thinks of his foes he breaks into an exclamation, which he leaves unfinished. The omission is easy to supply. He would have been their victim but for his faith. The broken words tell of his recoil from the terrible possibility forced on him by the sight of the formidable enemies. Well for us if we are but driven the closer to God, in conscious helplessness, by the sight of dangers and antagonisms! Faith does not falter, though it is keenly conscious of difficulties. It is not preserved by ignoring facts, but should be by them impelled to clasp God more firmly as its only safety.

So the psalm goes back to the major key at last, and in the closing verse prayer passes into self-encouragement. The heart that spoke to God now speaks to itself. Faith exhorts sense and soul to "wait on Jehovah." The self-communing of the psalmist, beginning with exultant confidence and merging into prayer thrilled with consciousness of need and of weakness, closes with bracing him up to courage, which is not presumption, because it is the fruit of waiting on the Lord. He who thus keeps his heart in touch with God will be able to obey the ancient command, which had rung so long before in the ears of Joshua in the plains of Jericho and is never out of date, "Be strong and of a good courage"; and none but those who wait on the Lord will be at once conscious of weakness and filled with strength, aware of the foes and bold to meet them.

PSALM XXVIII.

- 1 Unto Thee, Jehovah, I cry;
My rock, be not deaf to me,
Lest Thou be silent to me,
And I become as those who go down to the pit.
- 2 Hear the voice of my supplications in my crying
to Thee for help.
In my lifting my hands to Thy holy shrine.
- 3 Drag me not away with wicked men, and with
workers of iniquity,
Speaking peace with their neighbours,
And evil is in their hearts.
- 4 Give them according to their doings and according
to the evil of their deeds;
According to the work of their hands give
them;
Return their desert to them.
- 5 For they pay no heed to the doings of Jehovah
Nor to the work of His hands;
He shall cast them down, and not build them
up.
- 6 Blessed be Jehovah,
For He has heard the voice of my supplications.
- 7 Jehovah is my fortress and my shield;
In Him has my heart trusted, and I am helped;
So my heart leaps [for joy], and by my song
will I praise Him.
- 8 Jehovah is their strength (or the strength of
His people),
And a fortress of salvation for His anointed is
He.
- 9 Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance,
And shepherd them, and carry them even for
evermore.

THE unquestionable resemblances to Psalm xxvi. scarcely require that this should be considered its companion. The differences are as obvious as the likenesses. While the prayer "Draw me not away with the wicked" and the characterisation of these are alike in both, the further emphatic prayer for retribution here and the closing half of this psalm have nothing corresponding to them in the other. This psalm is built on the familiar plan of groups of two verses each, with the exception that the prayer, which is its centre, runs over into three. The course of thought is as familiar as the structure. Invocation is followed by petition, and that by exultant anticipation of the answer as already given; and all closes with wider petitions for the whole people.

Vv. 1, 2, are a prelude to the prayer proper, bespeaking the Divine acceptance of it, on the double ground of the psalmist's helplessness apart from God's help and of his outstretched hands appealing to God enthroned above the mercy-seat. He is in such straits that, unless his prayer brings an answer in act, he must sink into the pit of Sheol, and be made like those that lie huddled there in its darkness. On the edge of the slippery slope, he stretches out his hands toward the innermost sanctuary (for so the word rendered, by a mistaken etymology, "oracle" means). He beseeches God to hear, and blends the two figures of deafness and silence as both meaning the withholding of help. Jehovah seems deaf when prayer is unanswered, and is silent when He does not speak in deliverance. This prelude of invocation throbs with earnestness, and sets the pattern for suppliants, teaching them how to quicken their own desires as well as how to appeal to God by breath-

ing to Him their consciousness that only His hand can keep them from sliding down into death.

The prayer itself (vv. 3-5) touches lightly on the petition that the psalmist may be delivered from the fate of the wicked, and then launches out into indignant description of their practices and solemn invocation of retribution upon them. "Drag away" is parallel with, but stronger than, "Gather not" in xxvi. 9. Commentators quote Job xxiv. 22, where the word is used of God's dragging the mighty out of life by His power, as a struggling criminal is haled to the scaffold. The shuddering recoil from the fate of the wicked is accompanied with vehement loathing of their practices. A man who keeps his heart in touch with God cannot but shrink, as from a pestilence, from complicity with evil, and the depth of his hearty hatred of it is the measure of his right to ask that he may not share in the ruin it must bring, since God is righteous. One type of evil-doers is the object of the psalmist's special abhorrence: false friends with smooth tongues and daggers in their sleeves, the "dissemblers" of Psalm xxvi.; but he passes to the more general characterisation of the class, in his terrible prayer for retribution, in vv. 4, 5. The sin of sins, from which all specific acts of evil flow, is blindness to God's "deeds" and to "the work of His hands." His acts both of mercy and of judgment. Practical atheism, the indifference which looks upon nature, history, and self, and sees no signs of a mighty hand tender, pure, and strong, ever active in them all, will surely lead the purblind "Agnostics" to do "works of their hands" which, for lack of reference to Him, fail to conform to the highest ideal and draw down righteous judgment. But the blindness to God's work here meant is that of an averted will rather than that of mistaken understanding, and from the stem of such a thorn the grapes of holy living cannot be gathered. Therefore the psalmist is but putting into words the necessary result of such lives when from suppliant he becomes prophet, and declares that "He shall cast them down, and not build them up." The stern tone of this prayer marks it as belonging to the older type of religion, and its dissimilarity to the New Testament teaching is not to be slurred over. No doubt the element of personal enmity is all but absent, but it is not the prayer which those who have heard "Father, forgive them," are to copy. Yet, on the other hand, the wholesome abhorrence of evil, the solemn certitude that sin is death, the desire that it may cease from the world, and the lowly petition that it may not drag us into fatal associations are all to be preserved in Christian feeling, while softened by the light that falls from Calvary.

As in many psalms, the faith which prays passes at once into the faith which possesses. This man, when he "stood praying, believed that he had what he asked," and, so believing, had it. There was no change in circumstances, but he was changed. There is no fear of going down into the pit now, and the rabble of evil-doers have disappeared. This is the blessing which every true suppliant may bear away from the throne, the peace which passeth understanding, the sure pledge of the Divine act which answers prayer. It is the first gentle ripple of the incoming tide; high water is sure to come at the due hour. So the psalmist is exuberant and happily tautological in telling how his trusting heart has become a leaping heart, and help has been flashed back

from heaven as swiftly as his prayer had travelled thither.

The closing strophe (vv. 8, 9) is but loosely connected with the body of the psalm except on one supposition. What if the singer were king over Israel, and if the dangers threatening him were public perils? That would explain the else singular attachment of intercession for Israel to so intensely personal a supplication. It is most natural that God's "anointed" who has been asking deliverance for himself, should widen his petitions to take in that flock of which he was but the under-shepherd, and should devolve the shepherding and carrying of it on the Divine Shepherd-King, of whom he was the shadowy representative. The addition of one letter changes "their" in ver. 8 into "to His people" a reading which has the support of the LXX. and of some manuscripts and versions and is recommended by its congruity with the context. Cheyne's suggestion that "His anointed" is the high-priest is only conjecture. The reference of the expression to the king who is also the psalmist preserves the unity of the psalm. The Christian reader cannot but think of the true King and Intercessor, whose great prayer before His passion began, like our psalm, with petitions for Himself, but passed into supplication for His little flock and for all the unnumbered millions "who should believe on" Him "through their word."

PSALM XXIX.

- 1 Give to Jehovah, ye sons of God,
Give to Jehovah glory and strength.
- 2 Give to Jehovah the glory of His name;
Bow down to Jehovah in holy attire.
- 3 The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters;
The God of glory thunders;
Jehovah is on many waters.
- 4 The voice of Jehovah is with power;
The voice of Jehovah is with majesty.
- 5 The voice of Jehovah shivers the cedars;
Yea, Jehovah shivers the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 And makes them leap like a calf,
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of Jehovah hews out flames of fire.
- 8 The voice of Jehovah shakes the wilderness;
Jehovah shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 9 The voice of Jehovah makes the hinds calve,
and strips the woods;
And in His palace every one is saying, Glory!
- 10 Jehovah sat enthroned for the Flood;
And Jehovah sits King for ever.
- 11 Jehovah will give strength to His people;
Jehovah will bless His people with peace.

THE core of this psalm is the magnificent description of the thunderstorm rolling over the whole length of the land. That picture is framed by two verses of introduction and two of conclusion, which are connected, inasmuch as the one deals with the "glory to God in the highest" which is the echo of the tempest in angels' praises, and the other with the "peace on earth" in which its thunders die away.

The invocation in vv. 1, 2, is addressed to angels, whatever may be the exact rendering of the remarkable title by which they are summoned in ver. 1. It is all but unique, and the only other instance of its use (Psalm lxxxix. 6) establishes its

meaning, since "holy ones" is there given as synonymous in the verses preceding and following. The most probable explanation of the peculiar phrase (B'ne Elim) is that of Gesenius, Ewald, Delitzsch, and Riehm in his edition of Hupfeld's Commentary: that it is a double plural, both members of the compound phrase being inflected. Similarly "mighty men of valour" (1 Chron. vii. 5) has the second noun in the plural. This seems more probable than the rendering "sons of the gods." The psalmist summons these lofty beings to "give" glory and strength to Jehovah; that is, to ascribe to Him the attributes manifested in His acts, or, as ver. 2 puts it, "the glory of His name," *i.e.*, belonging to His character as thus revealed. The worship of earth is regarded as a type of that of heaven, and as here, so there, they who bow before Him are to be clothed in "holy attire." The thought underlying this ringing summons is that even angels learn the character of God from the exhibitions of His power in the Creation, and as they sang together for joy at first, still attend its manifestations with adoration. The contrast of their praise with the tumult and terror on earth, while the thunder growls in the sky, is surely not unintended. It suggests the different aspects of God's dread deeds as seen by them and by men, and carries a tacit lesson true of all calamities and convulsions. The thunder-cloud hangs boding in its piled blue blackness to those who from beneath watch the slow crumbling away of its torn edges and the ominous movements in its sullen heart or hear the crashes from its depths, but, seen from above, it is transfigured by the light that falls on its upper surface; and it stretches placid before the throne, like the sea of glass mingled with fire. Whatever may be earth's terror, heaven's echo of God's thunders is praise.

Then the storm bursts. We can hear it rolling in the short periods, mostly uniform in structure and grouped in verses of two clauses each, the second of which echoes the first, like the long-drawn roll that pauses, slackens, and yet persists. Seven times "the voice of Jehovah" is heard, like the apocalyptic "seven thunders before the throne." The poet's eye travels with the swift tempest, and his picture is full of motion, sweeping from the waters above the firmament to earth and from the northern boundary of the land to the far south. First we hear the mutterings in the sky (ver. 3). If we understood "the waters" as meaning the Mediterranean, we should have the picture of the storm working up from the sea; but it is better to take the expression as referring to the super-terrestrial reservoirs or the rain flood stored in the thunder-clouds. Up there the peals roll before their fury shakes the earth. It was not enough in the poet's mind to call the thunder the voice of Jehovah, but it must be brought into still closer connection with Him by the plain statement that it is He who "thunders" and who rides on the storm-clouds as they hurry across the sky. To catch tones of a Divine voice, full of power and majesty, in a noise so entirely explicable as a thunderclap, is, no doubt, unscientific; but the Hebrew contemplation of nature is occupied with another set of ideas than scientific, and is entirely unaffected by these. The psalmist had no notion of the physical cause of thunder, but there is no reason why a man who can make as much electricity as he wants by the grinding of a dynamo and then use it to carry his trivial messages should not repeat the psalmist's devout assertion.

We can assimilate all that physicists can tell us, and then, passing into another region, can hear Jehovah speaking in thunder. The psalm begins where science leaves off.

While the psalmist speaks the swift tempest has come down with a roar and a crash on the northern mountains, and Lebanon and "Sirion" (a Sidonian name for Hermon) reel, and the firm-boled, stately cedars are shivered. The structure of the verses already noticed, in which the second clause reduplicates, with some specialising, the thought of the first, makes it probable that in ver. 6 *a* the mountains, and not the cedars, are meant by "them." The trees are broken; the mountains shake. An emendation has been proposed, by which "Lebanon" should be transferred from ver. 5 to ver. 6 and substituted for "them" so as to bring out this meaning more smoothly, but the roughness of putting the pronoun in the first clause and the nouns to which it refers in the second is not so considerable as to require the change. The image of the mountains "skipping" sounds exaggerated to Western ears, but is not infrequent in Scripture, and in the present instance is simply a strong way of expressing the violence of the storm, which seems even to shake the steadfast mountains that keep guard over the furthest borders of the land. Nor are we to forget that here there may be some hint of a parable in nature. The heights are thunder-smitten; the valleys are safe. "The day of the Lord shall be upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, . . . and upon all the high mountains" (Isa. ii. 13, 14).

The two-clause verses are interrupted by one of a single clause (ver. 7), the brevity of which vividly suggests the suddenness and speed of the flash: "The voice of Jehovah cleaves [or, hews out] fire flames." The thunder is conceived of as the principal phenomenon and as creating the lightning, as if it hewed out the flash from the dark mass of cloud. A corrected accentuation of this short verse divides it into three parts, perhaps representing the triple zigzag; but in any case the one solitary, sudden fork, blazing fiercely for a moment and then swallowed up in the gloom, is marvellously given. It is further to be noted that this single lightning gleam parts the description of the storm into two, the former part painting it as in the north, the latter as in the extreme south. It has swept over the whole length of the land, while we have been watching the flash. Now it is rolling over the wide plain of the southern desert. The precise position of Kadesh is keenly debated, but it was certainly in the eastern part of the desert region on the southern border. It, too, shakes, low-lying as it is; and far and wide over its uninhabited levels the tempest rages. Its effects there are variously understood. The parallelism of clauses and the fact that nowhere else in the picture is animal life introduced give great probability to the very slight alteration required in ver. 9 *a*, in order to yield the rendering "pierces the oaks" (Cheyne), instead of "makes the hinds calve" which harmonises admirably with the next clause; but, on the other hand, the premature dropping of the young of wild animals from fear is said to be an authentic fact, and gives a defensible trait to the picture, which is perhaps none the less striking for the introduction of one small piece of animated nature. In any case the next clause paints the dishevelled forest trees, with scarred bark, broken boughs, and strewn leaves, after the fierce roar

and flash, wind and rain, have swept over them. The southern border must have been very unlike its present self, or the poet's thoughts must have travelled eastwards, among the oaks on the other side of the Arabah, if the local colouring of ver. 9 is correct.

While tumult of storm and crash of thunder have been raging and rolling below, the singer hears "a deep voice across the storm," the songs of the "sons of God" in the temple palace above, chanting the praise to which he had summoned them. "In His temple every one is saying, Glory!" That is the issue of all storms. The clear eyes of the angels see, and their "loud uplifted trumpets" celebrate, the lustrous self-manifestation of Jehovah, who rides upon the storm, and makes the rush of the thunder minister to the fruitfulness of earth.

But what of the effects down here? The concluding strophe (vv. 10, 11) tells. Its general sense is clear, though the first clause of ver. 10 is ambiguous. The source of the difficulty in rendering is twofold. The preposition may mean "for"—i.e., in order to bring about—or, according to some, "on," or "above," or "at." The word rendered "flood" is only used elsewhere in reference to the Noachic deluge, and here has the definite article, which is most naturally explained as fixing the reference to that event; but it has been objected that the allusion would be far-fetched and out of place, and therefore the rendering "rain-storm" has been suggested. In the absence of any instance of the word's being used for anything but the Deluge, it is safest to retain that meaning here. There must, however, be combined with that rendering an allusion to the torrents of thunder rain, which closed the thunder-storm. These could scarcely be omitted. They remind the singer of the downpour that drowned the world, and his thought is that just as Jehovah "sat"—i.e., solemnly took His place as King and Judge—in order to execute that act of retribution, so, in all subsequent smaller acts of an analogous nature, He "will sit enthroned for ever." The supremacy of Jehovah over all transient tempests and the judicial punitive nature of these are the thoughts which the storm has left with him. It has rolled away; God, who sent it, remains throned above nature and floods: they are His ministers.

And all ends with a sweet, calm word, assuring Jehovah's people of a share in the "strength" which spoke in the thunder, and, better still, of peace. That close is like the brightness of the glistening earth, with freshened air, and birds venturing to sing once more, and a sky of deeper blue, and the spent clouds low and harmless on the horizon. Beethoven has given the same contrast between storm and after-calm in the music of the Pastoral Symphony. Faith can listen to the wildest crashing thunder in quiet confidence that angels are saying, "Glory!" as each peal rolls, and that when the last, low mutterings are hushed, earth will smile the brighter, and deeper peace will fall on trusting hearts.

PSALM XXX.

- 1 Thee will I exalt, Jehovah, for me hast Thou lifted up,
And not made my foes rejoice over me.
- 2 Jehovah, my God,
I cried loudly to Thee, and Thou healedst me.

- 3 Jehovah, Thou hast brought up from Sheol my soul;
Thou hast revived me from among those who descend to the pit.
- 4 Make music to Jehovah, ye who are favoured by Him;
And thank His holy name.
- 5 For a moment passes in His anger,
A life in His favour;
In the evening comes weeping as a guest,
And at morn [there is] a shout of joy.
- 6 But I—I said in my security,
I shall not be moved for ever.
- 7 Jehovah, by Thy favour Thou hadst established strength to my mountain;
Thou didst hide Thy face: I was troubled.
- 8 To Thee, Jehovah, I cried;
And to the Lord I made supplication.
- 9 "What profit is in my blood when I descend to the pit?
Can dust thank Thee? can it declare Thy faithfulness?"
- 10 Hear, Jehovah, and be gracious to me;
Jehovah, be my Helper!"
- 11 Thou didst turn for me my mourning to dancing;
Thou didst unloose my sackcloth and gird me with gladness,
- 12 To the end that [my] glory should make music to Thee, and not be silent:
Jehovah, my God, for ever will I thank Thee.

THE title of this psalm is apparently a composite, the usual "Psalm of David" having been enlarged by the awkward insertion of "A Song at the Dedication of the House," which probably indicates its later liturgical use and not its first destination. Its occasion was evidently a deliverance from grave peril; and, whilst its tone is strikingly inappropriate if it had been composed for the inauguration of temple, tabernacle, or palace, one can understand how the venerable words, which praised Jehovah for swift deliverance from impending destruction, would be felt to fit the circumstances and emotions of the time when the Temple, profaned by the mad acts of Antiochus Epiphanes, was purified and the ceremonial worship restored. Never had Israel seemed nearer going down to the pit; never had deliverance come more suddenly and completely. The intrusive title is best explained as dating from that time and indicating the use then found for the song.

It is an outpouring of thankfulness, and mainly a leaf from the psalmist's autobiography, interrupted only by a call to all who share Jehovah's favour to help the single voice to praise Him (vv. 4, 5). The familiar arrangement in pairs of verses is slightly broken twice, vv. 1-3 being linked together as a kind of prelude and vv. 8-10 as a repetition of the singer's prayer. His praise breaks the barrier of silence and rushes out in a flood. The very first word tells of his exuberant thankfulness, and stands in striking relation to God's act which evokes it. Jehovah has raised him from the very sides of the pit, and therefore what shall he do but exalt Jehovah by praise and commemoration of His deeds? The song runs over in varying expressions for the one deliverance, which is designated as lifting up, disappointment of the malignant joy of enemies, healing, rescue

from Sheol and the company who descend thither by restoration to life. Possibly the prose fact was recovery from sickness, but the metaphor of healing is so frequent that the literal use of the word here is questionable. As Calvin remarks, sackcloth (ver. 11) is not a sick man's garb. These glad repetitions of the one thought in various forms indicate how deeply moved the singer was, and how lovingly he brooded over his deliverance. A heart truly penetrated with thankfulness delights to turn its blessings round and round, and see how prismatic lights play on their facets, as on revolving diamonds. The same warmth of feeling, which glows in the reiterated celebration of deliverance, impels to the frequent direct mention of Jehovah. Each verse has that name set on it as a seal, and the central one of the three (ver. 2), not content with it only, grasps Him as "my God," manifested as such with renewed and deepened tenderness by the recent fact that "I cried loudly unto Thee, and Thou healedest me." The best result of God's goodness is a firmer assurance of a personal relation to Him. "This is an enclosure of a common without damage: to make God mine own, to find that all that God says is spoken to me" (Donne). The stress of these three verses lies on the reiterated contemplation of God's fresh act of mercy and on the reiterated invocation of His name, which is not vain repetition, but represents distinct acts of consciousness, drawing near to delight the soul in thoughts of Him. The psalmist's vow of praise and former cry for help could not be left out of view, since the one was the condition and the other the issue of deliverance, but they are slightly touched. Such claiming of God for one's own and such absorbing gaze on Him are the intended results of His deeds, the crown of devotion, and the repose of the soul.

True thankfulness is expansive, and joy craves for sympathy. So the psalmist invites other voices to join his song, since he is sure that others there are who have shared his experience. It has been but one instance of a universal law. He is not the only one whom Jehovah has treated with loving-kindness, and he would fain hear a chorus supporting his solo. Therefore he calls upon "the favoured of God" to swell the praise with harp and voice and to give thanks to His "holy memorial," *i. e.*, the name by which His deeds of grace are commemorated. The ground of their praise is the psalmist's own case generalised. A tiny mirror may reflect the sun, and the humblest person's history, devoutly pondered, will yield insight into God's widest dealings. This, then, is what the psalmist had learned in suffering, and wishes to teach in song: that sorrow is transient and joy perennial. A cheerful optimism should be the fruit of experience, and especially of sorrowful experience. The antitheses in ver. 5 are obvious. In the first part of the verse "anger" and "favour" are plainly contrasted, and it is natural to suppose that "a moment" and "life" are so too. The rendering, then, is, "A moment passes in His anger, a life [*i. e.*, a lifetime] in His favour." Sorrow is brief; blessings are long. Thunderstorms occupy but a small part of summer. There is usually less sickness than health in a life. But memory and anticipation beat out sorrow thin, so as to cover a great space. A little solid matter, diffused by currents, will discolour miles of a stream. Unfortunately we have better memories for trouble than for blessing, and the

smart of the rose's prickles lasts longer in the flesh than its fragrance in the nostril or its hue in the eye. But the relation of ideas here is not merely that of contrast. May we not say that just as the "moment" is included in the "life," so the "anger" is in the "favour"? Probably that application of the thought was not present to the psalmist, but it is an Old Testament belief that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and God's anger is the aversion of holy love to its moral opposite. Hence comes the truth that varying and sometimes opposite Divine methods have one motive and one purpose, as the same motion of the earth brings summer and winter in turn. Since the desire of God is to make men partakers of His holiness, the root of chastisement is love, and hours of sorrow are not interruptions of the continuous favour which fills the life.

A like double antithesis moulds the beautiful image of the last clause. Night and morning are contrasted, as are weeping and joy; and the latter contrast is more striking, if it be observed that "joy" is literally a "joyful shout," raised by the voice that had been breaking into audible weeping. The verb used means to lodge for a night, and thus the whole is a picture of two guests, the one coming, sombre-robed, in the hour befitting her, the other, bright-garmented, taking the place of the former, when all things are dewy and sunny, in the morning. The thought may either be that of the substitution of joy for sorrow, or of the transformation of sorrow into joy. No grief lasts in its first bitterness. Recuperative forces begin to tell by slow degrees. "The low beginnings of content" appear. The sharpest-cutting edge is partially blunted by time and what it brings. Tender green drapes every ruin. Sorrow is transformed into something not undeserving of the name of joy. Grievs accepted change their nature. "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." The man who in the darkness took in the dark guest to sit by his fireside finds in the morning that she is transfigured, and her name is Gladness. Rich vintages are gathered on the crumbling lava of the quiescent volcano. Even for irremediable losses and immedicable griefs, the psalmist's prophecy is true, only that for these "the morning" is beyond earth's dim dawns, and breaks when this night which we call life, and which is wearing thin, is past. In the level light of that sunrise, every raindrop becomes a rainbow, and every sorrow rightly—that is, submissively—borne shall be represented by a special and particular joy.

But the thrilling sense of recent deliverance runs in too strong a current to be long turned aside, even by the thought of others' praise; and the personal element recurs in ver. 6, and persists till the close. This latter part falls into three well-marked minor divisions: the confession of self-confidence, bred of ease and shattered by chastisement, in vv. 6, 7; the prayer of the man startled into renewed dependence in vv. 8-10; and the closing reiterated commemoration of mercies received and vow of thankful praise, which echoes the first part, in vv. 11, 12.

In ver. 6 the psalmist's foolish confidence is emphatically contrasted with the truth won by experience and stated in ver. 5. "The law of God's dealings is so, but I—I thought so and so." The word rendered "prosperity" may be taken as meaning also security. The passage from the one idea to the other is easy, inasmuch as calm days lull men to sleep, and make it hard to believe that

"to-morrow shall" not "be as this day." Even devout hearts are apt to count upon the continuance of present good. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." The bottom of the crater of Vesuvius had once great trees growing, the produce of centuries of quiescence. It would be difficult to think, when looking at them, that they would ever be torn up and whirled aloft in flame by a new outburst. While continual peril and change may not foster remembrance of God, continuous peace is but too apt to lull to forgetfulness of Him. The psalmist was beguiled by comfort into saying precisely what "the wicked said in his heart" (Psalm x. 6). How different may be the meaning of the same words on different lips! The mad arrogance of the godless man's confidence, the error of the good man rocked to sleep by prosperity and the warranted confidence of a trustful soul are all expressed by the same words; but the last has an addition which changes the whole: "*Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*" The end of the first man's boast can only be destruction; that of the third's faith will certainly be "pleasures for evermore"; that of the second's lapse from dependence is recorded in ver. 7. The sudden crash of his false security is graphically reproduced by the abrupt clauses without connecting particles. It was the "favour" already celebrated which gave the stability which had been abused. Its effect is described in terms of which the general meaning is clear, though the exact rendering is doubtful. "Thou hast [or hadst] established strength to my mountain" is harsh, and the proposed emendation (Hupfeld, Cheyne, etc.), "hast set me on strong mountains," requires the addition to the text of the pronoun. In either case, we have a natural metaphor for prosperity. The emphasis lies on the recognition that it was God's work, a truth which the psalmist had forgotten and had to be taught by the sudden withdrawal of God's countenance, on which followed his own immediate passage from careless security to agitation and alarm. The word "troubled" is that used for Saul's conflicting emotions and despair in the witch's house at Endor, and for the agitation of Joseph's brethren when they heard that the man who had their lives in his hand was their wronged brother. Thus alarmed and filled with distracting thoughts was the psalmist. "Thou didst hide Thy face," describes his calamities in their source. When the sun goes in, an immediate gloom wraps the land, and the birds cease to sing. But the "trouble" was preferable to "security," for it drove to God. Any tempest which does that is better than calm which beguiles from Him; and, since all His storms are meant to "drive us to His breast," they come from His "favour."

The approach to God is told in vv. 8-10, of which the two latter are a quotation of the prayer then wrung from the psalmist. The ground of this appeal for deliverance from a danger threatening life is as in Hezekiah's prayer (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19), and reflects the same conception of the state of the dead as Psalm vi. 5. If the suppliant dies, his voice will be missed from the chorus which sings God's praise on earth. "The dust" (*i.e.*, the grave) is a region of silence. Here, where life yielded daily proofs of God's "truth" (*i.e.*, faithfulness), it could be extolled, but there dumb tongues could bring Him no "profit" of praise. The boldness of the thought that God is

in some sense advantaged by men's magnifying of His faithfulness, the cheerless gaze into the dark realm, and the implication that to live is desired not only for the sake of life's joys, but in order to show forth God's dealings, are all remarkable. The tone of the prayer indicates the imperfect view of the future life which shadows many psalms, and could only be completed by the historical facts of the Resurrection and Ascension. Concern for the honour of the Old Testament revelation may, in this matter, be stretched to invalidate the distinctive glory of the New, which has "brought life and immortality to light."

With quick transition, corresponding to the swiftness of the answer to prayer, the closing pair of verses tells of the instantaneous change which that answer wrought. As in the earlier metaphor weeping was transformed into joy, here mourning is turned into dancing, and God's hand unties the cord which loosely bound the sackcloth robe, and arrays the mourner in festival attire. The same conception of the sweetness of grateful praise to the ear of God which was presented in the prayer recurs here, where the purpose of God's gifts is regarded as being man's praise. The thought may be construed so as to be repulsive, but its true force is to present God as desiring hearts' love and trust, and as "seeking such to worship Him," because therein they will find supreme and abiding bliss. "My glory," that wonderful personal being, which in its lowest debasement retains glimmering reflections caught from God, is never so truly glory as when it "sings praise to Thee," and never so blessed as when, through a longer "for ever" than the psalmist saw stretching before him, it "gives thanks unto Thee."

PSALM XXXI.

- 1 In Thee, Jehovah, have I taken refuge: let me never be ashamed;
In Thy righteousness deliver me.
- 2 Bend down Thine ear to me: speedily extricate me;
Be to me for a refuge-rock, for a fortress-house, to save me.
- 3 For my rock and my fortress art Thou,
And for Thy name's sake wilt guide me and lead me.
- 4 Thou wilt bring me from the net which they have hidden for me,
For Thou art my defence.
- 5 Into Thy hand I commend my spirit;
Thou hast redeemed me, Jehovah, God of faithfulness.
- 6 I hate the worshippers of empty nothingnesses;
And I—to Jehovah do I cling.
- 7 I will exult and be joyful in Thy lovingkindness,
Who hast beheld my affliction,
[And] hast taken note of the distresses of my soul.
- 8 And hast not enclosed me in the hand of the enemy,
Thou hast set my feet at large.
- 9 Be merciful to me, Jehovah, for I am in straits;
Wasted away in grief is my eye,—my soul and my body.
- 10 For my life is consumed with sorrow,
And my years with sighing;
My strength reels because of mine iniquity,
And my bones are wasted.

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- 11 Because of all my adversaries I am become a reproach
And to my neighbours exceedingly, and a fear to my acquaintances;
They who see me without flee from me.
- 12 I am forgotten, out of mind, like a dead man;
I am like a broken vessel.
- 13 For I hear the whispering of many,
Terror on every side;
In their consulting together against me,
To take away my life do they scheme.
- 14 And I—on Thee I trust, Jehovah;
I say, My God art Thou.
- 15 In Thy hand are my times;
Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my pursuers.
- 16 Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant;
Save me in Thy lovingkindness.
- 17 Jehovah, I shall not be shamed, for I cry to Thee;
The wicked shall be shamed, shall be silent in Sheol.
- 18 Dumb shall the lying lips be made,
That speak arrogance against the righteous,
In pride and contempt.
- 19 How great is Thy goodness which Thou dost keep in secret for them who fear Thee,
Dost work before the sons of men for them who take refuge in Thee.
- 20 Thou dost shelter them in the shelter of Thy face from the plots of men;
Thou keepest them in secret in an arbour from the strife of tongues.
- 21 Blessed be Jehovah,
For He has done marvels of lovingkindness for me in a strong city!
- 22 And I—I said in my agitation, I am cut off from before Thine eyes,
But truly Thou didst hear the voice of my supplication in my crying aloud to Thee.
- 23 Love Jehovah, all His beloved;
Jehovah keeps faithfulness,
And repays overflowing him that practises pride.
- 24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
All ye that wait on Jehovah.

THE swift transitions of feeling in this psalm may seem strange to colder natures whose lives run smoothly, but reveal a brother-soul to those who have known what it is to ride on the top of the wave and then to go down into its trough. What is peculiar to the psalm is not only the inclusion of the whole gamut of feeling, but the force with which each key is struck and the persistence through all of the one ground tone of cleaving to Jehovah. The poetic temperament passes quickly from hope to fear. The devout man in sorrow can sometimes look away from a darkened earth to a bright sky, but the stern realities of pain and loss again force themselves in upon him. The psalm is like an April day, in which sunshine and rain chase each other across the plain.

"The beautiful uncertain weather,
Where gloom and glory meet together,"

makes the landscape live, and is the precursor of fruitfulness.

The stream of the psalmist's thoughts now runs in shadow of grim cliffs and vexed by opposing

rocks, and now opens out in sunny stretches of smoothness; but its source is "In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge" (ver. 1): and its end is "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all ye that wait for Jehovah" (ver. 24).

The first turn of the stream is in vv. 1-4, which consist of petitions and their grounds. The prayers reveal the suppliant's state. They are the familiar cries of an afflicted soul common to many psalms, and presenting no special features. The needs of the human heart are uniform, and the cry of distress is much alike on all lips. This sufferer asks, as his fellows have done and will do, for deliverance, a swift answer, shelter and defence, guidance and leading, escape from the net spread for him. These are the commonplaces of prayer, which God is not wearied of hearing, and which fit us all. The last place to look for originality is in the "sighing of such as be sorrowful." The pleas on which the petitions rest are also familiar. The man who trusts in Jehovah has a right to expect that his trust will not be put to shame, since God is faithful. Therefore the first plea is the psalmist's faith, expressed in ver. 1 by the word which literally means to flee to a refuge. The fact that he has done so makes his deliverance a work of God's "righteousness." The metaphor latent in "flee for refuge" comes into full sight in that beautiful plea in ver. 3, which unsympathetic critics would call illogical, "*Be for me a refuge-rock, for . . . Thou art my rock.*" Be what Thou art; manifest Thyself in act to be what Thou art in nature: be what I, Thy poor servant, have taken Thee to be. My heart has clasped Thy revelation of Thyself and fled to this strong tower. Let me not be deceived and find it incapable of sheltering me from my foes. "Therefore for Thy name's sake," or because of that revelation and for its glory as true in men's sight, deliver me. God's nature as revealed is the strongest plea with Him, and surely that cannot but be potent and acceptable prayer which says, Be what Thou art, and what Thou hast taught me to believe Thee.

Vv. 5-8 prolong the tone of the preceding, with some difference, inasmuch as God's past acts are more specifically dwelt on as the ground of confidence. In this turn of the stream, faith does not so much supplicate as meditate, plucking the flower of confidence from the nettle of past dangers and deliverances, and renewing its acts of surrender. The sacred words which Jesus made His own on the cross, and which have been the last utterance of so many saints, were meant by the psalmist to apply to life, not to death. He laid his spirit as a precious deposit in God's hand, assured that He was able to keep that which was committed to Him. Often had he done this before, and now he does it once more. Petitions pass into surrender. Resignation as well as confidence speaks. To lay one's life in God's hand is to leave the disposal of it to Him, and such absolute submission must come as the calm close and incipient reward of every cry for deliverance. Trust should not be hard to those who can remember. So Jehovah's past redemptions—*i. e.*, deliverances from temporal dangers—are its ground here; and these avail as pledges for the future, since He is "the God of truth," who can never falsify His past. The more nestlingly a soul clings to God, the more vehemently will it recoil from other trust. Attraction and repulsion are equal and contrary. The more clearly it sees God's faithfulness and living power as a reality

operating in its life, the more penetrating will be its detection of the falseness of other helpers. "Nothingnesses of emptiness" are they all to one who has felt the clasp of that great, tender hand; and unless the soul feels them to be such, it will never strongly clutch or firmly hold its true stay. Such trust has its crown in joyful experience of God's mercy even before the actual deliverance comes to pass, as wind-borne fragrance meets the traveller before he sees the spice gardens from which it comes. The cohortative verbs in ver. 7 may be petition ("Let me exult"), or they may be anticipation of future gladness, but in either case some waft of joy has already reached the singer, as how could it fail to do, when his faith was thus renewing itself, and his eyes gazing on God's deeds of old? The past tenses in vv. 7, 8, refer to former experiences. God's sight of the psalmist's affliction was not idle contemplation, but implied active intervention. To "take note of the distresses of my soul" (or possibly, "of my soul in distresses") is the same as to care for it. It is enough to know that God sees the secret sorrows, the obscure trials which can be told to none. He loves as well as knows, and looks on no griefs which He will not comfort nor on any wounds which He is not ready to bind up. The psalmist was sure that God had seen, because he had experienced His delivering power, as he goes on joyfully to tell. The figure in ver. 8 *a* points back to the act of trust in ver. 5. How should God let the hand of the enemy close round and crush the spirit which had been entrusted to His own hand? One sees the greedy fingers of the foe drawing themselves together on their prey as on a fly, but they close on nothing. Instead of suffering constraint the delivered spirit walks at liberty. They who are enclosed in God's hand have ample room there; and unhindered activity, with the ennobling consciousness of freedom, is the reward of trust.

Is it inconceivable that such sunny confidence should be suddenly clouded and followed, as in the third turn of thought (vv. 9-13), by plaintive absorption in the sad realities of present distress? The very remembrance of a brighter past may have sharpened the sense of present trouble. But it is to be noted that these complaints are prayer, not aimless, self-pitying wailing. The enumeration of miseries which begins with "Have mercy upon me, for—," has a hidden hope tinging its darkness, like the faint flush of sunrise on clouds. There is no such violent change of tone as is sometimes conceived; but the pleas of the former parts are continued in this section, which adds the psalmist's sore need to God's past and the suppliant's faith, as another reason for Jehovah's help. He begins with the effects of his trouble on himself in body and soul; thence he passes to its consequences on those around him, and finally he spreads before God its cause: plots against his life. The resemblances to Psalm vi. and to several parts of Jeremiah are unmistakable. In vv. 9, 10, the physical and mental effects of anxiety are graphically described. Sunken eyes, enfeebled soul, wasted body, are gaunt witnesses of his distress. Cares seem to him to have gnawed his very bones, so weak is he. All that he can do is to sigh. And worse than all, conscience tells him that his own sin underlies his trouble, and so he is without inward stay. The picture seems exaggerated to easy-going, prosperous people; but many a sufferer has since recognised himself in it as in a mirror, and been thankful for words

which gave voice to his pained heart and cheered him with the sense of companionship in the gloom.

Vv. 11, 12, are mainly the description of the often-repeated experience of friends forsaking the troubled. "Because of all my adversaries" somewhat anticipates ver. 13 in assigning the reason for the cowardly desertion. The three phrases "neighbours," "acquaintance," and "those who see me without" indicate concentric circles of increasing diameter. The psalmist is in the middle; and round him are, first, neighbours, who pour reproach on him, because of his enemies, then the wider range of "acquaintances," afraid to have anything to do with one who has such strong and numerous foes, and remotest of all, the chance people met on the way who fly from Him, as infected and dangerous. "They all forsook Him and fled." That bitter ingredient mingles in every cup of sorrow. The meanness of human nature and the selfishness of much apparent friendship are commonplaces, but the experience of them is always as painful and astonishing, as if nobody besides had ever suffered therefrom. The roughness of structure in ver 11 *b*, "and unto my neighbours exceedingly," seems to fit the psalmist's emotion, and does not need the emendation of "exceedingly" into "burden" (Delitzsch) or "shaking of the head" (Cheyne).

In ver. 12 the desertion is bitterly summed up, as like the oblivion that waits for the dead. The unsympathising world goes on its way, and friends find new interests and forget the broken man, who used to be so much to them, as completely as if he were in his grave, or as they do the damaged cup, flung on the rubbish heap. Ver. 13 discloses the nature of the calamity which has had these effects. Whispering slanders buzz round him; he is ringed about with causes for fear, since enemies are plotting his death. The use of the first part of the verse by Jeremiah does not require the hypothesis of his authorship of the psalm, nor of the prophet's priority to the psalmist. It is always a difficult problem to settle which of two cases of the employment of the same phrase is original and which quotation. The criteria are elastic, and the conclusion is very often arrived at in deference to preconceived ideas. But Jeremiah uses the phrase as if it were a proverb or familiar expression, and the psalmist as if it were the freshly struck coinage of his own experience.

Again the key changes, and the minor is modulated into confident petition. It is the test of true trust that it is deepened by the fullest recognition of dangers and enemies. The same facts may feed despair and be the fuel of faith. This man's eyes took in all surrounding evils, and these drove him to avert his gaze from them and fix it on Jehovah. That is the best thing that troubles can do for us. If they, on the contrary, monopolise our sight, they turn our hearts to stone; but if we can wrench our stare from them, they clear our vision to see our Helper. In vv. 14-18 we have the recoil of the devout soul to God, occasioned by its recognition of need and helplessness. This turn of the psalm begins with a strong emphatic adversative: "But I—I trust in Jehovah." We see the man flinging himself into the arms of God. The word for "trust" is the same as in ver. 6, and means to *hang* or *lean upon*, or, as we say, to *depend on*. He utters his trust in his prayer, which occupies the rest of this part of the psalm. A prayer, which is the voice of trust, does not begin with petition, but with renewed adherence to God and happy consciousness

of the soul's relation to Him, and thence melts into supplication for the blessings which are consequences of that relation. To feel, on occasion of the very dreariness of circumstances, that God is mine, makes miraculous sunrise at midnight. Built on that act of trust claiming its portion in God, is the recognition of God's all-regulating hand, as shaping the psalmist's "times," the changing periods, each of which has its definite character, responsibilities, and opportunities. Every man's life is a series of crises, in each of which there is some special work to be done or lesson to be learned, some particular virtue to be cultivated or sacrifice made. The opportunity does not return. "It might have been once; and we missed it, lost it for ever."

But the psalmist is thinking rather of the varying complexion of his days as bright or dark; and looking beyond circumstances, he sees God. The "hand of mine enemies" seems shrivelled into impotence when contrasted with that great hand, to which he has committed his spirit, and in which are his "times"; and the psalmist's recognition that it holds his destiny is the ground of his prayer for deliverance from the foes' paralysed grasp. They who feel the tender clasp of an almighty hand need not doubt their security from hostile assaults. The petitions proper are three in number: for deliverance, for the light of God's face, and for "salvation." The central petition recalls the priestly blessing (Num. vi. 25). It asks for consciousness of God's friendship and for the manifestation thereof in safety from present dangers. That face, turned in love to a man, can "make a sunshine in a shady place," and brings healing on its beams. It seems best to take the verbs in vv. 17, 18, as futures and not optatives. The prayer passes into assurance of its answer, and what was petition in ver. 1 is now trustful prediction: "I shall not be ashamed, for I cry to Thee." With like elevation of faith, the psalmist foresees the end of the whispering defamers round him: shame for their vain plots and their silent descent to the silent land. The loudest outcry against God's lovers will be hushed some day, and the hands that threatened them will be laid motionless and stiff across motionless breasts. He who stands by God and looks forward, can, by the light of that face, see the end of much transient bluster, "with pride and contempt," against the righteous. Lying lips fall dumb; praying lips, like the psalmist's, are opened to show forth God's praise. His prayer is audible still across the centuries; the mutterings of his enemies only live in his mention of them.

That assurance prepares the way for the noble burst of thanksgiving, as for accomplished deliverance, which ends the psalm, springing up in a joyous outpouring of melody, like a lark from a bare furrow. But there is no such change of tone as to warrant the supposition that these last verses (19-24) are either the psalmist's later addition or the work of another, nor do they oblige us to suppose that the whole psalm was written after the peril which it commemorates had passed. Rather the same voice which triumphantly rings out in these last verses has been sounding in the preceding, even in their saddest strains. The ear catches a twitter hushed again and renewed more than once before the full song breaks out. The psalmist has been absorbed with his own troubles till now, but thankfulness expands his vision, and suddenly there is with him a multitude of fellow-dependants on God's goodness. He hungers alone,

but he feasts in company. The abundance of God's "goodness" is conceived of as a treasure stored, and in part openly displayed, before the sons of men. The antithesis suggests manifold applications of the contrast, such as the inexhaustibility of the mercy which, after all revelation, remains unrevealed, and after all expenditure, has not perceptibly diminished in its shining mass, as of bullion in some vault; or the varying dealings of God, who sometimes, while sorrow is allowed to have its scope, seems to keep his riches of help under lock and key, and then again flashes them forth in deeds of deliverance; or the difference between the partial unfolding of these on earth and the full endowment of His servants with "riches in glory" hereafter. All these carry the one lesson that there is more in God than any creature or all creatures have ever drawn from Him or can ever draw. The repetition of the idea of hiding in ver. 20 is a true touch of devout poetry. The same word is used for laying up the treasure and for sheltering in a pavilion from the jangle of tongues. The wealth and the poor men who need it are stored together, as it were; and the place where they both lie safe is God Himself. How can they be poor who are dwelling close beside infinite riches? The psalmist has just prayed that God would make His face to shine upon him; and now he rejoices in the assurance of the answer, and knows himself and all like-minded men to be hidden in that "glorious privacy of light," where evil things cannot live. As if caught up to and "clothed with the sun," he and they are beyond the reach of hostile conspiracies, and have "outsoared the shadow of" earth's antagonisms. The great thought of security in God has never been more nobly expressed than by that magnificent metaphor of the light inaccessible streaming from God's face to be the bulwark of a poor man.

The personal tone recurs for a moment in vv. 21, 22, in which it is doubtful whether we hear thankfulness for deliverance anticipated as certain and so spoken of as past, since it is as good as done, or for some recently experienced marvel of lovingkindness, which heartens the psalmist in present trouble. If this psalm is David's, the reference may be to his finding a city of refuge, at the time when his fortunes were very low, in Ziklag, a strange place for a Jewish fugitive to be sheltered. One can scarcely help feeling that the allusion is so specific as to suggest historical fact as its basis. At the same time it must be admitted that the expression may be the carrying on of the metaphor of the hiding in a pavilion. The "strong city" is worthily interpreted as being God Himself, though the historical explanation is tempting. God's mercy makes a true man ashamed of his doubts, and therefore the thanksgiving of ver. 21 leads to the confession of ver. 22. Agitated into despair, the psalmist had thought that he was "cut off from God's eyes"—i.e., hidden so as not to be helped—but the event has showed that God both heard and saw him. If alarm does not so make us think that God is blind to our need and deaf to our cry as to make us dumb, we shall be taught the folly of our fears by His answers to our prayers. These will have a voice of gentle rebuke, and ask us, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" He delivers first, and lets the deliverance stand in place of chiding.

The whole closes with a summons to all whom Jehovah loves to love Him for His mercy's sake.

The joyful singer longs for a chorus to join his single voice, as all devout hearts do. He generalises his own experience, as all who have for themselves experienced deliverance are entitled and bound to do, and discerns that in his single case the broad law is attested that the faithful are guarded whatever dangers assail, and "the proud doer" abundantly repaid for all his contempt and hatred of the just. Therefore the last result of contemplating God's ways with His servants is an incentive to courage, strength, and patient waiting for the Lord.

PSALM XXXII.

- 1 Blessed he whose transgression is taken away,
whose sin is covered,
- 2 Blessed the man to whom Jehovah reckons not
iniquity.
In whose spirit is no guile.
- 3 When I kept silence, my bones rotted away,
Through my roaring all the day.
- 4 For day and night Thy hand weighed heavily
upon me;
My sap was turned [as] in drougts of summer. Selah.
- 5 My sin I acknowledged to Thee, and my in-
iquity I covered not;
I said, I will confess because of my transgres-
sions to Jehovah,
And Thou—Thou didst take away the iniquity
of my sin. Selah.
- 6 Because of this let every one beloved [of Thee]
pray to Thee in a time of finding;
Surely when great waters are in flood, to him
they shall not reach.
- 7 Thou art a shelter for me; from trouble wilt
Thou preserve me,
[With] shouts of deliverance wilt encircle me.
Selah.
- 8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way
which thou shouldest go;
I will counsel thee, [with] mine eye upon thee.
- 9 Be not ye like horse, like mule, without under-
standing,
Whose harness to hold them in is bit and
bridle,
Else no coming near to thee.
- 10 The wicked has many sorrows,
And he who trusts in Jehovah—with loving-
kindness will He encircle him.
- 11 Rejoice in Jehovah, and exult, ye righteous;
And shout joyfully, all ye upright of heart.

ONE must have a dull ear not to hear the voice of personal experience in this psalm. It throbs with emotion, and is a burst of rapture from a heart tasting the sweetness of the new joy of forgiveness. It is hard to believe that the speaker is but a personification of the nation, and the difficulty is recognised by Cheyne's concession that we have here "principally, though not exclusively, a national psalm." The old opinion that it records David's experience in the dark time when, for a whole year, he lived impenitent after his great sin of sense, and was then broken down by Nathan's message and restored to peace through pardon following swiftly on penitence, is still defensible, and gives a fit setting for this gem. Whoever was the singer, his song goes deep down

to permanent realities in conscience and in men's relations to God, and therefore is not for an age, but for all time. Across the dim waste of years, we hear this man speaking our sins, our penitence, our joy; and the antique words are as fresh, and fit as close to our experiences, as if they had been welled up from a living heart to-day. The theme is the way of forgiveness and its blessedness; and this is set forth in two parts; the first (vv. 1-5) a leaf from the psalmist's autobiography, the second (ver. 6 to end) the generalisation of individual experience and its application to others. In each part the prevailing division of verses is into strophes of two, each containing two members, but with some irregularity.

The page from the psalmist's confessions (vv. 1-5) begins with a burst of rapturous thankfulness for the joy of forgiveness (vv. 1, 2), passes to paint in dark colours the misery of sullen impotence (vv. 3, 4), and then, in one longer verse, tells with glad wonder how sudden and complete was the transition to the joy of forgiveness by the way of penitence. It is a chart of one man's path from the depths to the heights, and avails to guide all.

The psalmist begins abruptly with an exclamation (Oh, the blessedness, etc.). His new joy wells up irrepressibly. To think that he who had gone so far down in the mire, and had locked his lips in silence for so long, should find himself so blessed! Joy so exuberant cannot content itself with one statement of its grounds. It runs over in synonyms for sin and its forgiveness, which are not feeble tautology. The heart is too full to be emptied at one outpouring, and though all the clauses describe the same things, they do so with differences. This is true with regard to the words both for sin and for pardon. The three designations of the former present three aspects of its hideousness. The first, rendered ("transgression,") conceives of it as rebellion against rightful authority, not merely breach of an impersonal law, but breaking away from a rightful king. The second ("sin") describes it as missing a mark. What is in regard to God rebellion is in regard to myself missing the aim, whether that aim be considered as that which a man is, by his very make and relations, intended to be and do, or as that which he proposes to himself by his act. All sin tragically fails to hit the mark in both these senses. It is a failure as to reaching the ideal of conduct, "the chief end of man," and not less so as to winning the satisfaction sought by the deed. It keeps the word of promise to the ear, and breaks it to the hope, ever luring by lying offers; and if it gives the poor delights which it holds out, it ever adds something that embitters them like spirits of wine methylated and made undrinkable. It is always a blunder to do wrong. The last synonym ("iniquity") means crookedness or distortion, and seems to embody the same idea as our words "right" and "wrong," namely the contrast between the straight line of duty and the contorted lines drawn by sinful hands. What runs parallel with law is right; what diverges is wrong. The three expressions for pardon are also eloquent in their variety. The first word means taken away or lifted off, as a burden from aching shoulders. It implies more than holding back penal consequences; it is the removal of sin itself, and that not merely in the multitudinousness of its manifestations in act, but in the depth of its inward source. This is the metaphor which Bunyan has

made so familiar by his picture of the pilgrim losing his load at the cross. The second ("covered") paints pardon as God's shrouding the foul thing from His pure eyes, so that His action is no longer determined by its existence. The third describes forgiveness as God's not reckoning a man's sin to him, in which expression hovers some allusion to cancelling a debt. The clause "in whose spirit is no guile" is best taken as a conditional one, pointing to sincerity which confesses guilt as a condition of pardon. But the alternative construction as a continuation of the description of the forgiven man is quite possible; and if thus understood, the crowning blessing of pardon is set forth as being the liberation of the forgiven spirit from all "guile" or evil. God's kiss of forgiveness sucks the poison from the wound.

Retrospect of the dismal depth from which it has climbed is natural to a soul sunning itself on high. Therefore on the overflowing description of present blessedness follows a shuddering glance downwards to past unrest. Sullen silence caused the one; frank acknowledgment brought the other. He who will not speak his sin to God has to groan. A dumb conscience often makes a loud-voiced pain. This man's sin had indeed missed its aim; for it had brought about three things: rotting bones (which may be but a strong metaphor or may be a physical fact), the consciousness of God's displeasure dimly felt as if a great hand were pressing him down, and the drying up of the sap of his life, as if the fierce heat of summer had burned the marrow in his bones. These were the fruits of pleasant sin, and by reason of them many a moan broke from his locked lips. Stolid indifference may delay remorse, but its serpent fang strikes soon or later, and then strength and joy die. The *Selah* indicates a swell or prolongation of the accompaniment, to emphasise this terrible picture of a soul gnawing itself.

The abrupt turn to description of the opposite disposition in ver. 5 suggests a sudden gush of penitence. As at a bound, the soul passes from dreary remorse. The break with the former self is complete, and effected in one wrench. Some things are best done by degrees; and some, of which forsaking sin is one, are best done quickly. And as swift as the resolve to crave pardon, so swift is the answer giving it. We are reminded of that gospel compressed into a verse, "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Again the three designations of sin are employed, though in different order; and the act of confession is thrice mentioned, as that of forgiveness was. The fulness and immediateness of pardon are emphatically given by the double epithet "the iniquity of thy sin" and by the representation that it follows the resolve to confess, and does not wait for the act. The Divine love is so eager to forgive that it tarries not for actual confession, but anticipates it, as the father interrupts the prodigal's acknowledgment with gifts and welcome. The *Selah* at the end of ver. 5 is as triumphant as that at the close of ver. 4 had been sad. It parts the autobiographical section from the more general one which follows.

In the second part the solitary soul translates its experience into exhortations for all, and woos men to follow on the same path, by setting forth in rich variety the joys of pardon. The exhortation first dwells on the positive blessings associated with penitence (vv. 6, 7), and next on the

degradation and sorrow involved in obstinate hard-heartedness (vv. 8-10). The natural impulse of him who has known both is to beseech others to share his happy experience, and the psalmist's course of thought obeys that impulse, for the future "shall pray" (R.V.) is better regarded as hortatory "let . . . pray." "Because of this" does not express the contents of the petitions, but their reason. The manifestation of God as infinitely ready to forgive should hearten to prayer; and since God's beloved need forgiveness day by day, even though they may not have fallen into such gross sin as this psalmist, there is no incongruity in the exhortation being addressed to them. "He that is washed" still needs that feet fouled in muddy ways should be cleansed. Every time of seeking by such prayer is a "time of finding"; but the phrase implies that there is a time of not finding, and, in its very graciousness, is heavy with warning against delay. With forgiveness comes security. The penitent, praying, pardoned man is set as on a rock islet in the midst of floods, whether these be conceived of as temptation to sin or as calamities. The hortatory tone is broken in ver. 7 by the recurrence of the personal element, since the singer's heart was too full for silence; but there is no real interruption, for the joyous utterance of one's own faith is often the most winning persuasive, and a devout man can scarcely hold out to others the sweetness of finding God without at the same time tasting what he offers. Unless he does, his words will ring unreal. "Thou art a shelter for me" (same word as in xxvii. 5, xxxi. 20), is the utterance of trust; and the emphasis is on "my." To hide in God is to be "preserved from trouble," not in the sense of being exempt, but in that of not being overwhelmed, as the beautiful last clause of ver. 7 shows, in which "shouts of deliverance" from trouble which had pressed are represented by a bold, but not harsh, metaphor as ringing the psalmist round. The air is filled with jubilant voices, the echoes of his own. The word rendered "songs" or preferably "shouts" is unusual, and its consonants repeat the last three of the preceding word ("shalt preserve me"). These peculiarities have led to the suggestion that we have in it a "dittograph." If so, the remaining words of the last clause would read, "Thou wilt compass me about with deliverance," which would be a perfectly appropriate expression. But probably the similarity of letters is a play upon words, of which we have another example in the preceding clause where the consonants of the word for "trouble," reappear in their order in the verb "wilt preserve." The shout of joy is caught up by the *Selah*.

But now the tone changes into solemn warning against obstinate disregard of God's leading. It is usual to suppose that the psalmist still speaks, but surely "I will counsel thee, with mine eye upon thee," does not fit human lips. It is to be observed, too, that in ver. 8 a single person is addressed, who is most naturally taken to be the same as he who spoke his individual faith in ver. 7. In other words, the psalmist's confidence evokes a Divine response, and that brief interchange of clinging trust and answering promise stands in the midst of the appeal to men, which it scarcely interrupts. Ver. 9 may either be regarded as the continuance of the Divine voice, or perhaps better, as the resumption by the psalmist of his hortatory address. God's direction as to duty and protection in peril are both included in the prom-

ise of ver. 8. With His eye upon His servant, He will show him the way, and will keep him ever in sight as he travels on it. The beautiful meaning of the A.V., that God guides with a glance those who dwell near enough to Him to see His look, is scarcely contained in the words, though it is true that the sense of pardon binds men to Him in such sweet bonds that they are eager to catch the faintest indications of His will, and "His looks command, His lightest words are spells."

Vv. 9, 10, are a warning against brutish obstinacy. The former verse has difficulties in detail, but its drift is plain. It contrasts the gracious guidance which avails for those made docile by forgiveness and trust with the harsh constraint which must curb and coerce mulish natures. The only things which such understand are bits and bridles. They will not come near to God without such rough outward constraint, any more than an unbroken horse will approach a man unless dragged by a halter. That untamableness except by force is the reason why "many sorrows" must strike "the wicked." If these are here compared to "bit" and "bridle," they are meant to drive to God, and are therefore regarded as being such mercies as the obstinate are capable of receiving. Obedience extorted by force is no obedience, but approach to God compelled by sorrows that restrain unbridled license of tempers and of sense is accepted as a real approach and then is purged into access with confidence. They who are at first driven are afterwards drawn, and taught to know no delight so great as that of coming and keeping near God.

The antithesis of "wicked" and "he that trusteth in Jehovah" is significant as teaching that faith is the true opposite of sinfulness. Not less full of meaning is the sequence of trust, righteousness, and uprightness of heart in vv. 10, 11. Faith leads to righteousness, and they are upright, not who have never fallen, but who have been raised from their fall by pardon. The psalmist had thought of himself as compassed with shouts of deliverance. Another circle is cast round him and all who, with him, trust Jehovah. A ring of mercies, like a fiery wall, surrounds the pardoned, faithful soul, without a break through which a real evil can creep. Therefore the encompassing songs of deliverance are continuous as the mercies which they hymn, and in the centre of that double circle the soul sits secure and thankful.

The psalm ends with a joyful summons to general joy. All share in the solitary soul's exultation. The depth of penitence measures the height of gladness. The breath that was spent in "roaring all the day long" is used for shouts of deliverance. Every tear sparkles like a diamond in the sunshine of pardon, and he who begins with the lowly cry for forgiveness will end with lofty songs of joy and be made, by God's guidance and Spirit, righteous and upright in heart.

PSALM XXXIII.

- 1 Rejoice aloud, ye righteous, in Jehovah,
For the upright praise is seemly.
- 2 Give thanks to Jehovah with harp;
With ten-stringed psaltery play unto Him.
- 3 Sing to Him a new song,
Strike well [the strings] with joyful shouts.
- 4 For upright is the word of Jehovah,
And all His work is in faithfulness.

- 5 He loves righteousness and judgment,
Of Jehovah's lovingkindness the earth is full.
- 6 By the word of Jehovah the heavens were
made,
And all their host by the breath of His mouth.
- 7 Who gathereth as an heap the waters of the
sea,
Who layeth up the deeps in storehouses.
- 8 Let all the earth fear Jehovah,
Before Him let all inhabitants of the world
stand in awe.
- 9 For He, He spoke and it was;
He, He commanded and it stood.
- 10 Jehovah has brought to nothing the counsel
of the nations,
He has frustrated the designs of the peoples.
- 11 The counsel of Jehovah shall stand for ever,
The designs of His heart to generation after
generation.
- 12 Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah,
The people He has chosen for an inheritance for
Himself.
- 13 From heaven Jehovah looks down,
He beholds all the sons of men.
- 14 From the place where He sits, He gazes
On all the inhabitants of earth:—
- 15 Even He who forms the hearts of them all,
Who marks all their works.
- 16 A king is not saved by the greatness of [his]
army,
A hero is not delivered by the greatness of [his]
strength.
- 17 A horse is a vain thing for safety;
And by the greatness of its strength it does not
give escape.
- 18 Behold the eye of Jehovah is on them who fear
Him,
On them who hope for His lovingkindness,
- 19 To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine.
- 20 Our soul waits for Jehovah,
Our help and our shield is He.
- 21 For in Him shall our heart rejoice,
For in His holy name have we trusted.
- 22 Let Thy lovingkindness, Jehovah, be upon us,
According as we have hoped for Thee.

THIS is the last of the four psalms in Book I. which have no title, the others being Psalms i., ii., which are introductory, and x. which is closely connected with ix. Some have endeavoured to establish a similar connection between xxxii. and xxxiii.; but, while the closing summons to the righteous in the former is substantially repeated in the opening words of the latter, there is little other trace of connection, except the references in both to "the eye of Jehovah" (xxxii. 8, xxxiii. 18); and no two psalms could be more different in subject and tone than these. The one is full of profound, personal emotion, and deals with the depths of experience; the other is devoid of personal reference, and is a devout, calm contemplation of the creative power and providential government of God. It is kindred with the later type of psalms, and has many verbal allusions connecting it with them. It has probably been placed here simply because of the similarity just noticed between its beginning and the end of the preceding. The reasons for the arrangement of the psalter were, so far as they can be traced, usually such merely verbal coincidences. To one who has been travelling through the heights and

depths, the storms and sunny gleams of the previous psalms, this impersonal didactic meditation, with its historical allusions and entire ignoring of sins and sorrows, is indeed "a new song." It is apparently meant for liturgical use, and falls into three unequal parts; the first three verses and the last three being prelude and conclusion, the former summoning the "righteous" to praise Jehovah, the latter putting words of trust and triumph and prayer into their mouths. The central mass (vv. 4-19) celebrates the creative and providential work of God, in two parts, of which the first extends these Divine acts over the world (vv. 4-11) and the second concentrates them on Israel (vv. 12-19).

The opening summons to praise takes us far away from the solitary wrestlings and communings in former psalms. Now

"The singers lift up their voice,
And the trumpets make endeavour,
Sounding, 'In God rejoice!
In Him rejoice for ever!'"

But the clear recognition of purity as the condition of access to God speaks in this invocation as distinctly as in any of the preceding. "The righteous" whose lives conform to the Divine will, and only they, can shout aloud their joy in Jehovah. Praise fits and adorns the lips of the "upright" only, whose spirits are without twist of self-will and sin. The direction of character expressed in the word is horizontal rather than vertical, and is better represented by "straight" than "upright." Praise gilds the gold of purity and adds grace even to the beauty of holiness. Experts tell us that the *kinnor* (harp, A.V. and R.V.) and *nebel* (psaltery) were both stringed instruments, differing in the position of the sounding board, which was below in the former and above in the latter, and also in the covering of the strings (*v. Delitzsch*, Eng. transl. of latest ed. I. 7, n.). The "new song" is not necessarily the psalm itself, but may mean other thanksgivings evoked by God's meditated-on goodness. But in any case, it is noteworthy that the occasions of the new song are very old acts, stretching back to the first creation and continued down through the ages. The psalm has no trace of special recent mercies, but to the devout soul the old deeds are never antiquated, and each new meditation on them breaks into new praise. So inexhaustible is the theme that all generations take it up in turn, and find "songs unheard" and "sweeter" with which to celebrate it. Each new rising of the old sun brings music from the lips of Memnon, as he sits fronting the east. The facts of revelation must be sung by each age and soul for itself, and the glowing strains grow cold and archaic, while the ancient mercies which they magnify live on, bright and young. There is always room for a fresh voice to praise the old gospel, the old creation, the old providence.

This new song is saturated with reminiscences of old ones, and deals with familiar thoughts which have come to the psalmist with fresh power. He magnifies the moral attributes manifested in God's self-revelation, His creative Word, and His providential government. "The word of Jehovah," in ver. 4, is to be taken in the wide sense of every utterance of His thought or will ("non accipi pro doctrina, sed pro mundi gubernandi ratione," Calvin). It underlies His "works," as is more largely declared in the following verses.

It is "upright," the same word as in ver. 1, and here equivalent to the general idea of morally perfect. The acts which flow from it are "in faithfulness," correspond to and keep His word. The perfect word and works have for source the deep heart of Jehovah, which loves "righteousness and judgment," and therefore speaks and acts in accordance with these. Therefore the outcome of all is a world full of God's lovingkindness. The psalmist has won that "serene and blessed mood" in which the problem of life seems easy, and all harsh and gloomy thoughts have melted out of the sky. There is but one omnipotent Will at work everywhere, and that is a Will whose law for itself is the love of righteousness and truth. The majestic simplicity and universality of the cause are answered by the simplicity and universality of the result, the flooding of the whole world with blessing. Many another psalm shows how hard it is to maintain such a faith in the face of the terrible miseries of men, and the more complex "civilisation" becomes, the harder it grows; but it is well to hear sometimes the one clear note of gladness without its chord of melancholy.

The work of creation is set forth in vv. 6-9, as the effect of the Divine word alone. The psalmist is fascinated not by the glories created, but by the wonder of the process of creation. The Divine will uttered itself, and the universe was. Of course the thought is parallel with that of Genesis, "God said, Let there be . . . and there was . . ." Nor are we to antedate the Christian teaching of a personal Word of God, the agent of creation. The old versions and interpreters, followed by Cheyne, read "as in a bottle" for "as an heap," vocalising the text differently from the present pointing; but there seems to be an allusion to the wall of waters at the passage of the Red Sea, the same word being used in Miriam's song; with "depths" in the next clause, there as here (Exod. xv. 8). What is meant, however, here, is the separation of land and water at first, and possibly the continuance of the same power keeping them still apart, since the verbs in ver. 7 are participles, which imply continued action. The image of "an heap" is probably due to the same optical delusion which has coined the expression "the high seas," since, to an eye looking seawards from the beach, the level waters seem to rise as they recede; or it may merely express the gathering together in a mass. Away out there, in that ocean of which the Hebrews knew so little, were unplumbed depths in which, as in vast storehouses, the abundance of the sea was shut up, and the ever-present Word which made them at first was to them instead of bolts and bars. Possibly the thought of the storehouses suggested that of the Flood when these were opened, and that thought, crossing the psalmist's mind, led to the exhortation in ver. 8 to fear Jehovah, which would more naturally have followed ver. 9. The power displayed in creation is, however, a sufficient ground for the summons to reverent obedience, and ver. 9 may be but an emphatic repetition of the substance of the foregoing description. It is eloquent in its brevity and juxtaposition of the creative word and the created world. "It stood,"—"the word includes much; first, the coming into being (*Entstehen*), then, the continued subsistence (*Bestehen*), lastly, attendance (*Dastehen*) in readiness for service" (Stier).

From the original creation the psalmist's mind runs over the ages between it and him, and sees

the same mystical might of the Divine Will working in what we call providential government. God's bare word has power without material means. Nay, His very thoughts unspoken are endowed with immortal vigour, and are at bottom the only real powers in history. God's "thoughts stand," as creation does, lasting on through all men's fleeting years. With reverent boldness the psalm parallels the processes (if we may so speak) of the Divine mind with those of the human; "counsel" and "thoughts" being attributed to both. But how different the issue of the solemn thoughts of God and those of men, in so far as they are not in accordance with His! It unduly narrows the sweep of the psalmist's vision to suppose that he is speaking of a recent experience when some assault on Israel was repelled. He is much rather linking the hour of creation with to-day by one swift summary of the net result of all history. The only stable, permanent reality is the will of God and it imparts derived stability to those who ally themselves with it, yielding to its counsels and moulding their thoughts by its. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever," but the shore of time is littered with wreckage, the sad fragments of proud fleets which would sail in the teeth of the wind and went to pieces on the rocks.

From such thoughts the transition to the second part of the main body of the psalm is natural. Vv. 12-19 are a joyous celebration of the blessedness of Israel as the people of so great a God. The most striking feature of these verses is the pervading reference to the passage of the Red Sea which, as we have already seen, has coloured ver. 7. From Miriam's song come the designation of the people as God's "inheritance" and the phrase "the place of His habitation" (Exod. xv. 17). The "looking upon the inhabitants of the earth," and the thought that the "eye of Jehovah is upon them that fear Him, to deliver their soul in death" (vv. 14, 18), remind us of the Lord's looking from the pillar on the host of Egyptians and the terrified crowd of fugitives, and of the same glance being darkness to the one and light to the other. The abrupt introduction of the king not saved by his host, and of the vanity of the horse for safety, are explained if we catch an echo of Miriam's ringing notes, "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea. . . . The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea" (Exod. xv. 4, 21).

If this historical allusion be not recognised, the connection of these verses is somewhat obscure, but still discernible. The people who stand in special relation to God are blessed, because that eye, which sees all men, rests on them in loving-kindness and with gracious purpose of special protection. This contrast of God's universal knowledge and of that knowledge which is accompanied with loving care is the very nerve of these verses, as is shown by the otherwise aimless repetition of the thought of God's looking down on men. There is a wide all-seeingness, characterised by three words in an ascending scale of closeness of observance, in vv. 13, 14. It is possible to God as being Creator: "He fashions their hearts individually," or "one by one" seems the best interpretation of ver. 15 *a*, and thence is deduced His intimate knowledge of all His creatures' doings. The sudden turn to the impotence of earthly might, as illustrated by the king and the hero and the battle-horse, may be taken as intended to contrast the weakness of such strength both with the

preceding picture of Divine omniscience and almightiness, and with the succeeding assurance of safety in Jehovah. The true reason for the blessedness of the chosen people is that God's eye is on them, not merely with cold omniscience nor with critical considering of their works, but with the direct purpose of sheltering them from surrounding evil. But the stress of the characterisation of these guarded and nourished favourites of heaven is now laid not upon a Divine act of choice, but upon their meek looking to Him. His eye meets with love the upturned patient eye of humble expectance and loving fear.

What should be the issue of such thoughts, but the glad profession of trust, with which the psalm fittingly ends, corresponding to the invocation to praise which began it? Once in each of these three closing verses do the speakers profess their dependence on God. The attitude of waiting with fixed hope and patient submission is the characteristic of God's true servants in all ages. In it are blended consciousness of weakness and vulnerability, dread of assault, reliance on Divine Love, confidence of safety, patience, submission and strong aspiration.

These were the tribal marks of God's people, when this was "a new song"; they are so to-day, for though the Name of the Lord be more fully known by Christ, the trust in it is the same. A threefold good is possessed, expected and asked as the issue of this waiting. God is "help and shield" to those who exercise it. Its sure fruit is joy in Him, since He will answer the expectance of His people, and will make His name more fully known and more sweet to those who have clung to it, in so far as they knew it. The measure of hope in God is the measure of experience of His lovingkindness, and the closing prayer does not allege hope as meriting the answer which it expects, but recognises that desire is a condition of possession of God's best gifts, and knows it to be most impossible of all impossibilities that hope fixed on God should be ashamed. Hands, lifted empty to heaven in longing trust, will never drop empty back and hang listless, without a blessing in their grasp.

PSALM XXXIV.

- 1 (8) I will bless Jehovah at all times,
Continually shall His praise be in my mouth.
- 2 (2) In Jehovah my soul shall boast herself,
The humble shall hear and rejoice.
- 3 (1) Magnify Jehovah with me,
And let us exalt His name together.
- 4 (7) I sought Jehovah and He answered me,
And from all my terrors did He deliver me.
- 5 (7) They looked to Him and were brightened,
(1) And their faces did not blush.
- 6 (1) This afflicted man cried and Jehovah heard,
And from all his distresses saved him.
- 7 (7) The angel of Jehovah encamps round
them that fear Him,
And delivers them.
- 8 (5) Taste and see that Jehovah is good;
Happy the man that takes refuge in Him.
- 9 (1) Fear Jehovah, ye His holy ones;
For there is no want to them that fear Him.
- 10 (2) Young lions famish and starve,
But they that seek Jehovah shall not want any
good.

- 11 (5) Come [my] sons, hearken to me;
I will teach you the fear of Jehovah.
- 12 (2) Who is the man who desires life,
Who loves [many] days, in order to see good?
- 13 (2) Keep thy tongue from evil,
And thy lips from speaking deceit.
- 14 (5) Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.
- 15 (5) The eyes of Jehovah are toward the righteous,
And His ears are towards their loud cry.
- 16 (5) The face of Jehovah is against the doers
of evil
To cut off their remembrance from the earth.
- 17 (5) The righteous cry and Jehovah hears;
And from all their straits He rescues them.
- 18 (7) Jehovah is near to the broken in heart,
And the crushed in spirit He saves.
- 19 (7) Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
But from them all Jehovah delivers him.
- 20 (5) He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.
- 21 (7) Evil shall slay the wicked;
And the haters of the righteous shall be held
guilty.
- 22 (5) Jehovah redeems the soul of His serv-
ants;
And not held guilty shall any be who take ref-
uge in Him.

THE occasion of this psalm, according to the superscription, was that humiliating and questionable episode, when David pretended insanity to save his life from the ruler of Goliath's city of Gath. The set of critical opinion sweeps away this tradition as unworthy of serious refutation. The psalm is acrostic, therefore of late date; there are no references to the supposed occasion; the careless scribe has blundered "blindly" (Hupfeld) in the king's name, mixing up the stories about Abraham and Isaac in Genesis with the legend about David at Gath; the didactic, gnomical cast of the psalm speaks of a late age. But the assumption that acrostic structure is necessarily a mark of late date is not by any means self-evident, and needs more proof than is forthcoming; the absence of plain allusions to the singer's circumstances cuts both ways, and suggests the question, how the attribution to the period stated arose, since there is nothing in the psalm to suggest it; the blunder of the king's name is perhaps not a blunder after all, but, as the Genesis passages seem to imply, "Abimelech (the father of the King) may be a title, like Pharaoh, common to Philistine "kings," and Achish may have been the name of the reigning Abimelech; the proverbial style and somewhat slight connection and progress of thought are necessary results of acrostic fetters. If the psalm be David's, the contrast between the degrading expedient which saved him and the exalted sentiments here is remarkable, but not incredible. The seeming idiot scrabbling on the gate is now saint, poet, and preacher; and, looking back on the deliverance won by a trick, he thinks of it as an instance of Jehovah's answer to prayer! It is a strange psychological study; and yet, keeping in view the then existing standard of morality as to stratagems in warfare, and the wonderful power that even good men have of ignoring flaws in their faith and faults in their conduct, we may venture to suppose that the event which evoked this song of thanksgiving and is transfigured in ver. 4 is the escape by craft from

Achish. To David his feigning madness did not seem inconsistent with trust and prayer.

Whatever be the occasion of the psalm, its course of thought is obvious. There is first a vow of praise in which others are summoned to unite (vv. 1-3); then follows a section in which personal experience and invocation to others are similarly blended (vv. 4-10); and finally a purely didactic section, analysing the practical manifestations of "the fear of the Lord" and enforcing it by the familiar contrast of the blessedness of the righteous and the miserable fate of the ungodly. Throughout we find familiar turns of thought and expression, such as are usual in acrostic psalms.

The glad vow of unbroken praise and undivided trust, which begins the psalm, sounds like the welling over of a heart for recent mercy. It seems easy and natural while the glow of fresh blessings is felt, to "rejoice in the Lord always, and again to say Rejoice." Thankfulness which looks forward to its own cessation, and takes into account the distractions of circumstance and changes of mood which will surely come, is too foreseeing. Whether the vow be kept or no, it is well that it should be made: still better is it that it should be kept, as it may be, even amid distracting circumstances and changing moods. The incense on the altar did not flame throughout the day, but, being fanned into a glow at morning and evening sacrifice it smouldered with a thread of fragrant smoke continually. It is not only the exigencies of the acrostic which determine the order in ver. 2: "In Jehovah shall my soul boast,"—*in Him*, and not in self or worldly ground, of trust and glorying. The ideal of the devout life, which in moments of exaltation seems capable of realisation, as in clear weather Alpine summits look near enough to be reached in an hour, is unbroken praise and undivided reliance on and joy in Jehovah. But alas—how far above us the peaks are! Still to see them eunobles, and to strive to reach them secures an upward course.

The solitary heart hungers for sympathy in its joy, as in its sorrow; but knows full well that such can only be given by those who have known like bitterness and have learned submission in the same way. We must be purged of self in order to be glad in another's deliverance, and must be pupils in the same school in order to be entitled to take his experience as our encouragement, and to make a chorus to his solo of thanksgiving. The invocation is so natural an expression of the instinctive desire for companionship in praise that one needs not to look for any particular group to whom it is addressed; but if the psalm be David's, the call is not inappropriate in the mouth of the leader of his band of devoted followers.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 4-10) is at first biographical, and then generalises personal experience into broad universal truth. But even in recounting what befel himself, the singer will not eat his morsel alone, but is glad to be able at every turn to feel that he has companions in his happy experience. Vv. 4, 5 are a pair, as are vv. 6, 7, and in each the same fact is narrated first in reference to the single soul, and then in regard to all the servants of Jehovah. "This poor man" is by most of the older expositors taken to be the psalmist, but by the majority of moderns supposed to be an individualising way of saying, "poor men." The former explanation seems to me the more natural, as preserving the parallelism between the two groups of verses. If so, the close correspondence of expression in vv. 4 and 6 is ex-

plained, since the same event is subject of both. In both is the psalmist's appeal to Jehovah presented; in the one as "seeking" with anxious eagerness, and in the other as "crying" with the loud call of one in urgent need of immediate rescue. In both, Divine acceptance follows close on the cry, and in both immediately ensues succor. "He delivered me from all my fears," and "saved him out of all his troubles," correspond entirely, though not verbally. In like manner vv. 5 and 7 are alike in extending the blessing of the unit so as to embrace the class. The absence of any expressed subject of the verb in ver. 5 makes the statement more comprehensive, like the French "*on*," or English "they." To "look unto Him" is the same thing as is expressed in the individualising verses by the two phrases, "sought," and "cried unto," only the metaphor is changed into that of silent, wistful directing of beseeching and sad eyes to God. And its issue is beautifully told, in pursuance of the metaphor. Whoever turns his face to Jehovah will receive reflected brightness on his face; as when a mirror is directed sunwards, the dark surface will flash into sudden glory. Weary eyes will gleam. Faces turned to the sun are sure to be radiant.

The hypothesis of the Davidic authorship gives special force to the great assurance of ver. 7. The fugitive, in his rude shelter in the cave of Adullam, thinks of Jacob, who, in his hour of defenceless need, was heartened by the vision of the angel encampment surrounding his own little band, and named the place "Mahanaim," the two camps. That fleeting vision was a temporary manifestation of abiding reality. Wherever there is a camp of them that fear God, there is another, of which the helmed and sworded angel that appeared to Joshua is Captain, and the name of every such place is Two Camps. That is the sight which brightens the eyes that look to God. That mysterious personality, "the Angel of the Lord," is only mentioned in the Psalter here and in Psalm xxxv. In other places, He appears as the agent of Divine communications, and especially as the guide and champion of Israel. He is "the angel of God's face," the personal revealer of His presence and nature. His functions correspond to those of the Word in John's Gospel, and these, conjoined with the supremacy indicated in his name, suggest that "the Angel of the Lord" is, in fact, the everlasting Son of the Father, through whom the Christology of the New Testament teaches that all Revelation has been mediated. The psalmist did not know the full force of the name, but he believed that there was a Person, in an eminent and singular sense God's messenger, who would cast his protection round the devout, and bid inferior heavenly beings draw their impregnable ranks about them. Christians can tell more than he could, of the Bearer of the name. It becomes them to be all the surer of His protection.

Just as the vow of ver. 1 passed into invocation, so does the personal experience of vv. 4-7 glide into exhortation. If such be the experience of poor men, trusting in Jehovah, how should the sharers in it be able to withhold themselves from calling on others to take their part in the joy? The depth of a man's religion may be roughly, but on the whole fairly, tested by his irrepressible impulse to bring other men to the fountain from which he has drunk. Very significantly does the psalm call on men to "taste and see," for in reli-

gion experience must precede knowledge. The way to "taste" is to "trust" or to "take refuge in" Jehovah. "Crede et manducasti," says Augustine. The psalm said it before him. Just as the act of appealing to Jehovah was described in a threefold way in vv. 4-6, so a threefold designation of devout men occurs in vv. 8-10. They "trust," are "saints," they "seek." Faith, consecration and aspiration are their marks. These are the essentials of the religious life, whatever be the degree of revelation. These were its essentials in the psalmist's time, and they are so to-day. As abiding as they, are the blessings consequent. These may all be summed up in one—the satisfaction of every need and desire. There are two ways of seeking for satisfaction: that of effort, violence and reliance on one's own teeth and claws to get one's meat; the other that of patient, submissive trust. Were there lions prowling round the camp at Adullam, and did the psalmist take their growls as typical of all vain attempts to satisfy the soul? Struggle and force and self-reliant efforts leave men gaunt and hungry. He who takes the path of trust and has his supreme desires set on God, and who looks to Him to give what he himself cannot wring out of life, will get first his deepest desires answered in possessing God, and will then find that the One great Good is an encyclopædia of separate goods. They that "seek Jehovah" shall assuredly find Him, and in Him everything. He is multiform, and His goodness takes many shapes, according to the curves of the vessels which it fills. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . and all these things shall be added unto you."

The mention of the "fear of the Lord" prepares the way for the transition to the third part of the psalm. It is purely didactic, and, in its simple moral teaching and familiar contrast of the fates of righteous and ungodly, has affinities with the Book of Proverbs; but these are not so special as to require the supposition of contemporaneity. It is unfashionable now to incline to the Davidic authorship; but would not the supposition that the "children," who are to be taught the elements of religion, are the band of outlaws who have gathered round the fugitive, give appropriateness to the transition from the thanksgiving of the first part to the didactic tone of the second? We can see them sitting round the singer in the half-darkness of the cave, a wild group, needing much control and yet with faithful hearts, and loyal to their leader, who now tells them the laws of his camp, at the same time as he sets forth the broad principles of that morality, which is the garment and manifestation among men of the "fear of the Lord." The relations of religion and morals were never more clearly and strikingly expressed than in the simple language of this psalm, which puts the substance of many profound treatises in a nutshell, when it expounds the "fear of Jehovah" as consisting in speaking truth, doing good, abhorring evil and seeking peace even when it seems to flee from us. The primal virtues are the same for all ages and stages of revelation. The definition of good and evil may vary and become more spiritual and inward, but the dictum that it is good to love and do good shines unalterable. The psalmist's belief that doing good was the sure way to enjoy good was a commonplace of Old Testament teaching, and under a Theocracy was more distinctly verified by outward facts than now; but even then, as many psalms show, had exceptions so stark as to stir many

doubts. Unquestionably good in the sense of blessedness is inseparable from good in the sense of righteousness, as evil which is suffering is from evil which is sin, but the conception of what constitutes blessedness and sorrow must be modified so as to throw most weight on inward experiences, if such necessary coincidence is to be maintained in the face of patent facts.

The psalmist closes his song with a bold statement of the general principle that goodness is blessedness and wickedness is wretchedness; but he finds his proof mainly in the contrasted relation to Jehovah involved in the two opposite moral conditions. He has no vulgar conception of blessedness as resulting from circumstances. The lovingkindness of Jehovah is, in his view, prosperity, whatever be the aspect of externals. So with bold symbols, the very grossness of the letter of which shields them from misinterpretation, he declares this as the secret of all blessedness, that Jehovah's eyes are towards the righteous and His ears open to their cry. The individual experiences of vv. 5 and 6 are generalised. The eye of God—*i.e.* His loving observance—rests upon and blesses those whose faces are turned to Him, and His ear hears the poor man's cry. The grim antithesis, which contains in itself the seeds of all unrest, is that the "face of Jehovah"—*i.e.* His manifested presence, the same face in the reflected light of which the faces of the righteous are lit up with gladness and dawning glory—is against evil doers. The moral condition of the beholder determines the operation of the light of God's countenance upon him. The same presence is light and darkness, life and death. Evil and its doers shrivel and perish in its beams, as the sunshine kills creatures whose haunt is the dark, or as Apollo's keen light-arrows slew the monsters of the slime. All else follows from this double relationship.

The remainder of the psalm runs out into a detailed description of the joyful fate of the lovers of good, broken only by one tragic verse (21), like a black rock in the midst of a sunny stream, telling how evil and evil-doers end. In ver. 17, as in ver. 5, the verb has no subject expressed, but the supplement of A.V. and R.V., "the righteous," is naturally drawn from the context and is found in the LXX., whether as part of the original text, or as supplement thereto, is unknown. The construction may, as in ver. 6, indicate that whoever cries to Jehovah is heard. Hitzig and others propose to transpose vv. 15 and 16, so as to get a nearer subject for the verb in the "righteous" of ver. 15, and defend the inversion by referring to the alphabetic order in Lam. ii., iii., iv., where similarly Pe precedes Ayin; but the present order of verses is better as putting the principal theme of this part of the psalm—the blessedness of the righteous—in the foreground, and the opposite thought as its foil. The main thought of vv. 17-20 is nothing more than the experience of vv. 4-7 thrown into the form of general maxims. They are the commonplaces of religion, but come with strange freshness to a man, when they have been verified in his life. Happy they who can cast their personal experience into such proverbial sayings, and, having by faith individualised the general promises, can re-generalise the individual experience! The psalmist does not promise untroubled outward good. His anticipation is of troubled lives, delivered because of crying to Jehovah. "Many are the afflictions," but more are the deliverances.

Many are the blows and painful is the pressure, but they break no bones, though they rack and wrench the frame. Significant, too, is the sequence of synonyms—righteous, broken-hearted, crushed in spirit, servants, them that take refuge in Jehovah. The first of these refers mainly to conduct, the second to that submission of will and spirit which sorrow rightly borne brings about, substantially equivalent to “the humble” or “afflicted” of vv. 2 and 6, the third again deals mostly with practice, and the last touches the foundation of all service, submission, and righteousness, as laid in the act of faith in Jehovah.

The last group of vv. 21, 22, puts the teaching of the psalm in one terrible contrast, “Evil shall slay the wicked.” It were a mere platitude if by “evil” were meant misfortune. The same thought of the inseparable connection of the two senses of that word, which runs through the context, is here expressed in the most terse fashion. To do evil is to suffer evil, and all sin is suicide. Its wages is death. Every sin is a strand in the hangman’s rope, which the sinner nooses and puts round his own neck. That is so because every sin brings guilt, and guilt brings retribution. Much more than “desolate” is meant in vv. 21 and 22. The word means *to be condemned or held guilty*. Jehovah is the Judge; before His bar all actions and characters are set: His unerring estimate of each brings with it, here and now, consequences of reward and punishment which prophesy a future, more perfect judgment. The redemption of the soul of God’s servants is the antithesis to that awful experience; and they only, who take refuge in Him, escape it. The full Christian significance of this final contrast is in the Apostle’s words, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

PSALM XXXV.

- 1 Plead my cause, Jehovah, with those who plead against me.
Fight with those who fight with me.
- 2 Grasp target and shield.
And stand up in my help.
- 3 And unsheathe lance and battle-axe (?) against my pursuers;
Say to my soul, Thy salvation am I.
- 4 Be the seekers after my life put to shame and dishonoured:
Be the plotters of my hurt turned back and confounded.
- 5 Be they as chaff before the wind,
And the angel of Jehovah striking them down!
- 6 Be their path darkness and slipperiness,
And the angel of Jehovah pursuing them!
- 7 For without provocation have they hidden for me their net;
Without provocation have they dug a pit for my life.
- 8 May destruction light on him unawares,
And his net which he hath hidden snare him;
Into destruction (the pit?)—may he fall therein!
- 9 And my soul shall exult in Jehovah,
Shall rejoice in His salvation.
- 10 All my bones shall say, Jehovah, who is like Thee,

Delivering the afflicted from a stronger than he,
Even the afflicted and poor from his spoiler?

- 11 Unjust witnesses rise up;
Of what I know not they ask me.
- 12 They requite me evil for good—
Bereavement to my soul!
- 13 But I—in their sickness my garment was sackcloth,
I afflicted my soul by fasting,
And my prayer—may it return again (do thou return?) to my own bosom.
- 14 As [for] my friend or brother, I dragged myself about (bowed myself down?);
As one mourning for a mother, I bowed down (dragged myself about?) in squalid attire.
- 15 And at my tottering they rejoice and assemble themselves:
Abjects and those whom I know not assemble against me;
They tear me, and cease not.
- 16 Like the profanest of buffoons for a bit of bread,
Gnashing their teeth at me.
- 17 Lord, how long wilt Thou look on?
Bring back my soul from their destructions,
My only one from the young lions.
- 18 I will praise Thee in the great congregation;
Among people strong [in number] will I sound Thy praise.
- 19 Let not my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me,
Nor my haters without provocation wink the eye.
- 20 For it is not peace they speak,
And against the quiet of the land they plan words of guile.
- 21 And they open wide their mouth against me;
They say, Oho! Oho! our eyes have seen.
- 22 Thou hast seen, Jehovah: be not deaf;
Lord, be not far from me!
- 23 Arouse Thyself, and awake for my judgment,
My God and my Lord, for my suit!
- 24 Judge me according to Thy righteousness, Jehovah, my God,
And let them not rejoice over me.
- 25 Let them not say in their hearts, Oho! our desire!
Let them not say, We have swallowed him.
- 26 Be those who rejoice over my calamity put to shame and confounded together!
Be those who magnify themselves against me clothed in shame and dishonour!
- 27 May those who delight in my righteous cause sound out their gladness and rejoice,
And say continually, Magnified be Jehovah,
Who delights in the peace of His servant.
- 28 And my tongue shall meditate Thy righteousness,
All day long Thy praise.

THE psalmist’s life is in danger. He is the victim of ungrateful hatred. False accusations of crimes that he never dreamed of are brought against him. He professes innocence, and appeals to Jehovah to be his Advocate and also his Judge. The prayer in ver. 1 a uses the same word and metaphor as David does in his remonstrance with Saul (1 Sam. xxiv. 15). The correspondence with David’s situation in the Sauline persecution is, at

least, remarkable, and goes far to sustain the Davidic authorship. The distinctly individual traits in the psalm are difficulties in the way of regarding it as a national psalm. Jeremiah has several coincidences in point of expression and sentiment, which are more naturally accounted for as reminiscences by the prophet than as indications that he was the psalmist. His genius was assimilative, and liked to rest itself on earlier utterances.

The psalm has three parts, all of substantially the same import, and marked off by the conclusion of each being a vow of praise and the main body of each being a cry for deliverance, a characterisation of the enemy as ungrateful and malicious, and a profession of the singer's innocence. We do not look for melodious variations of note in a cry for help. The only variety to be expected is in its shrill intensity and prolongation. The triple division is in accordance with the natural feeling of completeness attaching to the number. If there is any difference between the three sets of petitions, it may be observed that the first (vv. 1-10) alleges innocence and vows praise without reference to others; that the second (vv. 11-18) rises to a profession not only of innocence, but of beneficence and affection met by hate, and ends with a vow of public praise; and that the final section (vv. 19-28) has less description of the machinations of the enemy and more prolonged appeal to Jehovah for His judgment, and ends, not with a solo of the psalmist's gratitude, but with a chorus of his friends, praising God for his "prosperity."

The most striking features of the first part are the boldness of the appeal to Jehovah to fight for the psalmist and the terrible imprecations and magnificent picture in vv. 5, 6. The relation between the two petitions of ver. 1, "Plead with those who plead against me" and "Fight with them that fight against me," may be variously determined. Both may be figurative, the former drawn from legal processes, the latter from the battle-field. But more probably the psalmist was really the object of armed attack, and the "fighting" was a grim reality. The suit against him was being carried on, not in a court, but in the field. The rendering of the R.V. in ver. 1, "Strive with . . . who strive against me," obscures the metaphor of a lawsuit, which, in view of its further expansion in vv. 23, 24 (and in "witnesses" in ver. 11?), is best retained. That is a daring flight of reverent imagination which thinks of the armed Jehovah as starting to His feet to help one poor man. The attitude anticipates Stephen's vision of "the Son of man standing," not throned in rest, but risen in eager sympathy and intent to succour. But the panoply in which the psalmist's faith arrays Jehovah, is purely imaginative and, of course, has nothing parallel in the martyr's vision. The "target" was smaller than the "shield" (2 Chron. ix. 15, 16). Both could not be wielded at once, but the incongruity helps to idealise the bold imagery and to emphasise the Divine completeness of protecting power. It is the psalmist, and not his heavenly Ally, who is to be sheltered. The two defensive weapons are probably matched by two offensive ones in ver. 3. The word rendered in the A.V. "stop" ("the way" being a supplement) is more probably to be taken as the name of a weapon, a battle-axe according to some, a dirk or dagger according to others. The ordinary translation gives a satisfac-

tory sense, but the other is more in accordance with the following preposition, with the accents, and with the parallelism of target and shield. In either case, how beautifully the spiritual reality breaks through the warlike metaphor! This armed Jehovah, grasping shield and drawing spear, utters no battle shout, but whispers consolation to the trembling man crouching behind his shield. The outward side of the Divine activity, turned to the foe, is martial and menacing; the inner side is full of tender, secret breathings of comfort and love.

The previous imagery of the battle-field and the Warrior God moulds the terrible wishes in vv. 4-6, which should not be interpreted as having a wider reference than to the issue of the attacks on the psalmist. The substance of them is nothing more than the obverse of his wish for his own deliverance, which necessarily is accomplished by the defeat of his enemies. The "moral difficulty" of such wishes is not removed by restricting them to the special matter in hand, but it is unduly aggravated if they are supposed to go beyond it. However restricted, they express a stage of feeling far beneath the Christian, and the attempt to slur over the contrast is in danger of hiding the glory of midday for fear of not doing justice to the beauty of morning twilight. It is true that the "imprecations" of the Psalter are not the offspring of passion, and that the psalmists speak as identifying their cause with God's; but when all such considerations are taken into account, these prayers against enemies remain distinctly inferior to the code of Christian ethics. The more frankly the fact is recognised, the better. But, if we turn from the moral to the poetic side of these verses, what stern beauty there is in that awful picture of the fleeing foe, with the angel of Jehovah pressing hard on their broken ranks! The hope which has been embodied in the legends of many nations, that the gods were seen fighting for their worshippers, is the psalmist's faith, and in its essence is ever true. That angel, whom we heard of in the previous psalm as defending the defenceless encampment of them that fear Jehovah, fights with and scatters the enemies like chaff before the wind. One more touch of terror is added in that picture of flight in the dark, on a slippery path, with the celestial avenger close on the fugitive's heels, as when the Amorite kings fled down the pass of Beth-horon, and "Jehovah cast great stones from heaven upon them." Æschylus or Dante has nothing more concentrated or suggestive of terror and beauty than this picture.

The psalmist's consciousness of innocence is the ground of his prayer and confidence. Causeless hatred is the lot of the good in this evil world. Their goodness is cause enough; for men's likes and dislikes follow their moral character. Virtue rebukes, and even patient endurance irritates. No hostility is so hard to turn into love as that which has its origin, not in the attitude of its object, but in instinctive consciousness of contrariety in the depths of the soul. Whoever wills to live near God and tries to shape his life accordingly may make up his mind to be the mark for many arrows of popular dislike, sometimes lightly tipped with ridicule, sometimes dipped in gall, sometimes steeped in poison, but always sharpened by hostility. The experience is too uniform to identify the poet by it, but the correspondence with David's tone in his remonstrances with Saul

is, at least, worthy of consideration. The familiar figures of the hunter's snare and pitfall recur here, as expressing crafty plans for destruction, and pass, as in other places, into the wish that the *lex talionis* may fall on the would-be ensnarer. The text appears to be somewhat dislocated and corrupted in vv. 7, 8. The word "pit" is needless in ver. 7 *a*, since snares are not usually spread in pits, and it is wanted in the next clause, and should therefore probably be transposed. Again, the last clause of ver. 8, whether the translation of the A.V. or of the R.V. be adopted, is awkward and feeble from the repetition of "destruction," but if we read "pit," which involves only a slight change of letters, we avoid tautology, and preserve the reference to the two engines of craft: "Let his net which he spread catch him; in the pit—let him fall therein!" The enemy's fall is the occasion of glad praise, not because his intended victim yields to the temptation to take malicious delight in his calamity (*Schadenfreude*). His own deliverance, not the other's destruction, makes the singer joyful in Jehovah, and what he vows to celebrate is not the retributive, but the delivering, aspect of the Divine act. In such joy there is nothing unworthy of the purest forgiving love to foes. The relaxation of the tension of anxiety and fear brings the sweetest moments, in the sweetness of which soul and body seem to share, and the very bones, which were consumed and waxed old (vi. 3, xxxii. 3), are at ease, and, in their sense of well-being, have a tongue to ascribe it to Jehovah's delivering hand. No physical enjoyment surpasses the delight of simple freedom from long torture of pain, nor are there many experiences so poignantly blessed as that of passing out of tempest into calm. Well for those who deepen and hallow such joy by turning it into praise, and see even in the experiences of their little lives tokens of the incomparable greatness and unparalleled love of their delivering God!

Once more the singer plunges into the depths, not because his faith fails to sustain him on the heights which it had won, but because it would travel the road again, in order to strengthen itself by persistent prayers which are not "vain repetitions." The second division (vv. 11-18) runs parallel with the first, with some differences. The reference to "unjust witnesses" and their charges of crimes which he had never dreamed of may be but the reappearance of the image of a lawsuit, as in ver. 1, but is more probably fact. We may venture to think of the slanders which poisoned Saul's too jealous mind, just as in "They requite me evil for good" we have at least a remarkable verbal coincidence with the latter's burst of tearful penitence (1 Sam. xxiv. 17): "Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rendered unto me good, whereas I have rendered unto thee evil." What a wail breaks the continuity of the sentence in the pathetic words of ver. 12 *b*!—"Bereavement to my soul!" The word is used again in Isa. xlviii. 7, 8, and there is translated "loss of children." The forlorn man felt as if all whom he loved were swept away, and he left alone to face the storm. The utter loneliness of sorrow was never more vividly expressed. The interjected clause sounds like an agonised cry forced from a man on the rack. Surely we hear in it not the voice of a personified nation, but of an individual sufferer, and if we have been down into the depths ourselves, we recognise the sound. The consciousness of innocence marking the for-

mer section becomes now the assertion of active sympathy, met by ungrateful hate. The power of kindness is great, but there are ill-conditioned souls which resent it. There is too much truth in the cynical belief that the sure way to make an enemy is to do a kindness. It is all too common an experience that the more abundantly one loves, the less he is loved. The highest degree of unrequited participation in others' sorrows is seen in Him who "Himself took our sicknesses." This psalmist so shared in those of his foes that in sackcloth and with fasting he prayed for their healing. Whether the prayer was answered to them or not, it brought reflex blessing to him, for self-forgetting sympathy is never waste, even though it does not secure returns of gratitude. "Your peace shall return to you again," though it may not bring peace to nor with a jangling household. Riehm (in Hupfeld) suggests the transposition of the verbs in 14 *a* and *b*: "I bowed down as though he had been my friend or brother; I went in mourning," etc., the former clause painting the drooping head of a mourner, the latter his slow walk and sad attire, either squalid or black.

The reverse of this picture of true sympathy is given in the conduct of its objects when it was the psalmist's turn to sorrow. Gleeefully they flock together to mock and triumph. His calamity was as good as a feast to the ingrates. Vv. 15 and 16 are in parts obscure, but the general sense is clear. The word rendered "abjects" is unique, and consequently its meaning is doubtful, and various conjectural emendations have been proposed—e.g., "foreigners," which, as Hupfeld says, is "as foreign to the connection as can be," "smiting," and others—but the rendering "abjects," or men of low degree, gives an intelligible meaning. The comparison in ver. 16 *a* is extremely obscure. The existing text is harsh; "profane of mockers for a cake" needs much explanation to be intelligible. "Mockers for a cake" are usually explained to be hangers-on at feasts who found wit for dull guests and were paid by a share of good things, or who crept into favour and entertainment by slandering the objects of the host's dislike. Another explanation, suggested by Hupfeld as an alternative, connects the word rendered "mockers" with the imagery in "tear" (ver. 15) and "gnash" (ver. 16) and "swallow" (ver. 25), and by an alteration of one letter gets the rendering "like profane cake-devourers," so comparing the enemies to greedy gluttons, to whom the psalmist's ruin is a dainty morsel eagerly devoured.

The picture of his danger is followed, as in the former part, by the psalmist's prayer. To him God's beholding without interposing is strange, and the time seems protracted; for the moments creep when sorrow-laden, and God's help seems slow to tortured hearts. But the impatience which speaks of itself to Him is soothed, and, though the man who cries, *How long?* may feel that his life lies as among lions, he will swiftly change his note of petition into thanksgiving. The designation of the life as "my only one," as in xxii. 20, enhances the earnestness of petition by the thought that, once lost, it can never be restored. A man has but one life: therefore he holds it so dear. The mercy implored for the single soul will be occasion of praise before many people. Not now, as in vv. 9, 10, is the thankfulness a private soliloquy. Individual blessings should be publicly

acknowledged, and the praise accruing thence may be used as a plea with God, who delivers men that they may "show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called them out of" trouble into His marvellous peace.

The third division (ver. 18 to end) goes over nearly the same ground as before, with the difference that the prayer for deliverance is more extended, and that the resulting praise comes from the great congregation, joining in as chorus in the singer's solo. The former references to innocence and causeless hatred, lies and plots, open-mouthed rage, are repeated. "Our eyes have seen," say the enemies, counting their plots as good as successful and snorting contempt of their victim's helplessness; but he bethinks him of another eye, and grandly opposes God's sight to theirs. Usually that Jehovah sees is, in the Psalter, the same as His helping; but here, as in ver. 17, the two things are separated, as they so often are, in fact, for the trial of faith. God's inaction does not disprove His knowledge, but the pleading soul presses on Him His knowledge as a plea that He would not be deaf to its cry nor far from its help. The greedy eyes of the enemy round the psalmist gloat on their prey; but he cries aloud to his God, and dares to speak to Him as if He were deaf and far off, inactive and asleep. The imagery of the lawsuit reappears in fuller form here. "My cause" in ver. 23 is a noun cognate with the verb rendered "plead" or "strive" in ver. 1; "Judge me" in ver. 24 does not mean, Pronounce sentence on my character and conduct, but, Do me right in this case of mine *versus* my gratuitous foes.

Again recurs the prayer for their confusion, which clearly has no wider scope than concerning the matter in hand. It is no breach of Christian charity to pray that hostile devices may fail. The vivid imagination of the poet hears the triumphant exclamations of gratified hatred: "Oho! our desire!" "We have swallowed him," and sums up the character of his enemies in the two traits of malicious joy in his hurt and self-exaltation in their hostility to him.

At last the prayer, which has run through so many moods of feeling, settles itself into restful contemplation of the sure results of Jehovah's sure deliverance. One receives the blessing; many rejoice in it. In significant antithesis to the enemies' joy is the joy of the rescued man's lovers and favourers. Their "saying" stands over against the silenced boastings of the losers of the suit. The latter "magnified themselves," but the end of Jehovah's deliverance will be that true hearts will "magnify" Him. The victor in the cause will give all the praise to the Judge, and he and his friends will unite in self-oblivious praise. Those who delight in his righteousness are of one mind with Jehovah, and magnify Him because He "delights in the peace of His servant." While they ring out their praises, the humble suppliant, whose cry has brought the Divine act which has waked all this surging song, "shall musingly speak in the low murmur of one entranced by a sweet thought" (Cheyne), or, if we might use a fine old word, shall "croon" over God's righteousness all the day long. That is the right end of mercies received. Whether there be many voices to join in praise or no, one voice should not be silent, that of the receiver of the blessings, and, even when he pauses in his song, his heart should keep singing day-long and life-long praises.

PSALM XXXVI.

- 1 The wicked has an Oracle of Transgression within his heart;
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
- 2 For it speaks smooth things to him in his imagination (eyes)
As to finding out his iniquity, as to hating [it].
- 3 The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit;
He has teased being wise, doing good.
- 4 He plots mischief upon his bed;
He sets himself firmly in a way [that is] not good;
Evil he loathes not.
- 5 Jehovah, Thy lovingkindness is in the heavens,
Thy faithfulness is unto the clouds.
- 6 Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God,
Thy judgments a mighty deep;
Man and beast preservest Thou, Jehovah.
- 7 How precious is Thy lovingkindness, Jehovah,
O God!
And the sons of men in the shadow of Thy wings take refuge.
- 8 They are satisfied from the fatness of Thy house,
And [of] the river of Thy delights Thou givest them to drink.
- 9 For with Thee is the fountain of life;
In Thy light do we see light.
- 10 Continue Thy lovingkindness to those who know Thee,
And Thy righteousness to the upright in heart.
- 11 Let not the foot of pride come against me,
And the hand of the wicked—let it not drive me forth.
- 12 There the workers of iniquity are fallen;
They are struck down, and are not able to rise.

THE supposition that the sombre picture of "the wicked" in vv. 1-4 was originally unconnected with the glorious hymn in vv. 5-9 fails to give weight to the difference between the sober pace of pedestrian prose and the swift flight of winged poetry. It fails also in apprehending the instinctive turning of a devout meditative spectator from the darkness of earth and its sins to the light above. The one refuge from the sad vision of evil here is in the faith that God is above it all, and that His name is Mercy. Nor can the blackness of the one picture be anywhere so plainly seen as when it is set in front of the brightness of the other. A religious man, who has laid to heart the miserable sights of which earth is full, will scarcely think that the psalmist's quick averting of his eyes from these to steep them in the light of God is unnatural, or that the original connection of the two parts of this psalm is an artificial supposition. Besides this, the closing section of prayer is tinged with references to the first part, and derives its *raison d'être* from it. The three parts form an organic whole.

The gnarled obscurity of the language in which the "wicked" is described corresponds to the theme, and contrasts strikingly with the limpid flow of the second part. "The line, too, labours" as it tries to tell the dark thoughts that move to dark deeds. Vv. 1, 2, unveil the secret beliefs of the sinner, vv. 3, 4, his consequent acts. As the text stands, it needs much torturing to get a tol-

erable meaning out of ver. 1, and the slight alteration, found in the LXX. and in some old versions, of "his heart" instead of "my heart" smooths the difficulty. We have then a bold personification of "Transgression" as speaking in the secret heart of the wicked, as in some dark cave, such as heathen oracle-mongers haunted. There is bitter irony in using the sacred word which stamped the prophets' utterances, and which we may translate "oracle," for the godless lies muttered in the sinner's heart. This is the account of how men come to do evil: that there is a voice within whispering falsehood. And the reason why that bitter voice has the shrine to itself is that "there is no fear of God before" the man's "eyes." The two clauses of ver. 1 are simply set side by side, leaving the reader to spell out their logical relation. Possibly the absence of the fear of God may be regarded as both the occasion and the result of the oracle of Transgression, since, in fact, it is both. Still more obscure is ver. 2. Who is the "flatterer"? The answers are conflicting. The "wicked," say some, but if so, "in his own eyes" is superfluous; "God," say others, but that requires a doubtful meaning for "flatters"—namely, "treats gently"—and is open to the same objection as the preceding in regard to "in his own eyes." The most natural supposition is that "transgression," which was represented in ver. 1 as speaking, is here also meant. Clearly the person in whose eyes the flattery is real is the wicked, and therefore its speaker must be another. "Sin beguiled me," says Paul, and therein echoes this psalmist. Transgression in its oracle is one of "those juggling fiends that palter with us in a double sense," promising delights and impunity. But the closing words of ver. 2 are a crux. Conjectural emendations have been suggested, but do not afford much help. Probably the best way is to take the text as it stands, and make the best of it. The meaning it yields is harsh, but tolerable: "to find out his sin, to hate" (it?). Who finds out sin? God. If He is the finder, it is He who also "hates"; and if it is sin that is the object of the one verb, it is most natural to suppose it that of the other also. The two verbs are infinitives, with the preposition of purpose or of reference prefixed. Either meaning is allowable. If the preposition is taken as implying reference, the sense will be that the glossing whippers of sin deceive a man in regard to the discovery of his wrong-doing and God's displeasure at it. Impunity is promised, and God's holiness is smoothed down. If, on the other hand, the idea of purpose is adopted, the solemn thought emerges that the oracle is spoken with intent to ruin the deluded listener and set his secret sins in the condemning light of God's face. Sin is cruel, and a traitor. This profound glimpse into the depths of a soul without the fear of God is followed by the picture of the consequences of such practical atheism, as seen in conduct. It is deeply charged with blackness and unrelieved by any gleam of light. Falsehood, abandonment of all attempts to do right, insensibility to the hallowing influences of nightly solitude, when men are wont to see their evil more clearly in the dark, like phosphorous streaks on the wall, obstinate planting the feet in ways not good, a silenced conscience which has no movement of aversion to evil—these are the fruits of that oracle of Transgression when it has its perfect work. We may call such a picture the idealisation of the character described, but there have been men who realised it, and the

warning is weighty that such a uniform and all-enwrapping darkness is the terrible goal towards which all listening to that bitter voice tends. No wonder that the psalmist wrenches himself swiftly away from such a sight!

The two strophes of the second division (vv. 5, 6, and 7-9) present the glorious realities of the Divine name in contrast with the false oracle of vv. 1, 2, and the blessedness of God's guests in contrast with the gloomy picture of the "wicked" in vv. 3, 4. It is noteworthy that the first and last-named "attributes" are the same. "Loving-kindness" begins and ends the glowing series. That stooping, active love encloses, like a golden circlet, all else that men can know or say of the perfection whose name is God. It is the white beam into which all colours melt, and from which all are evolved. As science feels after the reduction of all forms of physical energy to one, for which there is no name but energy, all the adorable glories of God pass into one, which He has bidden us call love. "Thy lovingkindness is in the heavens," towering on high. It is like some Divine æther, filling all space. The heavens are the home of light. They arch above every head; they rim every horizon; they are filled with nightly stars; they open into abysses as the eye gazes; they bend unchanged and untroubled above a weary earth; from them fall benedictions of rain and sunshine. All these subordinate allusions may lie in the psalmist's thought, while its main intention is to magnify the greatness of that mercy as heaven-high.

But mercy standing alone might seem to lack a guarantee of its duration, and therefore the strength of "faithfulness," unalterable continuance in a course begun, and adherence to every promise either spoken in words or implied in creation or providence, is added to the tenderness of mercy. The boundlessness of that faithfulness is the main thought, but the contrast of the whirling, shifting clouds with it is striking. The realm of eternal purpose and enduring act reaches to and stretches above the lower region where change rules.

But a third glory has yet to be flashed before glad eyes, God's "righteousness," which here is not merely nor mainly punitive, but delivering, or, perhaps in a still wider view, the perfect conformity of His nature with the ideal of ethical completeness. Right is the same for heaven as for earth, and "whatsoever things are just" have their home in the bosom of God. The point of comparison with "the mountains of God" is, as in the previous clauses, their loftiness, which expresses greatness and elevation above our reach; but the subsidiary ideas of permanence and sublimity are not to be overlooked. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but His righteousness endures for ever." There is safe hiding there, in the fastnesses of that everlasting hill. From character the psalmist passes to acts, and sets all the Divine dealings forth under the one category of "judgments," the utterances in act of His judicial estimate of men. Mountains seem highest and ocean broadest when the former rise sheer from the water's edge, as Carmel does. The immobility of the silent hills is wonderfully contrasted with the ever-moving sea, which to the Hebrew was the very home of mystery. The obscurity of the Divine judgments is a subject of praise, if we hold fast by faith in God's lovingkindness, faithfulness, and righteousness

They are obscure by reason of their vast scale, which permits the vision of only a fragment. How little of the ocean is seen from any shore! But there is no arbitrary obscurity. The sea is "of glass mingled with fire"; and if the eye cannot pierce its depths, it is not because of any darkening impurity in the crystal clearness, but simply because not even light can travel to the bottom. The higher up on the mountains men go, the deeper down can they see into that ocean. It is a hymn, not an indictment, which says, "Thy judgments are a great deep." But however the heights tower and the abysses open, there is a strip of green, solid earth on which "man and beast" live in safe plenty. The plain blessings of an all-embracing providence should make it easier to believe in the unmingled goodness of acts which are too vast for men to judge and of that mighty name which towers above their conceptions. What they see is goodness; what they cannot see must be of a piece. The psalmist is in "that serene and blessed mood" when the terrible mysteries of creation and providence do not interfere with his "steadfast faith that all which he beholds is full of blessings." There are times when these mysteries press with agonising force on devout souls, but there should also be moments when the pure love of the perfectly good God is seen to fill all space and outstretch all dimensions of height and depth and breadth. The awful problems of pain and death will be best dealt with by those who can echo the rapture of this psalm.

If God is such, what is man's natural attitude to so great and sweet a name? Glad wonder, accepting His gift as the one precious thing, and faith sheltering beneath the great shadow of His outstretched wing. The exclamation in ver. 8, "How precious is Thy lovingkindness!" expresses not only its intrinsic value, but the devout soul's appreciation of it. The secret of blessedness and test of true wisdom lie in a sane estimate of the worth of God's lovingkindness as compared with all other treasures. Such an estimate leads to trust in Him, as the psalmist implies by his juxtaposition of the two clauses of ver. 7, though he connects them, not by an expressed "therefore," but by the simple copula. The representation of trust as taking refuge reappears here, with its usual suggestions of haste and peril. The "wing" of God suggests tenderness and security. And the reason for trust is enforced in the designation "sons of men," partakers of weakness and mortality, and therefore needing the refuge which, in the wonderfulness of His lovingkindness, they find under the pinions of so great a God.

The psalm follows the refugees into their hiding-place, and shows how much more than bare shelter they find there. They are God's guests, and royally entertained as such. The joyful priestly feasts in the Temple colour the metaphor, but the idea of hospitable reception of guests is the more prominent. The psalmist speaks the language of that true and wholesome mysticism without which religion is feeble and formal. The root ideas of his delineation of the blessedness of the fugitives to God are their union with God and possession of Him. Such is the magical might of lowly trust that by it weak dying "sons of men" are so knit to the God whose glories the singer has been celebrating that they partake of Himself and are saturated with His sufficiency, drink of His delights in some deep sense, bathe in the fountain of life, and have His light for

their organ and medium and object of sight. These great sentences beggar all exposition. They touch on the rim of infinite things, whereof only the nearer fringe comes within our ken in this life. The soul that lives in God is satisfied, having real possession of the only adequate object. The variety of desires, appetites, and needs requires manifoldness in their food, but the unity of our nature demands that all that manifoldness should be in One. Multiplicity in objects, aims, loves, is misery; oneness is blessedness. We need a lasting good and an ever-growing one to meet and unfold the capacity of indefinite growth. Nothing but God can satisfy the narrowest human capacity.

Union with Him is the source of all delight, as of all true fruition of desires. Possibly a reference to Eden may be intended in the selection of the word for "pleasures," which is a cognate with that name. So there may be allusion to the river which watered that garden, and the thought may be that the present life of the guest of God is not all unlike the delights of that vanished paradise. We may perhaps scarcely venture on supposing that "Thy pleasures" means those which the blessed God Himself possesses; but even if we take the lower and safer meaning of those which God gives, we may bring into connection Christ's own gift to His disciples of His own peace, and His assurance that faithful servants will "enter into the joy of their Lord." Shepherd and sheep drink of the same brook by the way and of the same living fountains above. The psalmist's conception of religion is essentially joyful. No doubt there are sources of sadness peculiar to a religious man, and he is necessarily shut out from much of the effervescent poison of earthly joys drugged with sin. Much in his life is inevitably grave, stern, and sad. But the sources of joy opened are far deeper than those that are closed. Surface wells (many of them little better than open sewers) may be shut up, but an unfailing stream is found in the desert. Satisfaction and joy flow from God because life and light are with Him; and therefore he who is with Him has them for his. "With Thee is the fountain of life" is true in every sense of the word "life." In regard to life natural, the saying embodies a loftier conception of the Creator's relation to the creature than the mechanical notion of creation. The fountain pours its waters into stream or basin, which it keeps full by continual flow. Stop the efflux, and these are dried up. So the great mystery of life in all its forms is as a spark from a fire, a drop from a fountain, or, as Scripture puts it in regard to man, a breath from God's own lips. In a very real sense, wherever life is, there God is, and only by some form of union with him or by the presence of His power, which is Himself, do creatures live. But the psalm is dealing with the blessings belonging to those who trust beneath the shadow of God's wing; therefore life here, in this verse, is no equivalent to mere existence, physical or self-conscious, but it must be taken in its highest spiritual sense. Union with God is its condition, and that union is brought to pass by taking refuge with Him. The deep words anticipated the explicit teaching of the Gospel in so far as they proclaimed these truths, but the greatest utterance still remained unspoken: that this life is "in His Son."

Light and life are closely connected. Whether knowledge, purity, or joy is regarded as the dominant idea in the symbol, or whether all are united

in it, the profound words of the psalm are true. In God's light we see light. In the lowest region "the seeing eye is from the Lord." "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." Faculty and medium of vision are both of Him. But hearts in communion with God are illumined, and they who are "in the light" cannot walk in darkness. Practical wisdom is theirs. The light of God, like the star of the Magi, stoops to guide pilgrims' steps. Clear certitude as to sovereign realities is the guerdon of the guests of God. Where other eyes see nothing but mists, they can discern solid land and the gleaming towers of the city across the sea. Nor is that light only the dry light by which we know, but it means purity and joy also; and to "see light" is to possess these too by derivation from the purity and joy of God Himself. He is the "master light of all our seeing." The fountain has become a stream, and taken to itself movement towards men; for the psalmist's glowing picture is more than fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who has said, "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The closing division is prayer based both upon the contemplation of God's attributes in vv. 5, 6, and of the wicked in the first part. This distinct reference to both the preceding sections is in favour of the original unity of the psalm. The belief in the immensity of Divine loving-kindness and righteousness inspires the prayer for their long-drawn-out (so "continue" means literally) continuance to the psalmist and his fellows. He will not separate himself from these in his petition, but thinks of them before himself. "Those who know Thee" are those who take refuge under the shadow of the great wing. Their knowledge is intimate, vital; it is acquaintanceship, not mere intellectual apprehension. It is such as to purge the heart and make its possessors upright. Thus we have set forth in that sequence of trust, knowledge, and uprightness stages of growing Godlikeness closely corresponding to the Gospel sequence of faith, love, and holiness. Such souls are *capaces Dei*, fit to receive the manifestations of God's lovingkindness and righteousness; and from such these will never remove. They will stand stable as His firm attributes, and the spurning foot of proud oppressors shall not trample on them, nor violent hands be able to stir them from their steadfast, secure place. The prayer of the psalm goes deeper than any mere deprecation of earthly removal, and is but prosaically understood, if thought to refer to exile or the like. The dwelling-place from which it beseeches that the suppliant may never be removed is his safe refuge beneath the wing, or in the house, of God. Christ answered it when He said, "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." The one desire of the heart which has tasted the abundance, satisfaction, delights, fulness of life, and clearness of light that attend the presence of God is that nothing may draw it thence.

Prayer wins prophetic certitude. From his serene shelter under the wing, the suppliant looks out on the rout of baffled foes, and sees the end which gives the lie to the oracle of transgression and its flatteries. "They are struck down," the same word as in the picture of the pursuing angel of the Lord in Psalm xxxv. Here the agent of their fall is unnamed, but one power only can inflict such irrevocable ruin. God, who is the shelter of the upright in heart, has at last found

out the sinner's iniquity, and His hatred of sin stands ready to "smite once, and smite no more."

PSALM XXXVII.

- 1 (N) Heat not thyself because of the evil-doers;
Be not envious because of the workers of perversity.
- 2 For like grass shall they swiftly fade,
And like green herbage shall they wither.
- 3 (2) Trust in Jehovah, and do good;
Inhabit the land, and feed on faithfulness.
- 4 And delight thyself in Jehovah,
And He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.
- 5 (2) Roll thy way upon Jehovah,
And trust in Him, and He shall do [all that thou dost need].
- 6 And He shall bring forth as the light thy righteousness,
And thy judgment as the noonday.
- 7 (7) Be silent to Jehovah, and wait patiently for Him;
Heat not thyself because of him who makes his way prosperous,
Because of the man who carries out intrigues.
- 8 (7) Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Heat not thyself: [it leads] only to doing evil.
- 9 For evil-doers shall be cut off;
And they who wait on Jehovah—they shall inherit the land.
- 10 (1) And yet a little while, and the wicked is no more,
And thou shalt take heed to his place, and he is not [there].
- 11 And the meek shall inherit the land,
And delight themselves in the abundance of peace.
- 12 (1) The wicked intrigues against the righteous,
And grinds his teeth at him.
- 13 The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees that his day is coming.
- 14 (N) The wicked draw sword and bend their bow,
To slay the afflicted and poor,
To butcher the upright in way;
- 15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken.
- 16 (2) Better is the little of the righteous
Than the abundance of many wicked.
- 17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
And Jehovah holds up the righteous.
- 18 (1) Jehovah has knowledge of the days of the perfect,
And their inheritance shall be forever;
- 19 They shall not be put to shame in the time of evil,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.
- 20 (2) For the wicked shall perish,
And the enemies of Jehovah shall be like the beauty of the pastures;
They melt away in smoke: they melt away.

- 21 (ה) The wicked borrows, and does not pay;
And the righteous deals generously, and gives.
- 22 For His blessed ones shall inherit the earth,
And His cursed ones shall be cut off.
- 23 (נ) From Jehovah are a man's steps estab-
lished.
And He delighteth in his way;
- 24 If he falls, he shall not lie prostrate,
For Jehovah holds up his hand.
- 25 (י) A youth have I been, now I am old,
And I have not seen a righteous man forsaken,
Or his seed begging bread.
- 26 All day long he is dealing generously and lend-
ing,
And his seed is blessed.
- 27 (ד) Depart from evil, and do good;
And dwell for evermore.
- 28 For Jehovah loves judgment.
And forsakes not them whom He favours.
- (ע) They are preserved for ever
(The unrighteous are destroyed for ever?),
And the seed of the wicked is cut off.
- 29 The righteous shall inherit the land,
And dwell thereon for ever.
- 30 (ז) The mouth of the righteous meditates
wisdom.
And his tongue speaks judgment.
- 31 The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps shall not waver.
- 32 (ש) The wicked watches the righteous,
And seeks to slay him;
- 33 Jehovah will not leave him in his hand,
And will not condemn him when he is judged.
- 34 (פ) Wait for Jehovah, and keep His way.
And He will exalt thee to inherit the land;
When the wicked is cut off, thou shalt see [it].
- 35 (ר) I have seen the wicked terror-striking
And spreading himself abroad like [a tree]
native to the soil [and] green.
- 36 And he passed (I passed by?), and lo, he was
not [there];
And I sought for him, and he was not to be
found.
- 37 (ו) Mark the perfect, and behold the up-
right;
For there is a posterity to the man of peace.
- 38 And apostates are destroyed together;
The posterity of the wicked is cut off.
- 39 (א) And the salvation of the righteous is from
Jehovah,
Their stronghold in time of trouble.
- 40 And Jehovah helps them and rescues them;
He rescues them from the wicked, and saves
them,
Because they take refuge in Him.

THERE is a natural connection between acrostic structure and didactic tone, as is shown in several instances, and especially in this psalm. The structure is on the whole regular, each second verse beginning with the required letter, but here and there the period is curtailed or elongated by one member. Such irregularities do not seem to mark stages in the thought or breaks in the

sequence, but are simply reliefs to the monotony of the rhythm, like the shiftings of the place of the pause in blank verse, the management of which makes the difference between a master and a bungler. The psalm grapples with the problem which tried the faith of the Old Testament saints,—namely, the apparent absence of correlation of conduct with condition—and solves it by the strong assertion of the brevity of godless prosperity and the certainty that well-doing will lead to well-being. The principle is true absolutely in the long run, but there is no reference in the psalm to the future life. Visible material prosperity is its promise for the righteous, and the opposite its threatening for the godless. No doubt retribution is not wholly postponed till another life, but it does not fall so surely and visibly as this psalm would lead us to expect. The relative imperfection of the Old Testament revelation is reflected in the Psalms, faith's answer to Heaven's word. The clear light of New Testament revelation of the future is wanting, nor could the truest view of the meaning and blessedness of sorrow be adequately and proportionately held before Christ had taught it by His own history and by His words. The Cross was needed before the mystery of righteous suffering could be fully elucidated, and the psalmist's solution is but provisional. His faith that infinite love ruled and that righteousness was always gain, and sin loss, is grandly and eternally true. Nor is it to be forgotten that he lived and sang in an order of things in which the Divine government had promised material blessings as the result of spiritual faithfulness, and that, with whatever anomalies, modest prosperity did, on the whole, attend the true Israelite. The Scripture books which wrestle most profoundly with the standing puzzle of prosperous evil and afflicted goodness are late books, not merely because religious reflectiveness was slowly evolved, but because decaying faith had laid Israel open to many wounds, and the condition of things which accompanied the decline of the ancient order abounded with instances of triumphant wickedness.

But though this psalm does not go to the bottom of its theme, its teaching of the blessedness of absolute trust in God's providence is ever fresh, and fits close to all stages of revelation; and its prophecies of triumph for the afflicted who trust and of confusion to the evil-doer need only to be referred to the end to be completely established. As a theodicy, or vindication of the ways of God with men, it was true for its age, but the New Testament goes beneath it. As an exhortation to patient trust and an exhibition of the sure blessings thereof, it remains what it has been to many generations: the gentle encourager of meek faith and the stay of afflicted hearts.

Marked progress of thought is not to be looked for in an acrostic psalm. In the present instance the same ideas are reiterated with emphatic persistence, but little addition or variation. To the didactic poet "to write the same things is not grievous," for they are his habitual thoughts; and for his scholars "it is safe," for there is no better aid to memory than the cadenced monotony of the same ideas cast into song and slightly varied. But a possible grouping may be suggested by observing that the thought of the "cutting off" of the wicked and the inheritance of the land by the righteous occurs three times. If it is taken as a kind of refrain, we may cast the psalm into four

portions, the first three of which close with that double thought. Vv. 1-9 will then form a group, characterised by exhortations to trust and assurances of triumph. The second section will then be vv. 10-22, which, while reiterating the ground tone of the whole, does so with a difference, inasmuch as its main thought is the destruction of the wicked, in contrast with the triumph of the righteous in the preceding verses. A third division will be vv. 23-29, of which the chief feature is the adduction of the psalmist's own experience as authenticating his teaching in regard to the Divine care of the righteous, and that extended to his descendants. The last section (vv. 30-40) gathers up all, reasserts the main thesis, and confirms it by again adducing the psalmist's experience in confirmation of the other half of his assurances, namely the destruction of the wicked. But the poet does not wish to close his words with that gloomy picture, and therefore this last section bends round again to reiterate and strengthen the promises for the righteous, and its last note is one of untroubled trust and joy in experienced deliverance.

The first portion (vv. 1-9) consists of a series of exhortations to trust and patience, accompanied by assurance of consequent blessing. These are preceded and followed by a dehortation from yielding to the temptation of fretting against the prosperity of evil-doers, based upon the assurance of its transitoriness. Thus the positive precepts inculcating the ideal temper to be cultivated are framed in a setting of negatives, inseparable from them. The tendency to murmur at flaunting wrong must be repressed if the disposition of trust is to be cultivated; and, on the other hand, full obedience to the negative precepts is only possible when the positive ones have been obeyed with some degree of completeness. The soul's husbandry must be busied in grubbing up weeds as well as in sowing; but the true way to take away nourishment from the baser is to throw the strength of the soil into growing the nobler crop. "Fret not thyself" (A.V.) is literally, "Heat not thyself," and "Be not envious" is "Do not glow," the root idea being that of becoming fiery red. The one word expresses the kindling emotion, the other its visible sign in the flushed face. Envy, anger, and any other violent and God-forgetting emotion are included. There is nothing in the matter in hand worth getting into a heat about, for the prosperity in question is short-lived. This leading conviction moulds the whole psalm, and, as we have pointed out, is half of the refrain. We look for the other half to accompany it, as usual, and we find it in one rendering of ver. 3, which has fallen into discredit with modern commentators, and to which we shall come presently; but for the moment we may pause to suggest that the picture of the herbage withering as soon as cut, under the fierce heat of the Eastern sun, may stand in connection with the metaphors in ver. 1. Why should we blaze with indignation when so much hotter a glow will dry up the cut grass? Let it wave in brief glory, unmeddled with by us. The scythe and the sunshine will soon make an end. The precept and its reason are not on the highest levels of Christian ethics, but they are unfairly dealt with if taken to mean, Do not envy the wicked man's prosperity, nor wish it were yours, but solace yourself with the assurance of his speedy ruin. What is said is far nobler than that. It is, Do not let the prosperity of unworthy men shake your faith in God's gov-

ernment, nor fling you into an unwholesome heat, for God will sweep away the anomaly in due time.

In regard to the positive precepts, the question arises whether ver. 3 *b* is command or promise, with which is associated another question as to the translation of the words rendered by the A.V., "Verily thou shalt be fed," and by the R.V., "Follow after faithfulness." The relation of the first and second parts of the subsequent verses is in favour of regarding the clause as promise, but the force of that consideration is somewhat weakened by the non-occurrence in ver. 3 of the copula which introduces the promises of the other verses. Still its omission does not seem sufficient to forbid taking the clause as corresponding with these. The imperative is similarly used as substantially a future in ver. 27: "and dwell for evermore." The fact that in every other place in the psalm where "dwelling in the land" is spoken of it is a promise of the sure results of trust, points to the same sense here, and the juxtaposition of the two ideas in the refrain leads us to expect to find the prediction of ver. 2 followed by its companion there. On the whole, then, to understand ver. 3 *b* as promise seems best. (So LXX., Ewald, Grätz, etc.) What, then, is the meaning of its last words? If they are a continuation of the promise, they must describe some blessed effect of trust. Two renderings present themselves, one that adopted in the R.V. margin, "Feed securely," and another "Feed on faithfulness"; (*i.e.*, of God). Hupfeld calls this an "arbitrary and forced" reference of "faithfulness"; but it worthily completes the great promise. The blessed results of trust and active goodness are stable dwelling in the land and nourishment there from a faithful God. The thoughts move within the Old Testament circle, but their substance is eternally true, for they who take God for their portion have a safe abode, and feed their souls on His unalterable adherence to His promises and on the abundance flowing thence.

The subsequent precepts bear a certain relation to each other, and, taken together, make a lovely picture of the inner secret of the devout life: "Delight thyself in Jehovah; roll thy way on Him; trust in Him; be silent to Jehovah." No man will commit his way to God who does not delight in Him; and unless he has so committed his way, he cannot rest in the Lord. The heart that delights in God, finding its truest joy in Him and being well and at ease when consciously moving in Him as an all-encompassing atmosphere and reaching towards Him with the deepest of its desires, will live far above the region of disappointment. For its desire and fruition go together. Longings fixed on Him fulfil themselves. We can have as much of God as we wish. If He is our delight, we shall wish nothing contrary to nor apart from Him, and wishes which are directed to Him cannot be in vain. To delight in God is to possess our delight, and in Him to find fulfilled wishes and abiding joys. "Commit thy way unto Him," or "Roll it upon Him" in the exercise of trust; and, as the verse says with grand generality, omitting to specify an object for the verb, "He will do"—all that is wanted, or will finish the work. To roll one's way upon Jehovah implies subordination of will and judgment to Him and quiet confidence in His guidance. If the heart delights in Him, and the will waits silent before Him, and a happy consciousness of dependence fills the soul, the desert will not be trackless, nor the travellers fail to hear the voice

which says, "This is the way; walk ye in it." He who trusts is led, and God works for him, clearing away clouds and obstructions. His good may be evil spoken of, but the vindication by fact will make his righteousness shine spotless; and his cause may be apparently hopeless, but God will deliver him. He shall shine forth as the sun, not only in such earthly vindication as the psalmist prophesied, but more resplendently, as Christian faith has been gifted with long sight to anticipate, "in the kingdom of my Father." Thus delighting and trusting, a man may "be silent." Be still before Jehovah, in the silence of a submissive heart, and let not that stillness be torpor, but gather thyself together and stretch out thy hope towards Him. That patience is no mere passive endurance without murmuring, but implies tension of expectation. Only if it is thus occupied will it be possible to purge the heart of that foolish and weakening heat which does no harm to any one but to the man himself. "Heat not thyself; it only leads to doing evil." Thus the section returns upon itself and once more ends with the unhesitating assurance, based upon the very essence of God's covenant with the nation, that righteousness is the condition of inheritance, and sin the cause of certain destruction. The narrower application of the principle, which was all that the then stage of revelation made clear to the psalmist, melts away for us into the Christian certainty that righteousness is the condition of dwelling in the true land of promise, and that sin is always death, in germ or in full fruition.

The refrain occurs next in ver. 22, and the portion thus marked off (vv. 10-22) may be dealt with as a smaller whole. After a repetition (vv. 10, 11) of the main thesis slightly expanded, it sketches in vivid outline the fury of "the wicked" against "the just" and the grim retribution that turns their weapons into agents of their destruction. How dramatically are contrasted the two pictures of the quiet righteous in the former section and of this raging enemy, with his gnashing teeth and arsenal of murder! And with what crushing force the thought of the awful laughter of Jehovah, in foresight of the swift flight towards the blind miscreant of the day of his fall, which has already, as it were, set out on its road, smites his elaborate preparations into dust! Silently the good man sits wrapped in his faith. Without are raging, armed foes. Above, the laughter of God rolls thunderous, and from the throne the obedient "day" is winging its flight, like an eagle with lightning bolts in its claws. What can the end be but another instance of the solemn *lex talionis*, by which a man's evil slays himself?

Various forms of the contrast between the two classes follow, with considerable repetition and windings. One consideration which has to be taken into account in estimating the distribution of material prosperity is strongly put in vv. 16, 17. The good of outward blessings depends chiefly on the character of their owner. The strength of the extract from a raw material depends on the solvent applied, and there is none so powerful to draw out the last drop of most poignant and pure sweetness from earthly good as is righteousness of heart. Naboth's vineyard will yield better wine, if Naboth is trusting in Jehovah, than all the vines of Jezreel or Samaria. "Many wicked" have not as much of the potentiality of blessedness in all their bursting coffers as a poor widow may distil out of two mites. The reasons for that are

manifold, but the prevailing thought of the psalm leads to one only being named here. "For," says ver. 17, "the arms of the wicked shall be broken." Little is the good of possessions which cannot defend their owners from the stroke of God's executioners, but themselves pass away. The poor man's little is much, because, among other reasons, he is upheld by God, and therefore needs not to cherish anxiety, which embitters the enjoyments of others. Again the familiar thought of permanent inheritance recurs, but now with a glance at the picture just drawn of the destruction coming to the wicked. There are days and days. God saw that day of ruin speeding on its errand, and He has loving sympathetic knowledge of the days of the righteous (i. 6), and holds their lives in His hand; therefore continuance and abundance are ensured.

The antithetical structure of vv. 16-22 is skilfully varied, so as to avoid monotony. It is elastic within limits. We note that in the Teth strophe (vv. 16, 17) each verse contains a complete contrast, while in the Yod strophe (vv. 18, 19) one half only of the contrast is presented, which would require a similar expansion of the other over two verses. Instead of this, however, the latter half is compressed into one verse (20), which is elongated by a clause. Then in the Lamed strophe (vv. 21, 22) the briefer form recurs, as in vv. 16, 17. Thus the longer antithesis is enclosed between two parallel shorter ones, and a certain variety breaks up the sameness of the swing from one side to the other, and suggests a pause in the flow of the psalm. The elongated verse (20) reiterates the initial metaphor of withering herbage (ver. 2) with an addition for the rendering "fat of lambs" must be given up as incongruous, and only plausible on account of the emblem of smoke in the next clause. But the two metaphors are independent. Just as in ver. 2, so here, the gay "beauty of the pastures," so soon to wilt and be changed into brown barrenness, mirrors the fate of the wicked. Ver. 2 shows the grass fallen before the scythe; ver. 20 lets us see it in its flush of loveliness, so tragically unlike what it will be when its "day" has come. The other figure of smoke is a stereotype in all tongues for evanescence. The thick wreaths thin away and melt. Another peculiar form of the standing antithesis appears in the Lamed strophe (vv. 21, 22), which sets forth the gradual impoverishment of the wicked and prosperity as well as beneficence of the righteous, and, by the "for" of ver. 22, traces these up to the "curse and blessing of God, which become manifest in the final destiny of the two" (Delitzsch). Not dishonesty, but bankruptcy, is the cause of "not paying again"; while, on the other hand, the blessing of God not only enriches, but softens, making the heart which has received grace a well-spring of grace to needy ones, even if they are foes. The form of the contrast suggests its dependence on the promises in Deut. xii. 44, xv. 6, 28. Thus the refrain is once more reached, and a new departure taken.

The third section is shorter than the preceding (vv. 23-29), and has, as its centre, the psalmist's confirmation from his own experience of the former part of his antithesis, the fourth section similarly confirming the second. All this third part is sunny with the Divine favour streaming upon the righteous, the only reference to the wicked being in the refrain at the close. The first strophe (vv. 23, 24) declares God's care for the

former under the familiar image of guidance and support to a traveller. As in vv. 5, 7, the "way" is an emblem of active life, and is designated as "his" who treads it. The intention of the psalm, the context of the metaphor, and the parallelism with the verses just referred to, settle the reference of the ambiguous pronouns "he" and "his" in ver. 23 *b*. God delights in the good man's way (i. 6), and that is the reason for His establishing his goings. "*Quoniam Deo grata est piorum via, gressus ipsum ad lætū finem adducit*" (Calvin). That promise is not to be limited to either the material or moral region. The ground tone of the psalm is that the two regions coincide in so far as prosperity in the outer is the infallible index of rightness in the inner. The dial has two sets of hands, one within and one without, but both are, as it were, mounted on the same spindle, and move accurately alike. Steadfast treading in the path of duty and successful undertakings are both included, since they are inseparable in fact. True, even the fixed faith of the psalmist has to admit that the good man's path is not always smooth. If facts had not often contradicted his creed, he would never have sung his song; and hence he takes into account the case of such a man's falling, and seeks to reduce its importance by the considerations of its recoverableness and of God's keeping hold of the man's hand all the while.

The Nun strophe brings in the psalmist's experience to confirm his doctrine. The studiously impersonal tone of the psalm is dropped only here and in the complementary reference to the fall of the wicked (vv. 35, 36). Observation and reflection yield the same results. Experience seals the declarations of faith. His old eyes have seen much; and the net result is that the righteous may be troubled, but not abandoned, and that there is an entail of blessing to their children. In general, experience preaches the same truths to-day, for, on the whole, wrong-doing lies at the root of most of the hopeless poverty and misery of modern society. Idleness, recklessness, thriftlessness, lust, drunkenness, are the potent factors of it; and if their handiwork and that of the subtler forms of respectable godlessness and evil were to be eliminated, the sum of human wretchedness would shrink to very small dimensions. The mystery of suffering is made more mysterious by ignoring its patent connection with sin, and by denying the name of sin to many of its causes. If men's conduct were judged by God's standard, there would be less wonder at God's judgments manifested in men's suffering.

The solidarity of the family was more strongly felt in ancient times than in our days of individualism, but even now the children of the righteous, if they maintain the hereditary character, do largely realise the blessing which the psalmist declares is uniformly theirs. He is not to be tied down to literalism in his statement of the general working of things. What he deals with is the prevailing trend, and isolated exceptions do not destroy his assertion. Of course continuance in paternal virtues is presupposed as the condition of succeeding to paternal good. In the strength of the adduced experience, a hortatory tone, dropped since ver. 8, is resumed, with reminiscences of that earlier series of counsels. The secret of permanence is condensed into two antithetical precepts, to depart from evil and do good and the key-note is sounded once more in a promise, cast into the guise of a commandment (compare ver. 3), of unmoved habitation, which is, however, not

to be stretched to refer to a future life, of which the psalm says nothing. Such permanent abiding is sure, inasmuch as Jehovah loves judgment and watches over the objects of His lovingkindness.

The acrostic sequence fails at this point, if the Masoretic text is adhered to. There is evident disorder in the division of verses, for ver. 28 has four clauses instead of the normal two. If the superfluous two are detached from it and connected as one strophe with ver. 29, a regular two-versed and four-clausd strophe results. Its first word (L'olam="for ever") has the Ayin, due in the alphabetical sequence, in its second letter, the first being a prefixed preposition, which may be passed over, as in ver. 39 the copula Vav. is prefixed to the initial letter. Delitzsch takes this to be the required letter; but if so, another irregularity remains, inasmuch as the first couplet of the strophe should be occupied with the fate of the wicked as antithetical to that of the righteous in ver. 29. "They are preserved for ever" throws the whole strophe out of order. Probably, therefore, there is textual corruption here, which the LXX. helps in correcting. It has an evidently double rendering of the clause, as is not unfrequently the case where there is ambiguity or textual difficulty, and gives side by side with "They shall be preserved for ever" the rendering "The lawless shall be hunted out," which can be re-turned into Hebrew so as to give the needed initial Ayin either in a somewhat rare word, or in one which occurs in ver. 35. If this correction is adopted, the anomalies disappear, and strophe, division, acrostic, and antithetical refrain are all in order.

The last section (ver. 30 to end), like the preceding, has the psalmist's experience for its centre, and traces the entail of conduct to a second generation of evil-doers, as the former did to the seed of the righteous. Both sections begin with the promise of firmness for the "goings or steps" of the righteous, but the later verses expand the thought by a fuller description of the moral conditions of stability. "The law of his God is in his heart." That is the foundation on which all permanence is built. From that as centre there issue wise and just words on the one hand and stable deeds on the other. That is true in the psalmist's view in reference to outward success and continuance, but still more profoundly in regard to steadfast progress in paths of righteousness. He who orders his footsteps by God's known will is saved from much hesitancy, vacillation, and stumbling, and plants a firm foot even on slippery places.

Once more the picture of the enmity of the wicked recurs, as in vv. 12-14, with the difference that there the emphasis was laid on the destruction of the plotters and here it is put on the vindication of the righteous by acts of deliverance (vv. 32, 33).

In ver. 34 another irregularity occurs, in its being the only verse in a strophe and being prolonged to three clauses. This may be intended to give emphasis to the exhortation contained in it, which, like that in ver. 27, is the only one in its section. The two key words "inherit" and "cut off" are brought together. Not only are the two fates set in contrast, but the waiters on Jehovah are promised the sight of the destruction of the wicked. Satisfaction at the sight is implied. There is nothing unworthy in solemn thankfulness when God's judgments break the teeth of some devouring lion. Divine judgments minister occasion for praise even from pure spirits

before the throne, and men relieved from the incubus of godless oppression may well draw a long breath of relief, which passes into celebration of His righteous acts. No doubt there is a higher tone, which remembers ruth and pity even in that solemn joy; but Christian feeling does not destroy but modify the psalmist's thankfulness for the sweeping away of godless antagonism to goodness.

His assurance to those who wait on Jehovah has his own experience as its guarantee (ver. 35), just as the complementary assurance in ver. 24 had in ver. 25. The earlier metaphors of the green herb-**a**ge and the beauty of the pastures are heightened now. A venerable, wide-spreading giant of the forests, rooted in its native soil, is grander than those humble growths; but for lofty cedars or lowly grass the end is the same. Twice the psalmist stood at the same place; once the great tree laid its large limbs across the field, and lifted a firm bole: again he came, and a clear space revealed how great had been the bulk which shadowed it. Not even a stump was left to tell where the leafy glory had been.

Vv. 37, 38, make the Shin strophe, and simply reiterate the antithesis which has moulded the whole psalm, with the addition of that reference to a second generation which appeared in the third and fourth parts. The word rendered in the A. V. and R.V. "latter end" here means posterity. The "perfect man" is further designated as a "man of peace."

The psalm might have ended with this gathering together of its contents in one final emphatic statement, but the poet will not leave the stern words of destruction as his last. Therefore he adds a sweet, long-drawn-out close, like the calm, extended clouds, that lie motionless in the western sky after a day of storm in which he once more sings of the blessedness of those who wait on Jehovah. Trouble will come, notwithstanding his assurances that righteousness is blessedness; but in it Jehovah will be a fortress home, and out of it He will save them. However the teaching of the psalm may need modification in order to coincide with the highest New Testament doctrine of the relation between righteousness and prosperity, these confidences need none. For ever and absolutely they are true: in trouble a stronghold, out of trouble a Saviour, is God to all who cling to Him. Very beautifully the closing verse lingers on its theme and wreathes its thoughts together, with repetition that tells how sweet they are to the singer: "Jehovah helps them, and *rescues* them: He *rescues* them, . . . and saves them." So the measure of the strophe is complete, but the song flows over in an additional clause, which points the path for all who seek such blessedness. Trust is peace. They who take refuge in Jehovah are safe, and their inheritance shall be for ever. That is the psalmist's inmost secret of a blessed life.

PSALM XXXVIII.

- 1 Jehovah, not in Thine indignation do Thou rebuke me,
Nor in Thy hot anger chastise me.
- 2 For Thine arrows are come down into me,
And down upon me comes Thy hand.
- 3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of
Thy wrath;

There is no health in my bones because of my sin.

- 4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
As a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

- 5 My bruises smell foully, they run with matter,
Because of my folly.

- 6 I am twisted [with pain]; I am bowed down
utterly;

All the day I drag about in squalid attire.

- 7 For my loins are full of burning,
And there is no soundness in my flesh.

- 8 I am exhausted and crushed utterly;
I roar for the sighing of my heart.

- 9 Lord, present to Thee is all my desire,
And my sighing is not hid from Thee.

- 10 My heart flutters, my strength has left me,
And the light of my eyes—even it is no more
with me.

- 11 My lovers and friends stand aloof from my
stroke,

And my near [kin] stand far off.

- 12 And they who seek after my life set snares
[for me],

And they who desire my hurt speak destruction.

And meditate deceits all the day.

- 13 And I, like a deaf man, do not hear,
And am like one dumb, who opens not his
mouth.

- 14 Yea, I am become like a man who hears not,
And in whose mouth are no counter-pleas.

- 15 For for Thee, Jehovah, do I wait;
Thou, Thou wilt answer, O Lord, my God.

- 16 For I said Lest they should rejoice over me,
[And] when my foot slips, should magnify
themselves over me.

- 17 For I am ready to fall,
And my sorrow is continually present to me.

- 18 For I must declare my guilt,
Be distressed for my sin.

- 19 And my enemies are lively, they are strong,
(And my enemies without cause are strong?)

- 20 And, requiting evil for good,
They are my adversaries because I follow
good.

- 21 Forsake me not, Jehovah;
My God, be not far from me.

- 22 Haste to my help,
O God, my salvation.

THIS is a long-drawn wail, passionate at first, but gradually calming itself into submission and trust, though never passing from the minor key. The name of God is invoked thrice (vv. 1, 9, 15), and each time that the psalmist looks up his burden is somewhat easier to carry, and some "low beginnings of content" steal into his heart and mingle with his lament. Sorrow finds relief in repeating its plaint. It is the mistake of cold-blooded readers to look for consecution of thought in the cries of a wounded soul; but it is also a mistake to be blind to the gradual sinking of the waves in this psalm, which begins with deprecating

ing God's wrath, and ends with quietly nestling close to Him as "my salvation."

The characteristic of the first burst of feeling is its unbroken gloom. It sounds the depths of darkness, with which easy-going, superficial lives are unfamiliar, but whoever has been down into them will not think the picture overcharged with black. The occasion of the psalmist's deep dejection cannot be gathered from his words. He, like all poets who teach in song what they learn in suffering, translates his personal sorrows into language fitting for other's pains. The feelings are more important to him and to us than the facts, and we must be content to leave unsettled the question of his circumstances, on which, after all, little depends. Only, it is hard for the present writer, at least, to believe that such a psalm, quivering, as it seems, with agony, is not the genuine cry of a brother's tortured soul, but an utterance invented for a personified nation. The close verbal resemblance of the introductory deprecation of chastisement in anger to Psalm vi. 1 has been supposed to point to a common authorship, and Delitzsch takes both psalms, along with Psalms xxxii. and li., as a series belonging to the time of David's penitence after his great fall from purity. But the resemblance in question would rather favour the supposition of difference of authorship, since quotation is more probable than self-repetition. Jer. x. 23 is by some held to be the original, and either Jeremiah himself or some later singer to have been the author of the psalm. The question of which of two similar passages is source and which is copy is always ticklish. Jeremiah's bent was assimilative, and his prophecies are full of echoes. The priority, therefore, probably lies with one or other of the psalmists, if there are two.

The first part of the psalm is entirely occupied with the subjective aspect of the psalmist's affliction. Three elements are conspicuous: God's judgments, the singer's consciousness of sin, and his mental and probably physical sufferings. Are the "arrows" and crushing weight of God's "hand," which he deprecates in the first verses, the same as the sickness and wounds, whether of mind or body, which he next describes so pathetically? They are generally taken to be so, but the language of this section and the contents of the remainder of the psalm rather point to a distinction between them. It would seem that there are three stages, not two, as that interpretation would make them. Unspecified calamities, recognised by the sufferer as God's chastisements, have roused his conscience, and its gnawing has superinduced mental and bodily pain. The terribly realistic description of the latter may, indeed, be figurative, but is more probably literal. The reiterated synonyms for God's displeasure in vv. 1, 3, show how all the aspects of that solemn thought are familiar. The first word regards it as an outburst, or explosion, like a charge of dynamite; the second as "glowing, igniting"; the third as effervescent, bubbling like lava in a crater. The metaphors for the effects of this anger in ver. 2 deepen the impression of its terribleness. It is a fearful fate to be the target for God's "arrows," but it is worse to be crushed under the weight of His "hand." The two forms of representation refer to the same facts, but make a climax. The verbs in ver. 2 are from one root, meaning to come down, or to lie upon. In 2 *a* the word is reflexive, and represents the "arrows" as endowed with volition, hurling themselves down. They

penetrate with force proportionate to the distance which they fall, as a meteoric stone buries itself in the ground. Such being the wounding, crushing power of the Divine "anger," its effects on the psalmist are spread out before God, in the remaining part of this first division, with plaintive reiteration. The connection which a quickened conscience discerns between sorrow and sin is strikingly set forth in ver. 3, in which "Thine indignation" and "my sin" are the double fountain-heads of bitterness. The quivering frame first felt the power of God's anger, and then the awakened conscience turned inwards and discerned the occasion of the anger. The three elements which we have distinguished are clearly separated here, and their connection laid bare.

The second of these is the sense of sin, which the psalmist feels as taking all "peace" or well-being out of his "bones" as a flood rolling its black waters over his head, as a weight beneath which he cannot stand upright, and again as foolishness, since its only effect has been, to bring to him not what he hoped to win by it, but this miserable plight.

Then, he pours himself out, with the monotonous repetition so natural to self-pity, in a graphic accumulation of pictures of disease, which may be taken as symbolic of mental distress, but are better understood literally. With the whole, Isa. i. 5, 6, should be compared, nor should the partial resemblances of Isa. liii. be overlooked. No fastidiousness keeps the psalmist from describing offensive details. His body is scourged and livid with parti-coloured, swollen weals from the lash, and these discharge foul-smelling matter. With this compare Isa. liii. 5, "His stripes" (same word). Whatever may be thought of the other physical features of suffering, this must obviously be figurative. Contorted in pain, bent down by weakness, dragging himself wearily with the slow gait of an invalid, squalid in attire, burning with inward fever, diseased in every tortured atom of flesh, he is utterly worn out and broken (same word as "bruised," Isa. liii. 5). Inward misery, the cry of the heart, must have outward expression, and, with Eastern vehemence in utterance of emotions which Western reticence prefers to let gnaw in silence at the roots of life, he "roars" aloud because his heart groans.

This vivid picture of the effects of the sense of personal sin will seem to superficial modern Christianity exaggerated and alien from experience; but the deeper a man's godliness, the more will he listen with sympathy, with understanding and with appropriation of such piercing laments as his own. Just as few of us are dowered with sensibilities so keen as to feel what poets feel, in love or hope, or delight in nature, or with power to express the feelings, and yet can recognise in their winged words the heightened expression of our own less full emotions, so the truly devout soul will find, in the most passionate of these wailing notes, the completer expression of his own experience. We must go down into the depths and cry to God out of them, if we are to reach sunny heights of communion. Intense consciousness of sin is the obverse of ardent aspiration after righteousness, and that is but a poor type of religion which has not both. It is one of the glories of the Psalter that both are given utterance to in it in words which are as vital to-day as when they first came warm from the lips of these long dead men. Everything in the world has changed, but these songs of penitence and plaintive deprecations

tion, like their twin bursts of rapturous communion, were "not born for death." Contrast the utter deadness of the religious hymns of all other nations with the fresh vitality of the Psalms. As long as hearts are penetrated with the consciousness of evil done and loved, these strains will fit themselves to men's lips.

Because the psalmist's recounting of his pains was prayer and not soliloquy or mere cry of anguish, it calms him. We make the wound deeper by turning round the arrow in it, when we dwell upon suffering without thinking of God; but when, like the psalmist, we tell all to Him, healing begins. Thus, the second part (vv. 9-14) is perceptibly calmer, and though still agitated, its thought of God is more trustful, and silent submission at the close takes the place of the "roaring," the shrill cry of agony which ended the first part. A further variation of tone is that, instead of the entirely subjective description of the psalmist's sufferings in vv. 1-8, the desertion by friends and the hostility of foes, are now the main elements of trial. There is comparative peace for a tortured heart in the thought that all its desire and sighing are known to God. That knowledge is prior to the heart's prayer, but does not make it needless, for by the prayer the conviction of the Divine knowledge has entered the troubled soul, and brought some prelude of deliverance and hope of answer. The devout soul does not argue "Thou knowest, and I need not speak," but "Thou knowest, therefore I tell Thee"; and it is soothed in and after telling. He who begins his prayer, by submitting to chastisement and only deprecating the form of it inflicted by "wrath," will pass to the more gracious thought of God as lovingly cognisant of both his desire and his sighing, his wishes and his pains. The burst of the storm is past, when that light begins to break through clouds, though waves still run high.

How high they still run is plain from the immediate recurrence of the strain of recounting the singer's sorrows. This recrudescence of woe after the clear calm of a moment is only too well known to us all in our sorrows. The psalmist returns to speak of his sickness in ver. 10, which is really a picture of syncope or fainting. The heart's action is described by a rare word, which in its root means to go round and round, and is here in an intensive form expressive of violent motion, or possibly is to be regarded as a diminutive rather than an intensive, expressive of the thinner though quicker pulse. Then come collapse of strength and failure of sight. But this echo of the preceding part immediately gives place to the new element in the psalmist's sorrow, arising from the behaviour of friends and foes. The frequent complaint of desertion by friends has to be repeated by most sufferers in this selfish world. They keep far away from his "stroke," says the psalm, using the same word as is employed for leprosy, and as is used in the verb in Isa. liii. 4 ("stricken"). There is a tone of wonder and disappointment in the untranslatable play of language in ver. 11 b. "My near relations stand far off." Kin are not always kind. Friends have deserted because foes have beset him. Probably we have here the facts which in the previous part are conceived of as the "arrows" of God.

Open and secret enemies laying snares for him, as for some hunted wild creature, eagerly seeking his life, speaking "destructions" as if they would fain kill him with their words, and perpetually

whispering lies about him, were recognised by him as instruments of God's judgment, and evoked his consciousness of sin, which again led to actual disease. But the bitter schooling led to something else more blessed—namely, to silent resignation. Like David, when he let Shimei shriek his curses at him from the hillside and answered not, the psalmist is deaf and dumb to malicious tongues. He will speak to God, but to man he is silent, in utter submission of will.

Isaiah liii. 7 gives the same trait in the perfect Sufferer, a faint foreshadowing of whom is seen in the psalmist; and 1 Peter ii. 23 bids all who would follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, like Him open not their mouths when reviled, but commit themselves to the righteous Judge.

Once more the psalmist lifts his eyes to God, and the third invocation of the Name is attended by an increase of confidence. In the first part, "Jehovah" was addressed; in the second the designation "Lord" was used; in the third, both are united and the appropriating name "my God" is added. In the closing invocation (vv. 22-3) all three reappear, and each is the plea of a petition. The characteristics of these closing verses are three: humble trust, the marshalling of its reasons, and the combination of acknowledgment of sin and professions of innocence. The growth of trust is very marked, if the first part, with its synonyms for God's wrath and its deprecation of unmeasured chastisement and its details of pain, be compared with the quiet hope and assurance that God will answer, and with that great name "my Salvation." The singer does not indeed touch the heights of triumphant faith; but he who can grasp God as his, and can be silent because he is sure that God will speak by delivering deeds for him and can call Him his Salvation, has climbed far enough to have the sunshine all round him, and to be clear of the mists among which his song began. The best reason for letting the enemy speak on unanswered is the confidence that a mightier voice will speak. "But thou wilt answer, Lord, for me" may well make us deaf and dumb to temptations and threats, calumnies and flatteries.

How does this confidence spring in so troubled a heart? The fourfold "For" beginning each verse from 15 to 18 weaves them all into a chain. The first gives the reason for the submissive silence as being quiet confidence; and the succeeding three may be taken as either dependent on each other, or, as is perhaps better, as co-ordinate and all-assigning reasons for that confidence. Either construction yields worthy and natural meanings. If the former be adopted, trust in God's undertaking of the silent sufferer's cause is based upon the prayer which broke his silence. Dumb to men, he had breathed to God his petition for help, and had buttressed it with this plea, "Lest they rejoice over me," and he had feared that they would, because he knew that he was ready to fall and had ever before him his pain, and that because he felt himself forced to lament and confess his sin. But it seems to yield a richer meaning, if the "For's" be regarded as co-ordinate. They then become a striking and instructive example of faith's logic, the ingenuity of pleading which finds encouragements in discouragements. The suppliant is sure of answer because he has told God his fear, and yet again because he is so near falling and therefore needs help so much, and yet again because he has made a clean breast of his sin. Trust in God's help, dis-

trust of self, consciousness of weakness, and penitence make anything possible rather than that the prayer which embodies them should be flung up to an unanswering God. They are prevalent pleas with Him in regard to which He will not be "as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth there is no reply." They are grounds of assurance to him who prays.

The juxtaposition of consciousness of sin in ver. 18 with the declaration that love of good was the cause of being persecuted, brings out the two-fold attitude, in regard to God and men, which a devout soul may permissibly and sometimes must necessarily assume. There may be the truest sense of sinfulness, along with a clear-hearted affirmation of innocence in regard to men, and a conviction that it is good and goodwill to them, not evil in the sufferer, which makes him the butt of hatred. Not less instructive is the double view of the same facts presented in the beginning and end of this psalm. They were to the psalmist first regarded as God's chastisement in wrath, His "arrows" and heavy "hand," because of sin. Now they are men's enmity, because of his love of good. Is there not an entire contradiction between these two views of suffering, its cause and source? Certainly not, but rather the two views differ only in the angle of vision, and may be combined, like stereoscopic pictures, into one rounded, harmonious whole. To be able so to combine them is one of the rewards of such pleading trust as breathes its plaintive music through this psalm, and wakes responsive notes in devout hearts still.

PSALM XXXIX.

- 1 I said, I will guard my ways, that I sin not with my tongue;
I will put a muzzle on my mouth
So long as the wicked is before me.
- 2 I made myself dumb in still submission,
I kept silence joylessly,
And my sorrow was stirred.
- 3 My heart was hot within me;
While I mused the fire blazed up;
I spake with my tongue.
- 4 Make me, Jehovah, to know my end,
And the measure of my days, what it is;
Let me know how fleeting I am.
- 5 Behold, as handbreadths hast Thou made my days,
And my lifetime is as nothing before Thee;
Surely nothing but a breath is every man, stand he ever so firm. *Selah.*
- 6 Surely every man goes about like a shadow;
Surely for a breath do they make [such a stir];
He heaps up [goods] and knows not who will gather them.
- 7 And now what wait I for, Lord?
My hope—to Thee it goes.
- 8 From all my transgressions deliver me;
Make me not a reproach of the fool.
- 9 I make myself dumb, I open not my mouth,
For Thou hast done [it].
- 10 Remove Thy stroke from me;
I am wasted by the assault of Thy hand.
- 11 When with rebukes for iniquity Thou correctest a man,
Like a moth Thou frayest away his gracefulness;
Surely every man is [but] a breath. *Selah.*

- 12 Hear my prayer, Jehovah, and give ear to my cry;
At my weeping be not silent:
For I am a guest with Thee,
And a sojourner like all my fathers.

- 13 Look away from me, that I may brighten up,
Before I go hence and be no more.

PROTRACTED suffering, recognised as chastisement for sin, had wasted the psalmist's strength. It had been borne for a while in silence, but the rush of emotion had burst the floodgates. The psalm does not repeat the words which forced themselves from the hot heart, but preserves for us the calmer flow which followed. It falls into four parts, the first three of which contain three verses each, and the fourth is expanded into four, divided into two couples.

In the first part (vv. 1-3) the frustrated resolve of silence is recorded. Its motive was fear of sinning in speech "while the wicked is before me." That phrase is often explained as meaning that the sight of the prosperity of the godless in contrast with his own sorrows tempted the singer to break out into arraigning God's providence, and that he schooled himself to look at their insolent ease unmurmuringly. But the psalm has no other references to other men's flourishing condition; and it is more in accordance with its tone to suppose that his own pains, and not their pleasures, prompted to the withheld words. The presence of "the wicked" imposed on his devout heart silence as a duty. We do not complain of a friend's conduct in the hearing of his enemies. God's servants have to watch their speech about Him when godless ears are listening, lest hasty words should give occasion for malicious glee or blasphemy. So, for God's honour, the psalmist put restraint on himself. The word rendered "bridle" in ver. 2 by the A.V. and R.V. is better taken as muzzle, for a muzzle closes the lips, and a bridle does not. The resolution thus energetically expressed was vigorously carried out: "I made myself dumb in still submission; I kept silence." And what came of it? "My sorrow was stirred." Grief suppressed is increased, as all the world knows. The closing words of ver. 2 *b* (lit. *apart from good*) are obscure, and very variously understood, some regarding them as an elliptical form of "from good and bad," and expressing completeness of silence; others taking "the good" to mean "the law, or the praise of God, or good-fortune, or such words as would serve to protect the singer from slanders." "But the preposition here employed, when it follows a verb meaning silence, does not introduce that concerning which silence is kept, but a negative result of silence" (Hupfeld). The meaning, then, is best given by some such paraphrase as "joylessly" or "and I had no comfort" (R. V.). The hidden sorrow gnawed beneath the cloak like a fire in a hollow tree; it burned fiercely unseen, and ate its way at last into sight. Locked lips make hearts hotter. Repression of utterance only feeds the fire, and sooner or later the "muzzle" is torn off, and pent-up feeling breaks into speech, often the wilder for the violence done to nature by the attempt to deny it its way. The psalmist's motive was right, and in a measure his silence was so; but his resolve did not at first go deep enough. It is the heart, not the mouth, that has to be silenced. To build a dam across a torrent without diminishing the sources that supply its waters

only increases weight and pressure, and ensures a muddy flood when it bursts.

Does the psalm proceed to recount what its author said when he broke silence? It may appear so at first sight. On the other hand, the calm prayer which follows, beginning with ver. 4, is not of the character of the wild and whirling words which were suppressed for fear of sinning, nor does the fierce fire of which the psalm has been speaking flame in it. It seems, therefore, more probable that those first utterances, in which the overcharged heart relieved itself, and which were tinged with complaint and impatience, are not preserved, and did not deserve to be, and that the pathetic, meditative petitions of the rest of the psalm succeeded them, as after the first rush of the restrained torrent comes a stiller flow. Such a prayer might well have been offered "while the wicked is before me," and might have been laid to heart by them. Its thoughts are as a cool hand laid on the singer's hot heart. They damp the fire burning in him. There is no surer remedy for inordinate sensibility to outward sorrows than fixed convictions of life's brevity and illusoriness; and these are the two thoughts which the prayer casts into sweet, sad music.

It deals with commonplaces of thought, which poets and moralists have been singing and preaching since the world began, in different tones and with discordant applications, sometimes with fierce revolt against the inevitable, sometimes with paralysing consciousness of it, sometimes using these truths as arguments for base pleasures and aims, sometimes toying with them as occasions for cheap sentiment and artificial pathos, sometimes urging them as motives for strenuous toil. But of all the voices which have ever sung or prophesied of life's short span and shadowy activities, none is nobler, saner, healthier, and calmer than this psalmist's. The stately words in which he proclaimed the transiency of all earthly things are not transient. They are "nothing but a breath," but they have outlasted much that seemed solid, and their music will sound as long as man is on his march through time. Our "days" have a "measure"; they are a limited period, and the Measurer is God. But this fleeting creature man has an obstinate fancy of his permanence, which is not all bad indeed—since without it there would be little continuity of purpose or concentration of effort—but may easily run to extremes and hide the fact that there is an end. Therefore the prayer for Divine illumination is needed, that we may not be ignorant of that which we know well enough, if we would bethink ourselves. The solemn convictions of ver. 5 are won by the petitions of ver. 4. He who asks God to make him know his end has already gone far towards knowing it. If he seeks to estimate the "measure" of his days, he will soon come to the clear conviction that it is only the narrow space that may be covered by one or two breadths of a hand. So do noisy years shrink when heaven's chronology is applied to them. A lifetime looks long, but set against God's eternal years, it shrivels to an all but imperceptible point, having position, but not magnitude.

The thought of brevity naturally draws after it that of illusoriness. Just because life is so frail does it assume the appearance of being futile. Both ideas are blended in the metaphors of "a breath" and "a shadow." There is a solemn earnestness in the three-fold "surely," confirming each clause of the seer's insight into earth's hollowness. How emphatically he puts it in the al-

most pleonastic language, "Surely nothing but a breath is every man, stand he ever so firm." The truth proclaimed is undeniably certain. It covers the whole ground of earthly life, and it includes the most prosperous and firmly established. "A breath" is the very emblem of transiency and of unsubstantiality. Every solid body can be melted and made gaseous vapour, if heat enough is applied. They who habitually bring human life "before Thee" dissolve into vapour the solid-seeming illusions which cheat others, and save their own lives from being but a breath by clearly recognising that they are.

The *Selah* at the end of ver. 4 does not here seem to mark a logical pause in thought nor to coincide with the strophe division, but emphasises by some long-drawn, sad notes the teaching of the words. The thought runs on unbroken, and ver. 6 is closely linked to ver. 5 by the repeated "surely" and "breath" as well as in subject. The figure changes from breath to "shadow," literally "image," meaning not a sculptured likeness, but an *eidolon*, or unsubstantial apparition.

"The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things";

and all the movements of men coming and going in the world are but like a dance of shadows. As they are a breath, so are their aims. All their hubbub and activity is but like the bustle of ants on their hill—immense energy and toil, and nothing coming of it all. If any doubt remained as to the correctness of this judgment of the aimlessness of man's toil, one fact would confirm the psalmist's sentence, viz., that the most successful man labours to amass, and has to leave his piles for another whom he does not know, to gather into his storehouses and to scatter by his prodigality. There may be an allusion in the words to harvesting work. The sheaves are piled up, but in whose barn are they to be housed? Surely, if the grower and reaper is not the ultimate owner, his toil has been for a breath.

All this is no fantastic pessimism. Still less is it an account of what life must be. If any man's is nothing but toiling for a breath, and if he himself is nothing but a breath, it is his own fault. They who are joined to God have "in their embers something that doth live"; and if they labour for Him, they do *not* labour for vanity, nor do they leave their possessions when they die. The psalmist has no reference to a future life, but the immediately following strophe shows that, though he knew that his days were few, he knew, too, that, if his hope were set on God he was freed from the curse of illusoriness and grasped no shadow, but the Living Substance, who would make his life blessedly real and pour into it substantial good.

The effect of such convictions of life's brevity and emptiness should be to throw the heart back on God. In the third part of the psalm (vv. 7-9) a higher strain sounds. The singer turns from his dreary thoughts, which might so easily become bitter ones, to lay hold on God. What should earth's vanity teach but God's sufficiency? It does not need the light of a future life to be flashed upon this mean, swiftly vanishing present in order to see it "apparelled in celestial light." Without that transforming conception, it is still possible to make it great and real by bringing it into conscious connection with God; and if hope and effort are set on Him amid all the smallnesses

and perishablenesses of the outer world, hope will not chase a shadow, nor effort toil for very vanity. The psalmist sought to calm his hot heart by the contemplation of his end, but that is a poor remedy for perturbation and grief unless it leads to actual contact with the one enduring Substance. It did so with him, and therefore "grief grew calm," just because "hope was" not "dead." To preach the vanity of all earthly things to heavy hearts is but pouring vinegar on nitre, unless it is accompanied with the great antidote to all sad and depreciating views of life: the thought that in it men may reach their hands beyond the time-film that enmeshes them and grasp the unchanging God. This psalm has no reference to life beyond the grave; but it finds in present communion by waiting and hope, emancipation from the curse of fleeting triviality which haunts every life separated from Him, like that which the Christian hope of immortality gives. God is the significant figure which gives value to the row of ciphers of which every life is without Him made up. Blessed are they who are driven by earth's vanity and drawn by God's fulness of love and power to fling themselves into His arms and nestle there! The strong recoil of the devout soul from a world which it has profoundly felt to be shadowy, and its great venture of faith, which is not a venture after all, were never more nobly or simply expressed than in that quiet "And now"—things being so—"what wait I for? My hope"—in contrast with the false directions which other men's takes—"to Thee it turns."

The burden is still on the psalmist's shoulders. His sufferings are not ended, though his trust has taken the poison out of them. Therefore his renewed grasp of God leads at once to prayer for deliverance from his "transgressions," in which cry may be included both sins and their chastisement. "The fool" is the name of a class, not of an individual, and, as always in Scripture, denotes moral and religious obliquity, not intellectual feebleness. The expression is substantially equivalent to "the wicked" of ver. 1, and a similar motive to that which there induced the psalmist to be silent is here urged as a plea with God for the sufferer's deliverance. Taunts launched at a good man suffering will glance off him and appear to reach his God.

Ver. 9 pleads as a reason for God's deliverance the psalmist's silence under what he recognised as God's chastisement. The question arises whether this is the same silence as is referred to in vv. 1, 2, and many authorities take that view. But that silence was broken by a rush of words from a hot heart, and, if the account of the connection in the psalm given above is correct, by a subsequent more placid meditation and prayer. It would be irrelevant to recur to it here, especially as a plea with God. But there are two kinds of silence under His chastisements: one which may have for its motive regard to His honour, but is none the less tinged with rebellious thoughts, and brings no good to the sufferer, and another which is silence of heart and will, not of lips only, and soothes sorrow which the other only aggravated, and puts out the fire which the other fanned. Submission to God's hand discerned behind all visible causes is the blessed silence. "To lie still, let Him strike home, and bless the rod," is best. And when that is attained, the uses of chastisement are accomplished; and we may venture to ask God to burn the rod. The desire to be freed from its blow is not inconsistent with such submission. This

prayer does not break the silence, though it may seem to do so, for this is the privilege of hearts that love God: that they can breathe desires to Him without His holding them unsubmitive to His supreme will.

The last part (vv. 10-13) is somewhat abnormally long, and falls into two parts separated by "Selah," which musical note does not here coincide with the greater divisions. The two pairs of verses are both petitions for removal of sickness, either real or figurative. Their pleading persistence presents substantially the same prayer and supports it by the same considerations of man's transiency. The Pattern of perfect resignation thrice "prayed, saying the same words"; and His suffering followers may do the same, and yet neither sin by impatience, nor weary the Judge by their continual coming. The psalmist sees in his pains God's "stroke," and pleads the effects already produced on him as a reason for cessation. He is already "wasted by the assault of God's hand." One more buffet, and he feels that he must die. It is bold for a sufferer to say to God, "Hold! enough!" but all depends on the tone in which it is said. It may be presumption, or it may be a child's free speech, not in the least trenching on a Father's authority. The sufferer underrates his capacity of endurance, and often thinks, "I can bear no straw more"; but yet he has to bear it. Yet the psalmist's cry rests upon a deep truth: that God cannot mean to crush; therefore he goes on to a deeper insight into the meaning of that "stroke." It is not the attack of an enemy, but the "correction" of a friend.

If men regarded sorrows and sicknesses as rebukes for iniquity, they would better understand why sinful life, separated from God, is so fleeting. The characteristic ground tone of the Old Testament echoes here, according to which "the wages of sin is death." The commonplace of man's frailty receives a still more tragic colouring when thus regarded as a consequence of his sin. The psalmist has learned it in relation to his own sufferings, and, because he sees it so clearly, he pleads that these may cease. He looks on his own wasted form; and God's hand seems to him to have taken away all that made it or life desirable and fair, as a moth would gnaw a garment. What a daring figure to compare the mightiest with the feeblest, the Eternal with the very type of evanescence!

The second subdivision of this part (vv. 12, 13) reiterates the former with some difference of tone. There is a beautiful climax of earnestness in the psalmist's appeal to God. His prayer swells into crying, and that again melts into tears, which go straight to the great Father's heart. Weeping eyes are never turned to heaven in vain; the gates of mercy open wide when the hot drops touch them. But his fervour of desire is not this suppliant's chief argument with God. His meditation has won for him deeper insight into that transiency which at first he had only laid like ice on his heart, to cool its feverish heat. He sees now more clearly, by reason of his effort to turn away his hope from earth and fix it on God, that his brief life has an aspect in which its brevity is not only calming, but exalting, and gives him a claim on God, whose guest he is while here, and with whom he has guest-rights, whether his stay is longer or shorter. "The land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. xxv. 23). That which was true in a special way of

Israel's tenure of the soil is true for the individual, and true for ever. All men are God's guests; and if we betake ourselves behind the curtains of His tent, we have rights of shelter and sustenance. All the bitterness of the thought of the brevity of life is sucked out of it by such a confidence. If a man dwells with God, his Host will care for the needs, and not be indifferent to the tears, of His guest. The long generations which have come and gone like shadows are not a melancholy procession out of nothing through vanity into nothing again, nor "disquieted in vain," if they are conceived as each in turn lodging for a little while in that same ancestral home which the present generation inhabits. It has seen many sons succeeding their fathers as its tenants, but its stately strength grows not old, and its gates are open to-day as they have been in all generations.

The closing prayer in ver. 13 has a strange sound. "Look away from me" is surely a singular petition, and the effect of God's averting His face is not less singular. The psalmist thinks that it will be his regaining cheerfulness and brightness, for he uses a word which means to clear up or to brighten, as the sky becomes blue again after storm. The light of God's face makes men's faces bright. "They cried unto God, and were lightened," not because He looked away from them, but because He regarded them. But the intended paradox gives the more emphatic expression to the thought that the psalmist's pains came from God's angry look, and it is that which he asks may be turned from him. That mere negative withdrawal, however, would have no cheering power, and is not conceivable as unaccompanied by the turning to the suppliant of God's loving regard. The devout psalmist had no notion of a neutral God, nor could he ever be contented with simple cessation of the tokens of Divine displeasure. The ever-outflowing Divine activity must reach every man. It may come in one or other of the two forms of favour or of displeasure, but come it will; and each man can determine which side of that pillar of fire and cloud is turned to him. On one side is the red glare of anger, on the other the white lustre of love. If the one is turned from, the other is turned to us.

Not less remarkable is the prospect of going away into non-being which the last words of the psalm present as a piteous reason for a little gleam of brightness being vouchsafed in this span-long life. There is no vision here of life beyond the grave; but, though there is not, the singer "throws himself into the arms of God." He does not seek to solve the problem of life by bringing the future in to redress the balance of good and evil. To him the solution lies in present communion with a present God, in whose house he is a guest now, and whose face will make his life bright, however short it may be.

PSALM XL.

- 1 Waiting, I waited for Jehovah,
And He bent to me and heard my [loud] cry.
- 2 And lifted me from the pit of destruction,
From the mire of the bog,
And set my feet on a rock—
Established my steps.
- 3 And put in my mouth a new song,
Praise unto our God.
Many shall see and fear,
And trust in Jehovah.

- 4 Blessed is the man who has made Jehovah his trust,
And has not turned [away] to the proud and deserters to a lie.
- 5 In multitudes hast Thou wrought, Jehovah, my God;
Thy wonders and Thy purposes towards us—
There is none to be set beside Thee—
Should I declare them and speak them,
They surpass numbering.
- 6 Sacrifice and meal-offering Thou didst not delight in—
Ears hast Thou pierced for me—
Burnt-offering and sin-offering Thou didst not demand.
- 7 Then I said, Behold, I am come—
In the roll of the book it is prescribed to me—
- 8 To do Thy pleasure, my God, I delight,
And Thy law is within my inmost parts.
- 9 I proclaimed glad tidings of Thy righteousness in the great congregation;
Behold, my lips I did not restrain,
Jehovah, Thou knowest.
- 10 Thy righteousness did I not hide within my heart;
Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation did I speak;
I concealed not Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth from the great congregation.
- 11 Thou, Jehovah, wilt not restrain Thy compassions from me;
Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth will continually preserve me.
- 12 For evils beyond numbering have compassed me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, and I am not able to see:
They surpass the hairs of my head,
And my heart has forsaken me.
- 13 Be pleased, Jehovah, to deliver me;
Jehovah, hasten to my help.
- 14 Shamed and put to the blush together be the seekers after my soul to carry it away!
Turned back and dishonoured be they who delight in my calamity!
- 15 Paralysed by reason of their shame
Be they who say to me, Oho! Oho!
- 16 Joyful and glad in Thee be all who seek Thee!
Jehovah be magnified, may they ever say who love Thy salvation!
- 17 But as for me, I am afflicted and needy;
The Lord purposes [good] for me:
My Help and my Deliverer art Thou;
My God, delay not.

THE closing verses of this psalm reappear with slight changes as an independent whole in Psalm lxx. The question arises whether that is a fragment or this a conglomerate. Modern opinion inclines to the latter alternative, and points in support to the obvious change of tone in the second part. But that change does not coincide with the supposed line of junction, since Psalm lxx. begins with our ver. 13, and the change begins with ver. 12. Cheyne and others are therefore obliged to suppose that ver. 12 is the work of a third poet or compiler, who effected a junction thereby. The cumbrousness of the hypothesis of fusion is plain, and its necessity is not apparent, for it is resorted to in order to explain how a psalm which keeps so lofty a level of confidence at first should drop

to such keen consciousness of innumerable evils and such faint-heartedness. But surely such resurrection of apparently dead fears is not uncommon in devout, sensitive souls. They live beneath April skies, not unbroken blue. However many the wonderful works which God has done and however full of thankfulness the singer's heart, his deliverance is not complete. The contrast in the two parts of the psalm is true to facts and to the varying aspects of feeling and of faith. Though the latter half gives greater prominence to encompassing evils, they appear but for a moment; and the prayer for deliverance which they force from the psalmist is as triumphant in faith as were the thanksgivings of the former part. In both the ground tone is that of victorious grasp of God's help, which in the one is regarded in its mighty past acts, and in the other is implored and trusted in for present and future needs. The change of tone is not such as to demand the hypothesis of fusion. The unity is further supported by verbal links between the parts: *e.g.*, the innumerable evils of ver. 12 pathetically correspond to the innumerable mercies of ver. 5, and the same word for "surpass" occurs in both verses; "be pleased" in ver. 13 echoes "Thy pleasure" (will, A.V.) in ver. 8; "cares" or *thinks* (A.V.) in ver. 17 is the verb from which the noun rendered *purposes* (thoughts, A.V.) in ver. 5 is derived.

The attribution of the psalm to David rests solely on the superscription. The contents have no discernible points of connection with known circumstances in his or any other life. Jeremiah has been thought of as the author, on the strength of giving a prosaic literal meaning to the obviously poetical phrase "the pit of destruction" (ver. 2). If it is to be taken literally, what is to be made of the "rock" in the next clause? Baethgen and others see the return from Babylon in the glowing metaphors of ver. 2, and, in accordance with their conceptions of the evolution of spiritual religion, take the subordination of sacrifice to obedience as a clear token of late date. We may, however, recall 1 Sam. xv. 22, and venture to doubt whether the alleged process of spiritualising has been so clearly established, and its stages dated, as to afford a criterion of the age of a psalm.

In the first part, the current of thought starts from thankfulness for individual deliverances (vv. 1-3); widens into contemplation of the blessedness of trust and the riches of Divine mercies (vv. 4, 5); moved by these and taught what is acceptable to God, it rises to self-consecration as a living sacrifice (vv. 6-8); and, finally, pleads for experience of God's grace in all its forms on the ground of past faithful stewardship in celebrating these (vv. 9-11). The second part is one long-drawn cry for help, which admits of no such analysis, though its notes are various.

The first outpouring of the song is one long sentence, of which the clauses follow one another like sunlit ripples, and tell the whole process of the psalmist's deliverance. It began with patient waiting; it ended with a new song. The voice first raised in a cry, shrill and yet submissive enough to be heard above, is at last tuned into new forms of uttering the old praise. The two clauses of ver. 1 ("I" and "He") set over against each other, as separated by the distance between heaven and earth, the psalmist and his God. He does not begin with his troubles, but with his faith. "Waiting, he waited" for Je-

hovah; and wherever there is that attitude of tense and continuous but submissive expectance, God's attitude will be that of bending to meet it. The meek, upturned eye has power to draw His towards itself. That is an axiom of the devout life confirmed by all experience, even if the tokens of deliverance delay their coming. Such expectance, however patient, is not inconsistent with loud crying, but rather finds voice in it. Silent patience and impatient prayer, in too great a hurry to let God take His own time, are equally imperfect. But the cry, "Haste to my help" (ver. 13), and the final petition, "My God, delay not," are consistent with true waiting.

The suppliant and God have come closer together in ver. 2, which should not be regarded as beginning a new sentence. As in Psalm xviii., prayer brings God down to help. His hand reaches to the man prisoned in a pit or struggling in a swamp; he is dragged out, set on a rock, and feels firm ground beneath his feet. Obviously the whole representation is purely figurative, and it is hopelessly flat and prosaic to refer it to Jeremiah's experience. The "many waters" of Psalm xviii. are a parallel metaphor. The dangers that threatened the psalmist are described as "a pit of destruction," as if they were a dungeon into which whosoever was thrown would come out no more, or in which, like a wild beast, he has been trapped. They are also likened to a bog or quagmire, in which struggles only sink a man deeper. But the edge of the bog touches rock, and there is firm footing and unhindered walking there, if only some great lifting power can drag the sinking man out. God's hand can, and does, because the lips, almost choked with mire, could yet cry. The psalmist's extremity of danger was probably much more desperate than is usual in such conditions as ours, so that his cries seem too piercing for us to make our own; but the terrors and conflicts of humanity are nearly constant quantities, though the occasions calling them forth are widely different. If we look deeper into life than its surface, we shall learn that it is not violent "spiritualising" to make these utterances the expression of redeeming grace, since in truth there is but one or other of these two possibilities open for us. Either we flounder in a bottomless bog, or we have our feet on the Rock.

God's deliverance gives occasion for fresh praise. The psalmist has to add his voice to the great chorus, and this sense of being but one of a multitude, who have been blessed alike and therefore should bless alike, occasions the significant interchange in ver. 3 of "my" and "our," which needs no theory of the speaker being the nation to explain it. It is ever a joy to the heart swelling with the sense of God's mercies to be aware of the many who share the mercies and gratitude. The cry for deliverance is a solo; the song of praise is choral. The psalmist did not need to be bidden to praise; a new song welled from his lips as by inspiration. Silence was more impossible to his glad heart than even to his sorrow. To shriek for help from the bottom of the pit and to be dumb when lifted to the surface is a churl's part.

Though the song was new in this singer's mouth, as befitted a recipient of deliverances fresh from heaven, the theme was old; but each new voice individualises the commonplaces of religious experience, and repeats them as fresh. And the result of one man's convinced and jubilant

voice, giving novelty to old truths because he has verified them in new experiences, will be that "many shall see," as though they behold the deliverance of which they hear, "and shall fear" Jehovah and trust themselves to Him. It was not the psalmist's deliverance, but his song, that was to be the agent in this extension of the fear of Jehovah. All great poets have felt that their words would win audience and live. Thus, even apart from consciousness of inspiration, this lofty anticipation of the effect of his words is intelligible, without supposing that their meaning is that the signal deliverance of the nation from captivity would spread among heathens and draw them to Israel's faith.

The transition from purely personal experience to more general thoughts is completed in vv. 4, 5. Just as the psalmist began with telling of his own patient expectance and thence passed on to speak of God's help, so in these two verses he sets forth the same sequence in terms studiously cast into the most comprehensive form. Happy indeed are they who can translate their own experience into these two truths for all men: that trust is blessedness and that God's mercies are one long sequence, made up of numberless constituent parts. To have these for one's inmost convictions and to ring them out so clearly and melodiously that many shall be drawn to listen, and then to verify them by their own "seeing," is one reward of patient waiting for Jehovah. That trust must be maintained by resolute resistance to temptations to its opposite. Hence the negative aspect of trust is made prominent in ver. 4 *b*, in which the verb should be rendered "turns not" instead of "respecteth not," as in the A.V. and R.V. The same motion, looked at from opposite sides, may be described in turning to and turning from. Forsaking other confidences is part of the process of making God one's trust. But it is significant that the antithesis is not completely carried out, for those to whom the trustful heart does not turn are not here, as might have been expected, rival objects of trust, but those who put their own trust in false refuges. "The proud" are the class of arrogantly self-reliant people who feel no need of anything but their own strength to lean on. "Deserters to a lie" are those who fall away from Jehovah to put their trust in any creature, since all refuges but Himself will fail. Idols may be included in this thought of a *lie*, but it is unduly limited if confined to them. Much rather it takes in all false grounds of security. The antithesis fails in accuracy, for the sake of putting emphasis on the prevalence of such mistaken trust, which makes it so much the harder to keep aloof from the multitudes and stand alone in reliance on Jehovah.

Ver. 5 corresponds with ver. 4, in that it sets forth in similar generality the great deeds with which God is wont to answer man's trust. But the personality of the poet breaks very beautifully through the impersonal utterances at two points: once when he names Jehovah as "my God," thus claiming his separate share in the general mercies and his special bond of connection with the Lover of all; and once when he speaks of his own praises, thus recognising the obligation of individual gratitude for general blessings. Each particle of finely comminuted moisture in the rainbow has to flash back the broad sunbeam at its own angle. God's "wonders and designs" are "realised Divine thoughts and Divine thoughts which are gradually being realised" (Delitzsch). These are

wrought and being wrought in multitudes innumerable, and as the psalmist sees the bright, unbroken beams pouring forth from their inexhaustible source, he breaks into an exclamation of adoring wonder at the incomparable greatness of the ever-giving God. "There is none to set beside Thee" is far loftier and more accordant with the tone of the verse than the comparatively flat and incongruous remark that God's mercies cannot be told to him (A. V. and R. V.). A precisely similar exclamation occurs in Psalm lxxi. 19, in which God's incomparable greatness is deduced from the great things which He has done. Happy the singer who has an inexhaustible theme! He is not silenced by the consciousness of the inadequacy of his songs, but rather inspired to the never-ending, ever-beginning, joyful task of uttering some new fragment of that transcendent perfection. Innumerable wonders wrought should be met by ever-new songs. If they cannot be counted, the more reason for open-eyed observance of them as they come, and for a stream of praise as unbroken as is their bright continuance.

If God's mercies thus baffle enumeration and beggar praise, the question naturally rises, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" Therefore the next turn of thought shows the psalmist as reaching the lofty spiritual conception that heartfelt delight in God's will is the true response to God's wonders of love. He soars far above external rites as well as servile obedience to unloved authority, and proclaims the eternal and ultimate truth that what God delights in is man's delight in His will. The great words which rang the knell of Saul's kingship may well have sounded in his successor's spirit. Whether they are the source of the language of our psalm or not, they are remarkably similar. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 23), teaches precisely the same lesson as vv. 6-8 of this psalm. The strong negation in ver. 6 does not deny the Divine institution of the sacrificial law, but affirms that something much deeper than external sacrifices is the real object of God's desire. The negation is made emphatic by enumerating the chief kinds of sacrifice. Whether they are bloody or bloodless, whether meant to express consecration or to effect reconciliation, they are none of them the true sacrifices of God. In ver. 6 the psalmist is entirely occupied with God's declarations of His requirements; and he presents these in a remarkable fashion, intercalating the clause, "Ears hast Thou pierced for me," between the two parallel clauses in regard to sacrifice. Why should the connection be thus broken? The fact that God has endowed the psalmist with capacity to apprehend the Divine speech reveals God's desire concerning him. Just because he has ears to hear, it is clear that God wishes him to hear, and therefore that outward acts of worship cannot be the acknowledgment of mercies in which God delights. The central clause of the verse is embedded in the others, because it deals with a Divine act which, pondered, will be seen to establish their teaching. The whole puts in simple, concrete form a wide principle, namely, that the possession of capacity for receiving communications of God's will imposes the duty of loving reception and obedience, and points to inward joyful acceptance of that will as the purest kind of worship.

Vv. 7 and 8 are occupied with the response to

God's requirements thus manifested by His gift of capacity to hear His voice. "Then said I." As soon as he had learned the meaning of his ears he found the right use of his tongue. The thankful heart was moved to swift acceptance of the known will of God. The clearest recognition of His requirements may coexist with resistance to them, and needs the impulse of loving contemplation of God's unnumbered wonders to vivify it into glad service. "Behold, I am come," is the language of a servant entering his master's presence in obedience to his call. In ver. 7 the second clause interrupts just as in ver. 6. There the interruption spoke of the organ of receiving Divine messages as to duty; here it speaks of the messages themselves: "In the roll of the book is my duty prescribed for me." The promise implied in giving ears is fulfilled by giving a permanent written law. This man, having ears to hear, has heard, and has not only heard, but welcomed into the inmost recesses of his heart and will, the declared will of God. The word rendered "delight" in ver. 8 is the same as is rendered "desire" in ver. 6 (A. V.); and that rendered by the A. V. and R. V. in ver. 8 "will" is properly "good pleasure." Thus God's delight and man's coincide. Thankful love assimilates the creature's will with the Divine, and so changes tastes and impulses that desire and duty are fused into one. The prescriptions of the book become the delight of the heart. An inward voice directs: "Love, and do what Thou wilt"; for a will determined by love cannot but choose to please its Beloved. Liberty consists in freely willing and victoriously doing what we ought, and such liberty belongs to hearts whose supreme delight is to please the God whose numberless wonders have won their love and made their thanksgivings poor. The law written in the heart was the ideal even when a law was written on tables of stone. It was the prophetic promise for the Messianic age. It is fulfilled in the Christian life in the measure of its genuineness. Unless the heart delights in the law, acts of obedience count for very little.

The quotation of vv. 7, 8, in Heb. x. 5-7, is mainly, from the LXX., which has the remarkable rendering of ver. 6 *b*, "A body hast Thou prepared for me." Probably this is meant as paraphrase rather than as translation; and it does represent substantially the idea of the original, since the body is the instrument for fulfilling, just as the ear is the organ for apprehending, the uttered will of God. The value of the psalm for the writer of Hebrews does not depend on that clause, but on the whole representation which it gives of the ideal of the perfectly righteous servant's true worship, as involving the setting aside of sacrifice and the decisive pre-eminence of willing obedience. That ideal is fulfilled in Jesus, and really pointed onwards to Him. This use of the quotation does not imply the directly Messianic character of the psalm.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and thus the passage is easy from inward delight in God's will to public declaration of His character. Every true lover of God is a witness of His sweetness to the world. Since the psalmist had His law hidden in the depths of his being, he could not "hide" His righteousness within his heart, but must magnify it with his tongue. That is a feeble and doubtful love which knows no necessity of utterance. To "love and be silent" is sometimes imperative, but always bur-

densome; and a heart happy in its love cannot choose but ripple out in music of speech. The psalmist describes himself as a messenger of glad tidings, a true evangelist. The multiplicity of names for the various aspects of God's character and acts which he heaps together in these verses serves to indicate their manifoldness which he delighted to contemplate, and his long, loving familiarity with them. He sets his treasure in all lights, and views it from all points, as a man will turn a jewel in his hand and get a fresh flash from every facet. "Righteousness," the good news that the Ruler of all is inflexibly just, with a justice which scrupulously meets all creatures' needs and becomes penal and awful only to the rejectors of its tender aspect; "faithfulness," the inviolable adherence to every promise; "salvation," the actual fulness of deliverance and well-being flowing from these attributes; "loving-kindness" and "truth," often linked together as expressing at once the warmth and the unchangeableness of the Divine heart—these have been the psalmist's themes. Therefore they are his hope; and he is sure that, as he has been their singer, they will be his preservers. Ver. 11 is not prayer, but bold confidence. It echoes the preceding verse, since "I did not restrain" (ver. 9) corresponds with "Thou wilt not restrain," and "Thy loving-kindness and Thy truth" with the mention of the same attributes in ver. 10. The psalmist is not so much asserting his claims as giving voice to his faith. He does not so much think that his utterance is deserving of remuneration as that God's character makes impossible the supposition that he, who had so loved and sung His great name in its manifold glories, should find that name unavailing in his hour of need.

There is an undertone of such felt need even in the confidence of ver. 11; and it becomes dominant from ver. 12 to the end, but not so as to overpower the clear note of trust. The difference between the two parts of the psalm is great, but is not to be exaggerated as if it were contrariety. In the former part thanksgiving for deliverance from dangers recently past predominates; in the latter, petition for deliverance from dangers still threatening; but in both the psalmist is exercising the same confidence; and if in the beginning he hymns the praises of God who brought him out of the pit of destruction, in the end he keeps firm hold of Him as His "Help and Deliverer." Similarly, while in the first portion he celebrates the "purposes which are to usward," in the latter he is certain that, needy as he is, Jehovah has "purposes" of kindness to him. The change of tone is not so complete as to negative the original unity, and surely it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which both halves of the psalm should be appropriate. Are there any deliverances in this perilous and incomplete life so entire and permanent that they leave no room for future perils? Must not prevision of coming dangers accompany thankfulness for past escapes? Our Pharaohs are seldom drowned in the Red Sea, and we do not often see their corpses stretched on the sand. The change of tone, of which so much use is made as against the original unity of the psalm, begins with ver. 12: but that verse has a very strong and beautiful link of connection with the previous part, in the description of besetting evils as innumerable. Both words of ver. 5 are repeated, that for "surpass" or "are more than" in ver. 12 *c*, that for "number" in *a*. The heart that has felt how innumerable are God's thoughts

and deeds of love is not utterly reduced to despair, even while it beholds a sea of troubles rolling its white-crested billows shoreward as far as the horizon. The sky stretches beyond them, and the true numberlessness of God's mercies outdoes the great yet really limited range of apparently numberless sins or sorrows, the consequences of sin. "Mine iniquities have overtaken me" like pursuing foes, and every calamity that held him in its grip was a child of a sin of his. Such consciousness of transgression is not inconsistent with "delight in the law of God after the inward man," as Paul found out (Rom. vii. 22, 23), but it sets aside the attempt to make this a directly Messianic psalm. "I am not able to see." Such is the only possible rendering, for there is no justification for translating the simple word by "look up." Either the crowd of surrounding calamities prevent the psalmist from seeing anything but themselves, or, more probably, the failure of vital power accompanying his sorrow dims his vision (Psalm xxxviii. 10).

From ver. 13 onward Psalm lxx. repeats this psalm, with unimportant verbal differences. The first of these is the omission of "Be pleased" in ver. 13, which binds this second part to the first, and points back to "Thy pleasure" (ver. 8). The prayer for the confusion of enemies closely resembles that in Psalm xxxv., ver. 14 being almost identical with vv. 4 and 26 there, and ver. 15 recalling ver. 21 of that psalm. The prayer that enemies may fail in their designs is consistent with the most Christlike spirit, and nothing more is asked by the psalmist, but the tinge of satisfaction with which he dwells on their discomfiture, however natural, belongs to the less lofty moral standard of his stage of revelation. He uses extraordinarily forcible words to paint their bewilderment and mortification—may they blush, turn pale, be driven back, be as if paralysed with shame at their baffled malice! The prayer for the gladness of God's servants and seekers is like Psalm xxxv. 27. It asks that fruition as complete as the disappointment of the foes may be the lot of those whose desires set towards God, and it is prophecy as well as prayer. Seekers after God ever find Him, and are more joyful in possession than they hoped to be while seeking. He alone never eludes search, nor ever disappoints attainment. They who long for His salvation will receive it; and their reception will fill their hearts so full of blessedness that their lips will not be able to refrain from ever-new outbursts of the old praise, "The Lord be magnified."

Very plaintively and touchingly does the low sigh of personal need follow this triumphant intercession for the company of the saints. Its triple elements blend in one believing aspiration, which is not impatience, though it pleads for swift help. "I am afflicted and needy"; there the psalmist turns his eye on his own sore necessity. "Jehovah has purposes for me"; there he turns to God, and links his final petitions with his earlier trust by the repetition of the word by which he described (ver. 5) the many gracious designs of God. "My God, delay not"; there he embraces both in one act of faithful longing. His need calls for, and God's loving counsels ensure, swift response. He who delights when an afflicted and poor man calls Him "my God" will not be slack to vindicate His servant's confidence, and magnify His own name. That appeal goes straight to the heart of God.

PSALM XLI.

- 1 Happy the man who considers the helpless;
In the day of calamity will Jehovah deliver him.
- 2 Jehovah will preserve him and keep him alive,
—He shall be counted happy in the land,—
And do not Thou give him up to the wrath of his enemies.
- 3 Jehovah will sustain him on the bed of languishing;
All his lying down in his sickness Thou hast turned into health.
- 4 As for me, I said, Jehovah, be merciful to me,
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.
- 5 My enemies speak evil against me:
"When will he die, and his name perish?"
- 6 And if one [of them] comes to see [me], he
speaks falsehood (insincere sympathy);
His heart collects malice for itself;
He goes forth, he speaks it.
- 7 Together against me do all my haters whisper;
Against me they plan my hurt:
- 8 "A fatal thing is fixed upon him,
And he who has [now] lain down will rise no more."
- 9 Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread,
Has lifted his heel against me.
- 10 But Thou, Jehovah, be merciful to me and
raise me up,
That I may requite them.
- 11 By this I know that Thou delightest in me,
Since my enemy triumphs not over me.
- 12 And as for me, in my integrity Thou upholdest me,
And settest me before Thy face for ever.
- 13 Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel,
From everlasting and to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

THE central mass of this psalm describes the singer as suffering from two evils: sickness and treacherous friends. This situation naturally leads up to the prayer and confidence of the closing strophe (vv. 10-12). But its connection with the introductory verses (1-3) is less plain. A statement of the blessings ensured to the compassionate seems a singular introduction to the psalmist's pathetic exhibition of his sorrows. Cheyne thinks that the opening verses were added by the framer of the collection to adapt the poem to the use of the Church of his own time, and that "the original opening must have been different" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 246, n.). It is to be observed, however, that the two points of the psalmist's affliction are the two from which escape is assured to the compassionate, who shall not be "delivered to the desire of his enemies," and shall be supported and healed in sickness. Probably, therefore, the general promises of vv. 1-3 are silently applied by the psalmist to himself; and he is comforting his own sorrow with the assurance which in his humility he casts into impersonal form. He has been merciful, and believes, though things look dark, that he will obtain mercy. There is probably also an intentional contrast with the cruel exacerbation of his sufferings by uncompassionate companions, which has rubbed salt into his wounds. He has a double consciousness in these

opening verses, inasmuch as he partly thinks of himself as the compassionate man and partly as the "weak" one who is compassionated.

The combination of sickness and treachery is remarkable, especially if the former is taken literally, as the strongly marked details seem to require. The sick man is visited by an insincere sympathiser, who is all eyes to note symptoms of increasing weakness, and all tongue, as soon as he gets out of the sick-room, to give the result, which is to his malice the better the worse it is. Such a picture looks as if drawn from life, and the sketch of the traitor friend seems to be a portrait of a real person. The supporters of the post-exilic date and national interpretation of the psalm have not succeeded in pointing out who the false friends of Israel were, who seemed to condole with, and really rejoiced over, its weakness, or who were the treacherous allies who failed it. The theory of the Davidic origin has in its favour the correspondence of Ahithophel's treason with the treachery of the trusted friend in the psalm; and, while it must be admitted that there is no mention of sickness in the narrative in 2 Samuel, the supposition that trouble of conscience had brought illness gains some countenance from Psalm xxxiii., if it is Davidic, and would naturally explain David's singular passiveness whilst Absalom was hatching his plot.

The psalm may be divided into four strophes, of which, however, the two middle ones cohere very closely. Vv. 1-3 give the mercy required to the merciful; vv. 4-6, after a brief prayer and confession begin the picture of the psalmist's sufferings, which is carried on through the next strophe (vv. 7-9), with the difference that in the former the scene is mainly the sick man's chamber, and in the latter the meeting-place of the secret conspirators. Vv. 10-12 build on this picture of distress a prayer for deliverance, and rise to serene confidence in its certain answer. The closing doxology is not part of the psalm, but is appended as the conclusion of the first book of the Psalter.

The principle that God's dealings with us correspond to our dealings with men, as clouds are moulded after the curves of the mountains which they touch, is no less characteristic of the New Testament than of the Old. The merciful obtain mercy: God forgives those who forgive their brethren. The absoluteness of statement in this psalm is, of course, open to misunderstanding; but the singer had not such a superficial view of his relations to God as to suppose that kindly sympathy was the sole condition of Divine compassion. That virtue, the absence of which added pangs to his pains, might well seem to a sufferer writhing under the bitterness of its opposite the Divinest of all excellences, and worthiest of recompense. That its requital should be mainly considered as consisting in temporal deliverance and physical health is partly due to the characteristics of the Old Testament promises of blessedness, and partly to the psalmist's momentary needs. We have noted that these are reflected in the blessings promised in vv. 1-3. The "happy" of ver. 1 is caught up in the abruptly introduced "He shall be counted happy" of ver. 2, which may carry tacit reference to the malicious slanders that aggravated the psalmist's sufferings, and anticipates deliverance so perfect that all who see him shall think him fortunate. The next clause rises into direct address of Jehovah, and is shown by the form of the negative in the Hebrew to be petition, not assertion, thus strongly confirming

the view that "me" lurks below "him" in this context. A similar transition from the third to the second person occurs in ver. 3, as if the psalmist drew closer to his God. There is also a change of tense in the verbs there: "Jehovah will sustain"; "Thou hast turned," the latter tense converting the general truth expressed in the former clause into a fact of experience. The precise meaning of this verse is questioned, some regarding both clauses as descriptive of tender nursing, which sustains the drooping head and smoothes the crumpled bedding, while others, noting that the word rendered "bed" (A.V. and R.V.) in the second clause means properly "lying down," take that clause as descriptive of turning sickness into convalescence. The latter meaning gives a more appropriate ending to the strophe, as it leaves the sick man healed, not tossing on a disordered bed, as the other explanation does. Jehovah does not half cure.

The second and third strophes (vv. 4-9) are closely connected. In them the psalmist recounts his sorrows and pains, but first breathes a prayer for mercy, and bases it no longer on his mercifulness, but on his sin. Only a shallow experience will find contradiction here to either the former words, or to the later profession of "integrity" (ver. 12). The petition for soul-healing does not prove that sickness in the following verses is figurative, but results from the belief that sorrow is the effect of sin, a view which belongs to the psalmist's stage of revelation, and is not to be held by Christians in the same absolute fashion. If the Davidic origin of the psalm is recognised, the connection of the king's great sin with all his after-sorrows is patent. However he had been merciful and compassionate in general, his own verdict on the man in Nathan's parable was that he "showed no pity," and that sin bore bitter fruit in all his life. It was the parent of all the sensual outrages in his own house; it underlay Ahithophel's treachery; it had much to do in making his reign abhorred; it brought the fuel which Absalom fired, and if our supposition is right as to the origin of the sickness spoken of in this psalm, that sin and the remorse that followed it gnawed at the roots of bodily health. So the psalmist, if he is indeed the royal sinner, had need to pray for soul-healing first, even though he was conscious of much compassion and hoped for its recompense. While he speaks thus to Jehovah, his enemies speak in a different tone. The "evil" which they utter is not calumny, but malediction. Their hatred is impatient for his death. The time seems long till they can hear of it. One of them comes on a hypocritical visit of solicitude ("see" is used for visiting the sick in 2 Kings viii. 29), and speaks lying condolence, while he greedily collects encouraging symptoms that the disease is hopeless. Then he hurries back to tell how much worse he had found the patient; and that ignoble crew delight in the good news, and send it flying. This very special detail goes strongly in favour of the view that we have in this whole description a transcript of literal, personal experience. There were plenty of concealed enemies round David in the early stages of Absalom's conspiracy, who would look eagerly for signs of his approaching death, which might save the need of open revolt and plunge the kingdom into welcome confusion. The second strophe ends with the exit of the false friend.

The third (vv. 7-9) carries him to the meeting-

place of the plotters, who eagerly receive and retain the good news that the sick man is worse. They feed their ignoble hate by picturing further ill as laying hold of him. Their wish is parent to their thought, which is confirmed by the report of their emissary. "A thing of Belial is poured out on him," or "is fastened upon him," say they. That unusual expression may refer either to moral or physical evil. In the former sense it would here mean the sufferer's sin, in the latter a fatal disease. The connection makes the physical reference the more likely. This incurable disease is conceived of as "poured out," or perhaps as "molten on him," so that it cannot be separated from him. Therefore he will never rise from his sick-bed. But even this murderous glee is not the psalmist's sharpest pang. "The man of my peace," trusted, honoured, admitted to the privileges, and therefore bound by the obligations, of hospitality so sacred in the old world, has kicked the prostrate sufferer, as the ass in the fable did the sick lion. The treachery of Ahithophel at once occurs to mind. No doubt many treacherous friends have wounded many trustful hearts, but the correspondence of David's history with this detail is not to be got rid of by the observation that treachery is common. Still less is it sufficient to quote Obad. 7 where substantially the same language is employed in reference to the enemies of Edom, as supporting the national reference of the present passage. No one denies that false allies may be described by such a figure, or that nations may be personified; but is there any event in the post-exilic history which shows Israel deceived and spurned by trusted allies? The Davidic authorship and the personal reference of the psalm are separable. But if the latter is adopted, it will be hard to find any circumstances answering so fully to the details of the psalm as the Absalom rebellion and Ahithophel's treason. Our Lord's quotation of part of ver. 9, with the significant omission of "in whom I trusted," does not imply the Messianic character of the psalm, but is an instance of an event and a saying which were not meant as prophetic, finding fuller realisation in the life of the perfect type of suffering godliness than in the original sufferer.

The last strophe (vv. 10-12) recurs to prayer, and soars to confidence born of communion. A hand stretched out in need and trust soon comes back filled with blessings. Therefore here the moment of true petition is the moment of realised answer. The prayer traverses the malicious hopes of enemies. They had said, "He will rise no more"; it prays, "Raise me up." It touches a note which sounds discordant in the desire "that I may requite them"; and it is far more truly reverential and appreciative of the progress of revelation to recognise the relative inferiority of the psalmist's wish to render *quid pro quo* than to put violence on his words in order to harmonise them with Christian ethics, or to slur over the distinction between the Law, of which the keynote was retribution, and the Gospel, of which it is forgiveness.

But the last words of the psalm are sunny with the assurance of present favour and with boundless hope. The man is still lying on his sick-bed, ringed by whispering foes. There is no change without, but this change has passed: that he has tightened his hold of God, and therefore can feel that his enemies' whispers will never rise or swell into a shout of victory over him. He can speak of the future deliverance as if present; and he can

look ahead over an indefinite stretch of sunlit country, scarcely knowing whether the furthest point is earth or no. His integrity is not sinless, nor does he plead it as a reason for Jehovah's upholding, but hopes for it as the consequence of His sustaining hand. He knows that he will have close approach to Jehovah; and though, no doubt, "for ever" on his lips meant less than it does on ours, his assurance of continuous communion with God reached, if not to actual, clear consciousness of immortality, at all events to assurance of a future so indefinitely extended, and so brightened by the sunlight of God's face, that it wanted but little additional extension or brightening to be the full assurance of life immortal.

PSALMS XLII., XLIII.

PSALM XLII.

- 1 Like a hind which pants after the water-brooks,
So pants my soul after Thee, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?
- 3 My tears have been bread to me day and night,
While they say to me all the day, Where is thy God?
- 4 This would I remember, and pour out my soul in me.
How I went with the throng, led them in procession to the house of God,
With shrill cries of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
- 5 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and moanest within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks,
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.
- 6 Within me is my soul bowed down;
Therefore let me remember Thee from the land of Jordan and of the Hermons, from Mount Mizar.
- 7 Flood calls to flood at the voice of Thy cataracts;
All Thy breakers and rollers are gone over me.
- 8 [Yet] by day will Jehovah command His lovingkindness,
And in the night shall a song to Him be with me.
[Even] a prayer to the God of my life.
- 9 Let me say to God my Rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why must I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 10 As if they crushed my bones, my adversaries reproach me,
Whilst all the day they say to me, Where is thy God?
- 11 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and why moanest thou within me?
Hope thou in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

PSALM XLIII.

- 1 Do me right, O God, and plead my plea against a loveless nation;
From the man of fraud and mischief rescue me.
- 2 For Thou art God my stronghold; why hast Thou cast me off?
Why must I wearily go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

- 3 Send out Thy light and Thy troth; let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Thy holy hill and to Thy tabernacles.
- 4 That I may come in to the altar of God,
To God, the gladness of my joy,
And give Thee thanks with the harp, O God, my God.
- 5 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and why moanest thou within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks,
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

THE second book of the Psalter is characterised by the use of the Divine name "Elohim" instead of "Jehovah." It begins with a cluster of seven psalms (reckoning Psalms xlii. and xliii. as one) of which the superscription is most probably regarded as ascribing their authorship to "the sons of Korach." These were Levites, and (according to 1 Chron. ix. 19 *seq.*) the office of keepers of the door of the sanctuary had been hereditary in their family from the time of Moses. Some of them were among the faithful adherents of David at Ziklag (1 Chron. xii. 6), and in the new model of worship inaugurated by him the Korachites were doorkeepers and musicians. They retained the former office in the second Temple (Neh. xi. 19). The ascription of authorship to a group is remarkable, and has led to the suggestion that the superscription does not specify the authors, but the persons for whose use the psalms in question were composed. The Hebrew would bear either meaning; but if the latter is adopted, all these psalms are anonymous. The same construction is found in Book I. in Psalms xxv.-xxviii., xxxv., xxxvii., where it is obviously the designation of authorship, and it is naturally taken to have the same force in these Korachite psalms. It has been ingeniously conjectured by Delitzsch that the Korachite psalms originally formed a separate collection entitled "Songs of the Sons of Korach," and that this title afterwards passed over into the superscriptions when they were incorporated in the Psalter. It may have been so, but the supposition is unnecessary. It was not exactly literary fame which psalmists hungered for. The actual author, as one of a band of kinsmen who worked and sang together, would, not unnaturally, be content to sink his individuality and let his song go forth as that of the band. Clearly the superscriptions rested upon some tradition or knowledge, else defective information would not have been acknowledged as it is in this one; but some name would have been coined to fill the gap.

The two psalms (xlii., xliii.) are plainly one. The absence of a title for the second, the identity of tone throughout, the recurrence of several phrases, and especially of the refrain, put this beyond doubt. The separation, however, is old, since it is found in the LXX. It is useless to speculate on its origin.

There is much in the psalms which favours the hypothesis that the author was a Korachite companion of David's in his flight before Absalom; but the locality, described as that of the singer, does not entirely correspond to that of the king's retreat, and the description of the enemies is not easily capable of application in all points to his foes. The house of God is still standing, the poet has been there recently, and hopes soon to return and render praise. Therefore the psalm must be pre-exilic; and while there is no certainty attainable as to date, it may at least be said that the

circumstances of the singer present more points of contact with those of the supposed Korachite follower of David's fortunes on the uplands across Jordan than with those of any other of the imaginary persons to whom modern criticism has assigned the poem. Whoever wrote it has given immortal form to the longings of the soul after God. He has fixed for ever and made melodious a sigh.

The psalm falls into three parts, each closing with the same refrain. Longings and tears, remembrances of festal hours passed in the sanctuary melt the singer's soul, while taunting enemies hiss continual sarcasms at him as forsaken by his God. But his truer self silences these lamentations, and cheers the feeble "soul" with clear notes of trust and hope, blown in the refrain, like some trumpet-clang rallying dispirited fugitives to the fight. The stimulus serves for a moment; but once more courage fails, and once more, at yet greater length and with yet sadder tones, complaints and longings are wailed forth. Once more, too, the higher self repeats its half-rebuke, half-encouragement. So ends the first of the psalms; but obviously it is no real ending, for the victory over fear is not won, and longing has not become blessed. So once more the wave of emotion rolls over the psalmist, but with a new aspect which makes all the difference. He prays now; he had only remembered and complained and said that he would pray before. Therefore now he triumphs, and though he still is keenly conscious of his enemies, they appear but for a moment, and though he still feels that he is far from the sanctuary, his heart goes out in hopeful visions of the gladness of his return thither, and he already tastes the rapture of the joy that will then flood his heart. Therefore the refrain comes for a third time; and this time the longing, trembling soul continues at the height to which the better self has lifted it, and silently acknowledges that it need not have been cast down. Thus the whole song is a picture of a soul climbing, not without backward slips, from the depths to the heights, or, in another aspect, of the transformation of longing into certainty of fruition, which is itself fruition after a kind.

Perhaps the singer had seen, during his exile on the eastern side of Jordan, some gentle creature, with open mouth and heaving flanks, eagerly seeking in dry wadies for a drop of water to cool her outstretched tongue; and the sight had struck on his heart as an image of himself longing for the presence of God in the sanctuary. A similar bit of local colour is generally recognised in ver. 7. Nature reflects the poet's moods, and overmastering emotion sees its own analogues everywhere. That lovely metaphor has touched the common heart as few have done, and the solitary singer's plaint has fitted all devout lips. Injustice is done it, if it is regarded merely as the longing of a Levite for approach to the sanctuary. No doubt the psalmist connected communion with God and presence in the Temple more closely together than they should do who have heard the great charter, "neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem"; but, however the two things were coupled in his mind, they were sufficiently separate to allow of approach by longing and prayer while distant in body, and the true object of yearning was not access to the Temple, but communion with the God of the Temple.

The "soul" is feminine in Hebrew, and is here compared to the female deer, for "panting" is the feminine form of the verb, though its noun is

masculine. It is better therefore to translate "hind" than "hart." The "soul" is the seat of emotions and desires. It "pants" and "thirsts," is "cast down" and disquieted; it is "poured out"; it can be bidden to "hope." Thus tremulous, timid, mobile, it is beautifully compared to a hind. The true object of its longings is always God, however little it knows for what it is thirsting. But they are happy in their very yearnings who are conscious of the true direction of these, and can say that it is God for whom they are athirst. All unrest of longing, all fever of thirst, all outgoings of desire, are feelers put out blindly, and are only stilled when they clasp Him. The correspondence between man's needs and their true object is involved in that name "the living God"; for a heart can rest only in one all-sufficient Person, and must have a heart to throb against. Neither abstractions nor dead things can still its cravings. That which does must be living. But no finite being can still them; and after all sweetnesses of human loves and helps of human strengths the soul's thirst remains unslaked, and the Person who is enough must be the living God. The difference between the devout and the worldly man is just that the one can only say, "My soul pants and thirsts," and the other can add "after Thee, O God."

This man's longing was intensified by his unwilling exile from the sanctuary, a special privation to a door-keeper of the Temple. His situation and mood closely resemble those in another Korachite psalm (lxxxiv.), in which, as here, the soul "faints for the courts of the Lord," and as here the panting hind, so there the glancing swallows flitting about the eaves are woven into the song. Unnamed foes taunt the psalmist with the question, "Where is thy God?" There is no necessity to conclude that these were heathens, though the taunt is usually put into heathen lips (Psalms lxxix. 10; lii. 2) but it would be quite as natural from co-religionists, flouting his fervour and personal grasp of God and taking his sorrows as tokens of God's abandonment of him. That is the world's way with the calamities of a devout man, whose humble cry, "My God," it resents as presumption or hypocrisy.

But even these bitter sarcasms are less bitter than the remembrance of "happier things," which is his "sorrow's crown of sorrow." Yet, with the strange but universal love of summoning up remembrance of departed joys, the psalmist finds a certain pleasure in the pain of recalling how he, a Levite, led the festal march to the Temple, and in listening in fancy again to the shrill cries of joy which broke from the tumultuous crowd. The form of the verbs "remember" and "pour out" in ver. 4 indicates set purpose.

The higher self arrests this flow of self-pity and lamentation. The feminine soul has to give account of her moods to calmer judgment, and to be lifted and steadied by the strong spirit. The preceding verses have given ample reason why she has been dejected, but now she is summoned to repeat them to a judicial ear. The insufficiency of the circumstances described to warrant the vehement emotions expressed is implied in the summons. Feeling has to vindicate its rationality or to suppress itself, and its grounds have often only to be stated to the better self, to be found altogether disproportioned to the storm they have raised. It is a very elementary but necessary lesson for the conduct of life that emotion of all sorts, sad or glad, religious or other, needs rigid scrutiny and firm

control, sometimes stimulating and sometimes chilling. The true counterpoise to its excess lies in directing it to God and in making Him the object of hope and patient waiting. Emotion varies, but God is the same. The facts on which faith feeds abide while faith fluctuates. The secret of calm is to dwell in that inner chamber of the secret place of the Most High, which whoso inhabits "heareth not the loud winds when they call," and is neither dejected nor uplifted, neither disturbed by excessive joys nor torn by anxieties.

Ver. 5 has the refrain in a form slightly different from that of the other two instances of its occurrence (ver. 11 and xliii. 5). But probably the text is faulty. The shifting of the initial word of ver. 6 to the end of ver. 5, and the substitution of *My* for *His*, bring the three refrains into line, and avoid the harsh expression "help of His countenance." Since no reason for the variation is discernible, and the proposed slight change of text improves construction and restores uniformity, it is probably to be adopted. If it is, the second part of the psalm is also conformed to the other two in regard to its not beginning with the Divine name.

The break in the clouds is but momentary, and the grey wrack fills the sky once more. The second part of the psalm takes up the question of the refrain, and first reiterates with bitter emphasis that the soul is bowed down, and then pours out once more the stream of reasons for dejection. But the curb has not been applied quite in vain, for throughout the succeeding verses there is a striking alternation of despondency and hope. Streaks of brightness flash through the gloom. Sorrow is shot with trust. This conflict of opposite emotions is the characteristic of the second part of the psalm, while that of the first part is an all but unrelieved predominance of gloom, and that of the third an all but undisputed victory of sunshine. Naturally this transition strophe is marked by the mingling of both. In the former part, memory was the handmaid of sorrow, and came involuntarily, and increased the singer's pain; but in this part he makes an effort of will to remember, and in remembrance finds an antidote to sorrow. To recall past joys adds stings to present grief, but to remember God brings an anodyne for the smart. The psalmist is far from the sanctuary, but distance does not hinder thought. This man's faith was not so dependent on externals that it could not come close to God while distant from His temple. It had been so far strengthened by the encouragement of the refrain that the reflux of sadness at once rouses it to action. "My soul is cast down; . . . therefore let me remember Thee." With wise resolve he finds in dejection a reason for nestling closer to God. In reference to the description of the psalmist's locality, Cheyne beautifully says, "The preposition 'from' is chosen (rather than 'in') with a subtle purpose. It suggests that the psalmist's faith will bridge over the interval between himself and the sanctuary: 'I can send my thoughts to Thee from the distant frontier'" (*in loc.*). The region intended seems to be "the northeastern corner of Palestine, near the lower slopes of Hermon" (Cheyne, *u.s.*). The plural "Hermons" is probably used in reference to the group of crests. "Mizar" is probably the name of a hill otherwise unknown, and specifies the singer's locality more minutely, though not helpfully to us. Many ingenious attempts have been made to explain the name either as symbolical or as a com-

mon noun, and not a proper name, but these need not be dealt with here. The locality thus designated is too far north for the scene of David's retreat before Absalom, unless we give an unusual southward extension to the names; and this makes a difficulty in the way of accepting the hypothesis of the author's having been in his retinue.

The twofold emotions of ver. 6 recur in vv. 7, 8, where we have first renewed despondency and then reaction into hope. The imagery of floods lifting up their voices, and cataracts sounding as they fall, and breaking waves rolling over the half-drowned psalmist has been supposed to be suggested by the scenery in which he was; but the rushing noise of Jordan in its rocky bed seems scarcely enough to deserve being described as "flood calling to flood," and "breakers and rollers" is an exaggeration if applied to any commotion possible on such a stream. The imagery is so usual that it needs no assumption of having been occasioned by the poet's locality. The psalmist paints his calamities as storming on him in dismal continuity, each "flood" seeming to summon its successor. They rush upon him, multitudinous and close following; they pour down on him as with the thunder of descending cataracts; they overwhelm him like the breakers and rollers of an angry ocean. The bold metaphors are more striking when contrasted with the opposite ones of the first part. The dry and thirsty land there and the rush of waters here mean the same thing, so flexible is nature in a poet's hands.

Then follows a gleam of hope, like a rainbow spanning the waterfall. With the alternation of mood already noticed as characteristic, the singer looks forward, even from the midst of overwhelming seas of trouble, to a future day when God will give His angel, Mercy or Loving-kindness, charge concerning him and draw him out of many waters. That day of extrication will surely be followed by a night of music and of thankful prayer (for supplication is not the only element in prayer) to Him who by His deliverance has shown Himself to be the "God of" the rescued man's "life." The epithet answers to that of the former part, "the living God," from which it differs by but one additional letter. He who has life in Himself is the Giver and Rescuer of our lives, and to Him they are to be rendered in thankful sacrifice. Once more the contending currents meet in vv. 9 and 10, in the former of which confidence and hope utter themselves in the resolve to appeal to God and in the name given to Him as "my Rock"; while another surge of despondency breaks, in the question in which the soul interrogates God, as the better self had interrogated her, and contrasts almost reproachfully God's apparent forgetfulness, manifested by His delay in deliverance with her remembrance of Him. It is not a question asked for enlightenment's sake but is an exclamation of impatience, if not of rebuke. Ver. 10 repeats the enemies' taunt, which is there represented as like crushing blows which broke the bones. And then once more above this conflict of emotion soars the clear note of the refrain, summoning to self-command, calmness, and unfaltering hope.

But the victory is not quite won, and therefore Psalm xliii. follows. It is sufficiently distinct in tone to explain its separation from the preceding, inasmuch as it is prayer throughout, and the note of joy is dominant, even while an undertone of sadness links it with the previous parts. The unity is vouched by the considerations already

noticed, and by the incompleteness of Psalm xlii. without such triumphant close and of Psalm xliii. without such despondent beginning. The prayer of vv. 1, 2, blends the two elements, which were at war in the second part; and for the moment the darker is the more prominent. The situation is described as in the preceding parts. The enemy is called a "loveless nation." The word rendered "loveless" is compounded of the negative prefix and the word which is usually found with the meaning of "one whom God favours," or visits with lovingkindness. It has been much disputed whether its proper signification is active (one who shows lovingkindness) or passive (one who receives it). But, considering that lovingkindness is in the Psalter mainly a Divine attribute, and that, when a human excellence, it is regarded as derived from and being the echo of experienced Divine mercy, it is best to take the passive meaning as the principal, though sometimes, as unmistakably here, the active is more suitable. These loveless people are not further defined, and may either have been Israelites or aliens. Perhaps there was one "man" of special mischief prominent among them, but it is not safe to treat that expression as anything but a collective. Ver. 2 looks back to xlii. 9, the former clause in each verse being practically equivalent, and the second in xliii. being a quotation of the second in ver. 9, with a variation in the form of the verb to suggest more vividly the picture of weary, slow, dragging gait, fit for a man clad in mourning garb.

But the gloomier mood has shot its last bolt. Grief which finds no fresh words is beginning to dry up. The stage of mechanical repetition of complaints is not far from that of cessation of them. So the higher mood conquers at last, and breaks into a burst of joyous petition, which passes swiftly into realisation of the future joys whose coming shines thus far off. Hope and trust hold the field. The certainty of return to the Temple overbears the pain of absence from it, and the vivid realisation of the gladness of worshipping again at the altar takes the place of the vivid remembrance of former festal approach thither. It is the prerogative of faith to make pictures drawn by memory pale beside those painted by hope. Light and Truth—i. e., Lovingkindness and Faithfulness in fulfilling promises—are like two angels, despatched from the presence-chamber of God, to guide with gentleness the exile's steps. That is to say, because God is mercy and faithfulness, the return of the psalmist to the home of his heart is sure. God being what He is, no longing soul can ever remain unsatisfied. The actual return to the Temple is desired because thereby new praise will be occasioned. Not mere bodily presence there, but that joyful outpouring of triumph and gladness, is the object of the psalmist's longing. He began with yearning after the living God. In his sorrow he could still think of Him at intervals as the help of his countenance and call Him "my God." He ends with naming Him "the gladness of my joy." Whoever begins as he did will finish where he climbed. The refrain is repeated for a third time, and is followed by no relapse into sadness. The effort of faith should be persistent, even if old bitternesses begin again and "break the low beginnings of content"; for, even if the wild waters burst through the dam once and again, they do not utterly wash it away, and there remains a foundation on which it may be built up anew. Each swing of the gymnast lifts him higher, until he is on a level with a firm platform on

which he can spring and stand secure. Faith may have a long struggle with fear, but it will have the last word, and that word will be "the help of my countenance and my God."

PSALM XLIV.

- 1 O God, with our ears we have heard,
Our fathers have told to us.
The work Thou didst work in their days,
In the days of yore.
- 2 Thou [with] Thy hand didst dispossess na-
tions, and didst plant *them*,
Didst afflict peoples and spread *them* forth.
- 3 For not by their own sword did they possess
the land,
And their own arm did not save them,
But Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the
light of Thy face,
Because Thou hadst delight in them.
- 4 Thou Thyself art my King, O God;
Command salvations for Jacob.
- 5 Through Thee can we butt down our op-
pressors;
In Thy name can we trample those that rise
against us.
- 6 For not in my own bow do I trust,
And my own sword does not save me.
- 7 But Thou hast saved us from our oppressors,
And our haters Thou hast put to shame.
- 8 In God have we made our boast all the day,
And Thy name will we thank for ever. Selah.
- 9 Yet Thou hast cast [us] off and shamed us,
And goest not forth with our hosts.
- 10 Thou makest us turn back from the oppressor,
And our haters plunder to their hearts' con-
tent.
- 11 Thou makest us like sheep for food,
And among the nations hast Thou scattered
us,
- 12 Thou sellest Thy people at no profit,
And hast not increased [Thy wealth] by their
price.
- 13 Thou makest us a reproach for our neigh-
bours,
A mockery and derision to those around us.
- 14 Thou makest us a proverb among the nations,
A nodding of the head among the peoples.
- 15 All the day is my dishonour before me,
And the shame of my face has covered me,
- 16 Because of the voice of the rebuker and blas-
phemer,
Because of the face of the enemy and the re-
vengeful.
- 17 All this is come upon us, and [yet] have we
not forgotten Thee,
Nor been false to Thy covenant.
- 18 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor our footsteps swerved from Thy way.
- 19 That Thou shouldest have crushed us in the
place of jackals,
And covered us with thick darkness.
- 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God
And spread out our hands to a strange God,
- 21 Would not God search out this? for He knows
the secrets of the heart.
- 22 Nay, for Thy sake are we killed all the day;
We are reckoned as sheep for slaughter.
- 23 Awake; why sleepest Thou, Lord?
Arise; cast not off for ever.

- 24 Why hidest Thou Thy face,
Forgettest our affliction and oppression?
- 25 For bowed to the dust is our soul;
Our body cleaves to the earth.
- 26 Arise [for] a help for us,
And redeem us for Thy lovingkindness' sake.

CALVIN says that the authorship of this psalm is uncertain, but that it is abundantly clear that it was composed by any one rather than David, and that its plaintive contents suit best the time when the savage tyranny of Antiochus raged. No period corresponds to the situation which makes the background of the psalm so completely as the Maccabean, for only then could it be truly said that national calamities fell because of the nation's rigid monotheism. Other epochs have been thought of, so as to avoid the necessity of recognising Maccabean psalms, but none of them can be said to meet the conditions described in the psalm. The choice lies between accepting the Maccabean date and giving up the attempt to fix one at all.

Objections to that late date based upon the history of the completion of the canon take for granted more accurate and complete knowledge of a very obscure subject than is possessed, and do not seem strong enough to negative the indications arising from the very unique fact, asserted in the psalm, that the nation was persecuted for its faith and engaged in a religious war. The psalm falls into four parts: a wistful look backwards to days already "old," when God fought for them (vv. 1-8); a sad contrast in present oppression (vv. 9-16); a profession of unfaltering national adherence to the covenant notwithstanding all these ills (vv. 17-22); and a fervent cry to a God who seems asleep to awake and rescue His martyred people (vv. 23-26).

The first part (vv. 1-8) recalls the fact that shone so brightly in all the past, the continual exercise of Divine power giving victory to their weakness, and builds thereon a prayer that the same law of His providence might be fulfilled now. The bitter side of the retrospect forces itself into consciousness in the next part, but here Memory is the handmaid of Faith. The whole process of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan is gathered up as one great "work" of God's hand. The former inhabitants of the land were uprooted like old trees, to give room for planting the "vine out of Egypt." Two stages in the settlement are distinguished in ver. 2: first came the "planting" and next the growth; for the phrase "didst spread them forth" carries on the metaphor of the tree, and expresses the extension of its roots and branches. The ascription of victory to God is made more emphatic by the negatives in ver. 3, which take away all credit of it from the people's own weapons or strength. The consciousness of our own impotence must accompany adequate recognition of God's agency in our deliverances. The conceit of our own power blinds our vision of His working hand. But what moved His power? No merit of man's, but the infinite free grace of God's heart. "The light of Thy face" is the symbol of God's loving regard, and the deepest truth as to His acts of favour is that they are the outcome of His own merciful nature. He is His own motive. "Thou hadst delight in them" is the ultimate word, leading us into sacred abysses of self-existent and self-originated Deity. The spirit, then, of Israel's history is contained in these three thoughts: the positive assertion of God's power as

the reason for their victories; the confirmatory negative, putting aside their own prowess; and the tracing of all God's work for them solely to His unmerited grace.

On this grand generalisation of the meaning of past centuries a prayer is built for their repetition in the prosaic present. The psalmist did not think that God was nearer in some majestic past than now. His unchangeableness had for consequence, as he thought, continuous manifestation of Himself in the same character and relation to His people. To-day is as full of God as any yesterday. Therefore ver. 4 begins with an emphatic recognition of the constancy of the Divine nature in that strong expression "Thou Thyself," and with an individualising transition for a moment to the singular in "my King," in order to give most forcible utterance to the thought that He was the same to each man of that generation as He had been to the fathers. On that unchanging relation rests the prayer, "Command salvations for (lit. of) Jacob," as if a multitude of several acts of deliverance stood before God, as servants waiting to be sent on His errands. Just as God (Elohim) takes the place of Jehovah in this second book of the Psalter, so in it Jacob frequently stands for Israel. The prayer is no sooner spoken than the confidence in its fulfilment lifts the suppliant's heart buoyantly above present defeat, which will in the next turn of thought insist on being felt. Such is the magic of every act of true appeal to God. However dark the horizon, there is light if a man looks straight up. Thus this psalmist breaks into anticipatory pæans of victory. The vivid image of ver. 5 is taken from the manner of fighting common to wild horned animals, buffaloes and the like, who first prostrate their foe by their fierce charge and then trample him. The individualising "my" reappears in ver. 6, where the negation that had been true of the ancestors is made his own by the descendant. Each man must, as his own act, appropriate the universal relation of God to men and make God his God, and must also disown for himself reliance on himself. So he will enter into participation in God's victories. Remembrance of the victorious past and confidence in a like victorious future blend in the closing burst of praise and vow for its continuance, which vow takes for granted the future continued manifestation of deliverances as occasions for uninterrupted thanksgivings. Well might some long-drawn, triumphant notes from the instruments prolong the impression of the jubilant words.

The song drops in the second part (vv. 9-16) from these clear heights with lyric suddenness. The grim facts of defeat and consequent exposure to mocking laughter from enemies force themselves into sight, and seem utterly to contradict the preceding verses. But the first part speaks with the voice of faith and the second with that of sense, and these two may sound in very close sequence or even simultaneously. In ver. 9 the two verbs are united by the absence of "us" with the first; and the difference of tense in the Hebrew brings out the dependence of the second on the first, as effect and cause. God's rejection is the reason for the nation's disgrace by defeat. In the subsequent verses the thoughts of rejection and disgrace are expanded, the former in ver. 9 *b* to ver. 12, and the latter in vv. 13-16. The poet paints with few strokes the whole disastrous rout. We see the fated band going out to battle, with no Pillar of Cloud or Ark of the Covenant at their head. They have but their own weapons and

sinews to depend on—not, as of old, a Divine Captain. No description of a fight under such conditions is needed, for it can have only one issue; and so the next clause shows panic-struck flight. Whoever goes into battle without God comes out of it without victory. Next follows plundering, as was the savage wont of these times, and there is no force to oppose the spoilers. The routed fugitives are defenceless and unresisting as sheep, and their fate is to be devoured, or possibly the expression "sheep for food" may be substantially equivalent to "sheep for the slaughter" (ver. 22), and may refer to the usual butchery of a defeated army. Some of them are slain and others carried off as slaves. The precise rendering of ver. 12 *b* is doubtful. Calvin, and among the moderns, Hitzig, Ewald, Delitzsch, Cheyne, take it to mean "Thou didst not set their prices high." Others, such as Hupfeld, Baethgen, etc., adhere to the rendering, "Thou didst not increase [Thy wealth] by their price." The general sense is clear, and as bold as clear. It is almost sarcasm, directed against the Divine dealings: little has He gained by letting His flock be devoured and scattered. Hupfeld attaches to the bitter saying a deep meaning: namely, that the "sale" did not take place "for the sake of profit or other external worldly ends, as is the case with men, but from higher disciplinary grounds of the Divine government—namely, simply as punishment for their sins, for their improvement." Rather it may indicate the dishonour accruing to the God, according to the ideas of the old world, when His votaries were defeated; or it may be the bitter reflection, "We can be of little worth in our Shepherd's eyes when He parts with us so easily." If there is any hint of tarnish adhering to the name of God by His people's defeat, the passage to the second main idea of this part is the easier.

Defeat brings dishonour. The nearer nations, such as Edomites, Ammonites, and other ancestral foes, are ready with their gibes. The more distant peoples make a proverb out of the tragedy, and nod their heads in triumph and scorn. The cowering creature, in the middle of this ring of mockers, is covered with shame as he hears the babel of heartless jests at his expense, and steals a glance at the fierce faces round him.

It is difficult to find historical facts corresponding with this picture. Even if the feature of selling into captivity is treated as metaphor, the rest of the picture needs some pressure to be made to fit the conditions of the Maccabean struggle, to which alone the subsequent avowals of faithfulness to God as the cause of calamity answer. For there were no such periods of disgraceful defeat and utter devastation when once that heroic revolt had begun. The third part of the psalm is in full accord with the religious consciousness of that Indian summer of national glories; but it must be acknowledged that the state of things described in this second part does not fit quite smoothly into the hypothesis of a Maccabean date.

The third part (vv. 17-22) brings closely together professions of righteousness, which sound strangely in Christian ears, and complaints of suffering, and closes with the assertion that these two are cause and effect. The sufferers are a nation of martyrs, and know themselves to be so. This tone is remarkable when the nation is the speaker; for though we find individuals asserting innocence and complaining of undeserved afflictions in many psalms, a declaration of national

conformity with the Law is in sharp contradiction both to history and to the uniform tone of prophets. This psalmist asserts not only national freedom from idolatry, but adherence in heart and act to the Covenant. No period before the exile was clear of the taint of idol worship and yet darkened by calamity. We have no record of any events before the persecutions that roused the Maccabean struggle which answer to the martyr cry of ver. 22: "For Thy sake we are killed all the day." It may, indeed, be questioned what is the relation in time of the two facts spoken of in vv. 17-19. Which comes first, the calamity or the steadfastness? Does the psalmist mean, "We are afflicted, and yet we are in affliction true to God," or "We were true to God, and yet are afflicted"? Probably the latter, as in the remainder of this part. "The place of jackals" is apparently the field of defeat referred to in the second part, where obscene creatures would gather to feast on the plundered corpses. The Christian consciousness cannot appropriate the psalmist's asseverations of innocence, and the difference between them, and it should not be slurred over. But, on the other hand, his words should not be exaggerated into charges of injustice against God, nor claims of absolute sinlessness. He does feel that present national distresses have not the same origin as past ones had had. There has been no such falling away as to account for them. But he does not arraign God's government. He knows why the miseries have come, and that he and his fellows are martyrs. He does not fling that fact down as an accusation of Providence, but as the foundation of a prayer and as a plea for God's help. The words may sound daring; still they are not blasphemy, but supplication.

The fourth part is importunate prayer. Its frank anthropomorphisms of a sleeping God, forgetting His people, surely need little defence. Sleep withdraws from knowledge of and action on the external world, and hence is attributed to God, when He allows evils to run unchecked. He is said to "awake," or, with another figure, to "arise," as if starting from His throned calm, when by some great act of judgment He smites flourishing evil into nothingness. Injustice is surely done to these cries of the *Ecclesia pressa* when they are supposed to be in opposition to the other psalmist's word: "He that keepeth Israel slumbers not, nor sleeps." Some commentators call these closing petitions commonplace; and so they are. Extreme need and agony of supplication have other things to think of than originality, and so long as sorrows are so commonplace and like each other, the cries of the sorrowful will be very much alike. God is pleased with well-worn prayers, which have fitted many lips, and is not so fastidious as some critics.

PSALM XLV.

- 1 My heart seethes [with] goodly speech:
I speak my work (poem) to a king;
My tongue is the pen of a swift scribe.
- 2 Thou art fair beyond the sons of men;
Grace is poured on thy lips:
Therefore God has blessed thee for ever.
- 3 Gird thy sword on thy thigh, O hero,
Thy splendour and thy majesty.
- 4 [And [in] thy majesty] press forward,
ride on,

- For the help of truth, and meekness-
righteousness:
And thy right hand shall teach thee awe-
striking deeds.
- 5 Thine arrows are keen—
The peoples fall under thee—
Into the heart of the enemies of the king.
 - 6 Thy throne, O God, is for ever and aye:
 - 7 A sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of
thy kingdom.
Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest in-
iquity:
Therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee
With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
 - 8 Myrrh and aloes [and] cassia [are] all
thy robes;
Out of palaces of ivory, stringed instru-
ments make thee glad.
 - 9 King's daughters are among thy favour-
ites:
The consort stands at thy right hand in
Ophir gold.
 - 10 Harken, O daughter, and behold, and
incline thine ear;
And forget thy people, and thy father's
house;
 - 11 So shall the king desire thy beauty:
For he is thy lord; and bow thou down to
him.
 - 12 And the daughter of Tyre [shall come]
with a gift;
The richest among the peoples shall seek thy
favour.
 - 13 All glorious is the king's daughter in the inner
palace:
Of cloth of gold is her garment.
 - 14 In embroidered robes is she led to the king:
Maidens behind her, her friends, are brought
to thee.
 - 15 They are brought with gladness and exulta-
tion:
They enter into the palace of the king.
 - 16 Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children:
Thou wilt make them princes in all the earth.
 - 17 I will commemorate thy name through gen-
eration after generation:
Therefore shall the peoples praise thee for ever
and aye.

THIS is an epithalamion or ode on a king's marriage. The usual bewildering variety of conjectures as to his identity meets us in commentaries. The older opinion points to Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess, to which it is objected that he was not a warrior king, as the monarch of the psalm is. Hitzig regards "daughter of Tyre," in ver. 12, as a vocative, and therefore looks for a king who married a Tyrian woman. He is obliged to go to the northern kingdom to find one, and pitches on Ahab, because Jezebel was the daughter of "a king of the Zidonians," and Ahab had an "ivory house" (1 Kings xxii. 39). It is hard to believe that that wedded pair of evil memory are the originals of the lovely portraits in the psalm, or that a psalmist would recognise the kingdom of Israel as divinely established and to be eternally upheld. Besides, the construction of ver. 12, on which this theory pivots, is doubtful, and the daughter of Tyre there mentioned is more probably one of the bringers

of gifts to the bride. The attributes of the king and the promises for his descendants cannot be extended, without incongruity, beyond the Davidic line. Hence Delitzsch has selected Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, principally because his wife, Athaliah, was of Tyrian descent, being Jezebel's daughter, and partly because his father had been a trader, which accounts for the allusions to gold of Ophir and ivory. These are slender grounds of identification, to say nothing of the miserable contrast which Jehoram's reign—a dreary record of apostasy and defeat, culminating in a tragic death and a dishonoured grave (2 Chron. xxi.)—would present to the psalm. Some commentators have thought of the marriage of a Persian king, mainly because the peculiar word for *consort* in ver. 9 is employed for Persian queens (Neh. ii. 6), and also because the Tyrians were tributary to Persia, and because the sons of the king are to be "called princes in all lands," which reminds us of Persian satraps. Ewald finally fixed on Jeroboam II. of Israel. Cheyne ("Orig. of Psalt.") finds the king of the psalm in Ptolemy Philadelphus, the inspirer, as was believed, of the LXX. translation, whom Josephus and Philo extol. Its author puts this identification only as "tentative." Notwithstanding his anticipatory protest against making Philadelphus' moral character an objection, he feels that it is an objection; for he urges that its darker shades had not yet disclosed themselves, and confesses that "a haze of illusion encompassed our poet," who "overrated this Ptolemy, from taking too external a view of the Messianic promise, and being flattered by a Hellenic king's partiality for his people" (*u.s.*, 172). Philadelphus afterwards married his sister. His hands were red with blood. Was a Jewish psalmist likely to take "up the singing robes of a court poet" (*u.s.*) in honour of a Ptolemy, or to transfer the promises to the Davidic line to, and to speak of God as the God of, a foreign king? Or how, if he did, came his song to find and keep a place in the Psalter? All these conjectures show the hopelessness of identifying the person intended addressed in the psalm. It is said that a knowledge of the historical allusions in the Psalter is indispensable to enjoying it. They would often be helpful if they could be settled, but that is no reason for elevating conjecture to the place of knowledge.

One reason for the failure of attempts at identification is that the language is a world too wide for the best and greatest of Jewish kings. Much in the psalm applies to a historical occasion, the marriage of some monarch: but there is much that as obviously goes beyond it. Either, then, the psalm is hyperbole, outstripping even poetical licence, or there appear in it characteristics of the ideal monarch whom the psalmist knew to be promised to Israel. Every king of Judah by descent and office was a living prophecy. The singer sees the Messiah shining, as it were, through the shadowy form of the earthly king, whose limitations and defects, no less than his excellences and glories, pointed onwards to a greater than Solomon, in whom the "sure mercies" promised to David should be facts at last.

The psalm has two main divisions, prefaced by a prelude (ver. 1), and followed by prediction of happy issue of the marriage and enduring and wide dominion. The two main parts are respectively addressed to the royal bridegroom (vv. 2-9) and to the bride (vv. 10-15).

The singer lays claim to at least *poetic* inspira-

tion. His heart is seething or boiling over with goodly words, or perhaps with the joyful matter which occasions his song—namely, the royal nuptials. He dedicates his "work" (like the original meaning of "poem"—a thing made) to "a king," the absence of the definite article suggesting that the office is more prominent than the person. He sings to a king; therefore his strains must be lofty. So full is his heart that the swift words pour out as the stylus of a rapid writer races over the parchment. The previous musing has been long, the fire has burned slowly; but at last all is molten, and rushes out, fluent because fervent.

The picture of the king begins with two features on which the old-world ideal of a monarch laid stress—personal beauty and gracious speech. This monarch is fairer than the sons of men. The note of superhuman excellence is struck at the outset; and though the surface reference is only to physical beauty, that is conceived of as the indication of a fair nature which moulds the fair form.

"For of the soul the body form doth take;
For soul is form, and doth the body make."

The highest truth of this opening word is realised only in Him of whom it was also said, in apparent contradiction, but real harmony with it, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." The craving for "whatsoever things are lovely," like all other desires, has for its object Jesus Christ. Another kingly excellence is sweet courtesy of speech. Possibly, indeed, the "grace poured on the lips" may mean the gracious smile which moulds their curves, but more likely it refers to the kindly speech that so well becomes a mouth that can command. The sweetest examples of such words are poor beside "the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth." The psalmist's ideal is that of a gentle king. Where else than in the King whose sceptre was a reed, not an iron rod, has it been fulfilled?

"Nor know we anything more fair
Than is the smile upon Thy face."

From such characteristics the psalmist draws an inference—"therefore God hath blessed thee for ever"; for that "therefore" does not introduce the result of the preceding excellences, but the cause of them. The psalmist knows that God has blessed the king because he sees these beauties. They are the visible signs and tokens of the Divine benediction. In its reference to Christ, the thought expressed is that His superhuman beauty is to all men the proof of a unique operation of God. Abiding divinity is witnessed by perfect humanity.

The scene changes with startling suddenness to the fury of battle. In a burst of lyric enthusiasm, forgetting for a moment nuptials and wedding marches, the singer calls on the king to array himself for war and to rush on the foe. Very striking is this combination of gentleness and warrior strength—a union which has been often realised in heroic figures, which is needful for the highest type of either, and which is fulfilled in the Lamb of God, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The king is to gird on his sword, and to array himself, as in glittering armour, in his splendour and majesty, and, thus arrayed, to mount his chariot,

or, less probably, to bestride his war-horse, and hurl himself on the yielding ranks of the enemy. "Press forward, drive (or *ride*) on," crushing obstacles and forcing a path. But Israel's king could be no vulgar conqueror, impelled by lust of dominion or "glory." His sword is to be girt on for the help or "on behalf of truth, meekness, and righteousness." These abstracts may be used for concretes—namely, the possessors of the qualities named. But the limitation is not necessary. The monarch's warfare is for the spread of these. The Hebrew binds the two latter closely together by an anomalous construction, which may be represented by connecting the two words with a hyphen. They are regarded as a double star. Then follows a verse of hurry: "Thy right hand shall teach thee awe-striking deeds." He has no allies. The canvas has no room for soldiers. The picture is like the Assyrian sculptures, in which the king stands erect and alone in his chariot, a giant in comparison with the tiny figures beneath him. Like Rameses in Pentaur's great battle song, "he pierced the line of the foe; . . . he was all alone, no other with him." Then follow three abrupt clauses, reflecting in their fragmentary character the stress of battle: "Thine arrows are sharp—The peoples fall under thee—In the heart of the enemies of the king." The bright arrow is on the string; it whizzes; the plain is strewn with prostrate forms, the king's shaft in the heart of each. It is no mere fanciful spiritualising which sees in this picture an adumbration of the merciful warfare of Christ all through the ages. We get to the kernel of the history of Israel when we regard it as the preparation for Christ. We understand the *raison d'être* of its monarchy when we see in these poor shadows the types of the King of men, who was to be all that they should have been and were not. The world-wide conflict for truth and meekness and righteousness is His conflict, and the help which is done on earth He doeth it all Himself. The psalm waits for its completion still, and will wait until the day when the marriage supper of the Lamb is preceded by the last battle and crowning victory of Him who "in righteousness doth judge and make war."

All the older versions take "God," in ver. 6 *a*, as a vocative, while most moderns seek another construction or text. "The sum of the matter is that the only natural rendering of the received text is that of the Versions. 'Thy throne, O God'" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Three renderings have been proposed, all of which are harsh. "Thy throne is the throne of God," etc., is Ewald's suggestion, revived from a Jewish expositor, and adopted widely by many recent commentators, and in the margin of the R.V. It is clumsy, and leaves it doubtful whether the stress of the assertion lies on the Divine appointment or on the eternal duration of the throne. "Thy God's throne is," etc., is very questionable grammatically, and extremely harsh. The only other suggested rendering, "Thy throne is God," etc., may fairly be pronounced impossible. If the vocative construction is retained, are we shut up to Cheyne's further opinion, that "the only natural interpretation [is] that of the Targum, 'Thy throne, O Jehovah'"? If so, we shall be obliged to admit textual corruption; for a reference to the eternal duration of Jehovah's dominion is quite out of place here, where the parallelism of the next clause demands some characteristic of the king's throne corresponding to that of his sceptre, there stated. But in Exod. xxi. 6, xxii. 8, and Psalm lxxxii. 6, the

name God (Elohim) is applied to rulers and judges, on the ground, as our Lord puts it, in John x. 35, that "unto them the word of God came"—*i.e.*, that they were theocratic officers. The designation, therefore, of the king as Elohim is not contrary to the Hebrew line of thought. It does not predicate divinity, but Divine preparation for and appointment to office. The recurrence of Elohim (God) in its full Divine signification in the next verse is felt by many to be an insuperable objection to recognising the lower sense here. But the emphatic "thy God," which is appended to the name in ver. 7, seems expressly intended to distinguish between the uses of the word in the two verses. August, then, as the title is, it proves nothing as to the divinity of the person addressed. We recognise the prophetic character of the psalm, and strongly believe that it points onwards to Christ the King. But we cannot take the ascription of the title "O God" as having reference to His Divine nature. Such a thought lay far beyond the prophetic horizon. The Old Testament usage, which is appealed to in order to justify the translation of the word "God" as a vocative, must govern its meaning. The careful distinction drawn by the expressions of ver. 7, between the lower and higher senses of the name, forbid the attempt to find here a premature and anomalous statement of deep truth, for which the ages were not ripe. While we, who know the full truth, may permissibly apply the psalmist's words as its expression, we must not forget that in so doing we are going beyond their real meaning. The controversies waged over the construction of this verse have sometimes been embittered by the supposition that it was a buttress for the truth of Christ's Divine nature. But that is a mistake. The psalm goes no further than to declare that the king is divinely endowed and appointed. It does outline a character fairer than the sons of men, which requires indwelling Deity for its realisation in humanity. But it does not speak the decisive word, which alone could solve the mystery of its requirement, by proclaiming the fact of incarnation.

The perpetuity of the king's throne is guaranteed, not only by his theocratic appointment by God, but by the righteousness of his rule. His sceptre is not a rod of iron, but "a sceptre of uprightness." He is righteous in character as well as in official acts. He "loves righteousness," and therefore cannot but "hate iniquity." His broad shield shelters all who love and seek after righteousness, and he wars against evil wherever it shows itself. Therefore his throne stands firm, and is the world's hope. A singer who had grasped the truth that power divorced from justice could not endure was far in advance of his time. The nations have not yet learned his lesson. The vast robber-kingdoms which seemed to give the lie to his faith have confirmed it by their evanescence.

The king's love of righteousness leads to his being "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." This anointing is not that of a coronation, but that of a feast. His "fellows" may either be other kings or his attendant companions at his marriage. The psalmist looks as deep into individual life as he has just done into politics, and ascribes to righteousness lofty powers in that region too. The heart which loves it will be joyful, whatever befalls. Conformity to the highest ideal known to a man, or, at all events, hearty

love thereof, leading to efforts after it, is the surest foundation for lasting and deep joy. Since Christ is the fulfilment of the psalmist's picture, and perfectly realised the perfection of manhood, the psalmist's words here are most fully applicable to Him.

True, He was "a man of sorrows," but beneath His sorrow had abiding and central joy, which He bequeathed to us, with the assurance that to possess it would make our joy full. His pure manhood was ever in touch with God, and lived in conscious righteousness, and therefore there was ever light within, though there was darkness around. He, the saddest, was likewise the gladdest of men, and "anointed with the oil of joy above His fellows."

In ver. 8 the psalm reaches its main theme—the marriage of the king. The previous verses have painted his grace of person, his heroic deeds in battle, and his righteous rule. Now he stands ready to pass into the palace to meet his bride. His festival robes are so redolent of perfumes that they seem to be composed of nothing but woven fragrance. There are difficulties in the rendering of ver. 8 *a*, but that adopted above is generally accepted as the most probable. The clause then describes the burst of jubilant music which welcomed and rejoiced the king as he approached the "palaces of ivory," where his bride waited his coming.

Ver. 9 carries the king into his harem. The inferior wives are of royal blood, but nearest him and superior to these is the queen-consort glittering with golden ornaments. This feature of the psalmist's description can only have reference to the actual historical occasion of the psalm, and warns against overlooking that in seeking a prophetic reference to the Christ in every particular.

The second half of the psalm is an address to the bride and a description of her beauty and state. The singer assumes a fatherly tone, speaking to her as "daughter." She is a foreigner by birth, and is called upon to give up all her former associations, with whole-hearted consecration to her new duties. It is difficult to imagine Jezebel or Athaliah as the recipient of these counsels, nor does it seem to the present writer to add anything to the enjoyment of the psalm that the person to whom they were addressed should be identified. The exhortation to give up all for love's sake goes to the heart of the sacred relation of husband and wife, and witnesses to the lofty ideal of that relation which prevailed in Israel, even though polygamy was not forbidden. The sweet necessity of wedded love subordinates all other love, as a deeper well, when sunk, draws the surface waters and shallower springs into itself.

"The rich, golden shaft
Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her."

The king sung of in the psalm was a type of Christ. Every true marriage is in the same fashion a type of the union of the soul with Jesus, the lover of all, the bridegroom of humanity. So it is not arbitrary spiritualising, but recognition of the nobleness of the lower love and of its essential similarity with the highest, when the counsel to this bride is regarded as shadowing the duties of the soul wedded to Christ. If a heart is really influenced by love to Him, that love will make self-surrender blessed. A child gladly drops toys when it stretches out its little hand

for better gifts. If we are joined to Jesus, we shall not be unwilling to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge" of Him. Have the terms of wedded life changed since this psalm was written? Have the terms of Christian living altered since it was said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple"? The law still remains, "Daughter, forget thine own people and Thy father's house." The exhortation is followed by a promise: "So shall the king desire thy beauty." The application of these words to the relations of Christ and His people carries with it a striking thought that He is affected by the completeness of our self-surrender and dependence. He pours love on the unworthy, but that is a different thing from the love with which He responds to such abandonment of self and other loves. Holy, noble living will bring a smile into His face and draw Him nearer to us.

But whilst there is all this sweet commerce of love and giving, the bride is reminded that the king is her lord, and is to be revered as well as loved. There is here, no doubt, the influence of an archaic mode of regarding marriage and the wife's position. But it still is true that no woman finds all that her heart needs in her husband, unless she can bring her reverence where she has brought her love; and that love will not long remain if reverence departs. Nor is the warning less needed in the higher region of the wedlock of the soul with the Saviour. Some types of emotional religion have more to say about love than about obedience. They are full of half-wholesome apostrophes to a "dear Lord," and are apt to forget the last word in the emphasis which they put on the first. The beggar-maid married to a king was full of reverence as well as love; and the souls whom Jesus stoops to love and wash and wed are never to forget to blend adoration with approach and obedience with love.

A picture of the reflected honour and influence of the bride follows in ver. 12. When she stands by the king's side, those around recognise her dignity, and seek to secure her favour. Hupfeld, Hitzig, and others take "daughter of Tyre" to be a vocative, addressed to the bride, who is, according to their view, a Tyrian princess. But there is a strong grammatical objection to that construction in the copula ("and") prefixed to "daughter," which is never so prefixed to a vocative unless preceded by another vocative. Delitzsch, Baethgen, Perowne, and Cheyne agree in recognising the force of that consideration, and the three former regard the phrase not as a vocative, but as a nominative. It is a personification of the Tyrians according to a familiar idiom. The clause is elliptical, and has to be supplemented by supposing that the same verb, which appears in the next clause in the plural, is to be supplied in thought, just as that clause requires the supplement of "with a gift" from this one. There appears to be some flaw in the text, as the clauses are unsymmetrical, and possibly the punctuators have marked a hiatus by the sign (Pasek) after the word "daughter of Tyre." To "seek thy favour" is literally to "smooth thy face"—a graphic representation. In the highest region, which we regard the psalm as adumbrating, the words have fulfilment. The bride standing by her bridegroom, and showing her love and devotion by self-abandonment and reverence, will be glorious in the eyes of those around. They who manifestly live in loving communion with

their Lord will be recognised for what they are, and, though sometimes hated therefor, will also be honoured. When the Church has cast all but Christ out of its heart, it will conquer the world. "The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee."

In vv. 13-15 the bride's apparel and nuptial procession are described. She is "all glorious within,"—by which is not meant, as ordinarily supposed, that she possesses an inner beauty of soul, but that the poet conceives of her as standing in the inner chamber, where she has been arrayed in her splendour. Krochmal, followed by Graetz and Cheyne, changes the text so as to read *corals*, or, as Cheyne renders, *pearls* (Heb. *p'ninim*), for *within* (*p'ninah*), and thus preserves unity of subject in the verse by removing the local designation. But the existing reading is intelligible. In ver. 14 the marriage procession is described. The words rendered "embroidered robes" are by some taken to mean "tapestry of divers colours" (Perowne), or richly woven carpets spread for the bride to walk on, and by others (Hitzig, Riehm) gay-coloured cushions, to which she is led in order to sit beside the bridegroom. But the word means apparel elsewhere, and either of the other meanings introduces an irrelevant detail of another kind into the picture. The analogy of other Scripture metaphors leads at once to interpreting the bride's attire as symbolic of the purity of character belonging to the Church. The Apocalypse dresses "the Lamb's wife" in "fine linen, clean and white." The psalm arrays her in garments gleaming with gold, which symbolise splendour and glory, and in embroidered robes, which suggest the patient use of the slow needle, and the variegated harmony of colour attained at last. There is no marriage between Christ and the soul, unless it is robed in the beauty of righteousness and manifold graces of character. In other places we read that the bride "made herself ready," and also that "to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white," in which sayings are set forth the double sources of such a garment of the soul. It is a gift from above. It is "put on" by continual effort, based on faith. The picture of the home-coming of the bride follows. She is attended by her maidens, and with them she passes into the palace amid joys and exultation. The psalm stops at the threshold. It is not for the singer to draw back the curtains and let in the day. "The door was shut." The presence of virgin companions waiting on the bride no more interferes with the application of the psalm to Christ and His Church than the similar representation brings confusion into our Lord's parable of the Ten Virgins. Parables and symbols are elastic, and often duplicate their representations of the same thing; and such is the case here.

The closing verses are addressed, not to the bride, but to the king, and can only in a very modified way and partially be supposed to pass beyond the Jewish monarch and refer to the true King. Hopes that he might be blessed with fortunate issue of the marriage were quite in place in an epithalamion, and the delicacy of the light touch with which this closing note is struck is noteworthy, especially in contrast with the tone of many famous secular songs of similar import. But much straining is needed to extract a spiritual sense from the words. Perowne truly says that it is "wiser to acknowledge at once the mixed character" of the psalm, and he quotes a

sagacious saying of Calvin's to the effect that it is not necessary that every detail should be carefully fitted to Christ. The psalm had a historical basis; and it has also a prophetic meaning, because the king of Israel was himself a type, and Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the ideal never realised by its successive occupants. Both views of its nature must be kept in view in its interpretation; and it need cause no surprise if, at some points, the rind of prose fact is, so to speak, thicker than at others, or if certain features absolutely refuse to lend themselves to the spiritual interpretation.

PSALM XLVI.

- 1 God is a refuge and stronghold for us,
A help in troubles most readily to be found.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth do change,
And the mountains reel into the heart of the sea.
- 3 Let its waters roar and foam;
Let mountains shake at its pride. Selah.
[Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God.]
- 4 [There is] a river—its branches make glad the city of God,
The sanctuary of the tabernacles of the Most High.
- 5 God is in her midst; she shall not be moved:
God shall help her at the morning dawn.
- 6 Nations roared, kingdoms were moved:
He gave forth His voice, the earth melts.
- 7 Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God. Selah.
- 8 Come, behold the deeds of Jehovah,
Who has made desolations in the earth.
- 9 Quelling wars to the end of the earth:
The bow He breaks, and hews the spear in splinters;
The chariots He burns in the fire.
- 10 "Desist, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted in the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
- 11 Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God. Selah.

THERE are two events, one or other of which probably supplies the historical basis of this and the two following psalms. One is Jehoshaphat's deliverance from the combined forces of the bordering nations (2 Chron. xx.). Delitzsch adopts this as the occasion of the psalm. But the other more usually accepted reference to the destruction of Sennacherib's army is more probable. Psalms xlv. and xlviii. have remarkable parallelisms with Isaiah. The noble contrast of the quiet river which makes glad the city of God with a tossing, earth-shaking sea resembles the prophet's threatening that the effect of refusing the "waters of Shiloah which go softly" would be inundation by the strong and mighty river, the Assyrian power. And the emblem is expanded in the striking language of Isa. xxxiii. 21: "The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars." Encircled by the flashing links of that broad moat, Jerusalem sits secure. Again, the central thought of the refrain in the psalm, "The Lord of hosts is with

us," is closely allied to the symbolic name which Isaiah gave as a pledge of deliverance, "Immanuel, God with us."

The structure is simple. The three strophes into which the psalm falls set forth substantially the same thought, that God's presence is safety and peace, whatever storms may roar. This general theme is exhibited in the first strophe (vv. 1-3) in reference to natural convulsions; in the second (vv. 4-7) in reference to the rage of hostile kingdoms; and in the third (vv. 8-11) men are summoned to behold a recent example of God's delivering might, which establishes the truth of the preceding utterances and has occasioned the psalm. The grand refrain which closes the second and third strophes should probably be restored at the end of ver. 3.

In the first strophe the psalmist paints chaos come again, by the familiar figures of a changed earth, tottering mountains sinking in the raging sea from which they rose at creation, and a wild ocean with thunderous dash appalling the ear and yeasty foam terrifying the eye, sweeping in triumphant insolence over all the fair earth. It is prosaic to insist on an allegorical meaning for the picture. It is rather a vivid sketch of utter confusion, dashed in with three or four bold strokes, an impossible case supposed in order to bring out the unshaken calm of those who have God for ark in such a deluge. He is not only a sure refuge and stronghold, but one easy of access when troubles come. There is little good in a fortress, however impregnable, if it is so difficult to reach that a fugitive might be slain a hundred times before he was safe in it. But this high tower, which no foe can scale, can be climbed at a thought, and a wish lifts us within its mighty walls. The psalmist speaks a deep truth, verified in the spiritual life of all ages, when he celebrates the refuge of the devout soul as "most readily to be found."

As the text stands, this strophe is a verse too short, and ver. 3 drags if connected with "will not we fear." The restoration of the refrain removes the anomaly in the length of the strophe, and enables us to detach ver. 3 from the preceding. Its sense is then completed, if we regard it as the protasis of a sentence of which the refrain is the apodosis, or if, with Cheyne and others, we take ver. 3, "Let its waters roar," etc.—what of that? "Jehovah of hosts is with us." If the strophe is thus completed, it conforms to the other two, in each of which may be traced a division into two pairs of verses. These two verse-pairs of the first strophe would then be inverted parallelism,—the former putting security in God first, and surrounding trouble second; the latter dealing with the same two subjects, but in reversed sequence.

The second strophe brings a new picture to view with impressive suddenness, which is even more vividly dramatic if the refrain is not supplied. Right against the vision of confusion comes one of peace. The abrupt introduction of "a river" as an isolated noun, which dislocates grammatical structure, is almost an exclamation. "There is a river" enfeebles the swing of the original. We might almost translate, "Lo! a river!" Jerusalem was unique among historical cities in that it had no great river. It had one tiny thread of water, of which perhaps the psalmist is thinking. But whether there is here the same contrast between Siloam's gentle flow and the surging waters of hostile powers as Isaiah

sets forth in the passage already referred to (Isa. viii. 6), the meaning of this gladdening stream is the ever-flowing communication of God Himself in His grace. The stream is the fountain in flow. In the former strophe we hear the roar of the troubled waters, and see the firm hills toppling into their depths. Now we behold the gentle flow of the river, gliding through the city, with music in its ripples and sunshine in its flash and refreshment in its waters, parting into many arms and yet one in diversity, and bringing life and gladness wherever it comes. Not with noise nor tumult, but in silent communication, God's grace and peace refresh the soul. Power is loud, but Omnipotence is silent. The roar of all the billows is weak when compared with the quiet sliding onwards of that still stream. It has its divisions. As in old days each man's bit of garden was irrigated by a branch led from the stream, so in endless diversity, corresponding to the infinite greatness of the source and the innumerable variety of men's needs, God's grace comes. "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally." The streams gladden the city of God with the gladness of satisfied thirsts, with the gladness which comes from the contact of the human spirit with Divine completeness. So supplied, the city may laugh at besiegers. It has unfailing supplies within itself, and the enemy may cut off all surface streams, but its "water shall be sure."

Substantially the same thought is next stated in plain words: "God is in the midst of her." And therefore two things follow. One is unshaken stability, and another is help at the right time—"at the turn of the morning." "The Lord is in the midst of her"—that is a perennial fact. "The Lord shall help her"—that is the "grace for seasonable help." He, not we, determines when the night shall thin away its blackness into morning twilight. But we may be sure that the presence which is the pledge of stability and calm even in storm and darkness will flash into energy of help at the moment when He wills. The same expression is used to mark the time of His looking from the pillar of cloud and troubling the Egyptians, and there may be an allusion to that standing instance of His help here. "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons"; but this we may know—that the Lord of all times will always help at the right time; He will not come so quickly as to anticipate our consciousness of need, nor delay so long as to let us be irrevocably engulfed in the bog. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He heard *therefore* that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Yet He came in time.

With what vigour the short, crashing clauses of ver. 6 describe the wrath and turbulence of the nations, and the instantaneous dissolving of their strength into weakness at a word from those awful lips! The verse may be taken as hypothetical or as historical. In either case we see the sequence of events as by a succession of lightning flashes. The hurry of the style, marked by the omission of connecting particles, reflects the swiftness of incident, like *I'eni, vidi, vici*. The utterance of God's will conquers all. At the sound of that voice stillness and a pause of dread fall on the "roar" (same word as in ver. 3) of the nations, like the hush in the woods when thunder rolls. He speaks, and all meaner sounds cease. "The lion hath roared, who shall not

fear?" No material vehicle is needed. To every believer in God there is an incomprehensible action of the Divine Will on material things; and no explanations bridge the gulf recognised in the psalmist's broken utterances, which declare sequence and not mode of operation: "He uttered His voice, the earth melted."

Again the triumph of the refrain peals forth, with its musical accompaniment prolonging the impression. In it the psalmist gives voice, for himself and his fellows, to their making their own of the general truths which the psalm has been declaring. The two names of God set forth a twofold ground for confidence. "Jehovah of hosts" is all the more emphatic here since the Second Book of the Psalter is usually Elohistic. It proclaims God's eternal, self-existent Being, and His covenant relation as well as His absolute authority over the ranked forces of the universe, personal or impersonal, spiritual or material. The Lord of all these legions is with us. When we say "The God of Jacob," we reach back into the past and lay hold of the Helper of the men of old as ours. What He has been, He is: what He did, He is doing still. The river is full to-day, though the van of the army did long ago drink and were satisfied. The bright waters are still as pellucid and abundant as then, and the last of the rear-guard will find them the same.

The third strophe summons to contemplate with fixed attention the "desolations" made by some great manifestation of God's delivering power. It is presupposed that these are still visible. Broken bows, splintered spears, half-charred chariots, strew the ground, and Israel can go forth without fear and feast their eyes on these tokens of what God has done for them. The language is naturally applied to the relics of Sennacherib's annihilated force. In any case it points to a recent act of God's, the glad surprise of which palpitates all through the psalm. The field of history is littered with broken, abandoned weapons, once flourished in hands long since turned to dust; and the city and throne of God against which they were lifted remain unharmed. The voice which melted the earth speaks at the close of the psalm; not now with destructive energy, but in warning, through which tones of tenderness can be caught. God desires that foes would cease their vain strife before it proves fatal. "Desist" is here an elliptical expression, of which the full form is "Let your hands drop"; or, as we say, "Ground your weapons," and learn how vain is a contest with Him who is God, and whose fixed purpose is that all nations shall know and exalt Him. The prospect hinted at in the last words, of a world submissive to its King, softens the terrors of His destructive manifestations, reveals their inmost purpose, and opens to foes the possibility of passing, not as conquerors, but as subjects, and therefore fellow citizens, through the gate into the city.

PSALM XLVII.

- 1 All ye peoples, clap [your] hands;
Shout to God with joyful cry.
- 2 For Jehovah is most High [and] dread,
A great King over all the earth.
- 3 He subdues peoples under us,
And nations under our feet.
- 4 He chooses for us our inheritance,
The pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.

- 5 God is gone up with a shout,
Jehovah with trumpet clang.
- 6 Sing with the harp to God, sing with the harp;
Sing with the harp to our King, sing with the harp.
- 7 For King of all the earth is God:
Sing with the harp a skilful song.
- 8 God has become King over the nations:
He has taken His seat on His holy throne.
- 9 The princes of the peoples gather themselves together
[As] a people of the God of Abraham:
For to God belong the shields of the earth;
Greatly has He exalted Himself.

THE closing thought of Psalm xlvii. is nobly expanded in this jubilant summons to all nations to praise Jehovah as their King. Both psalms have a similar, and probably the same, historical basis: a Divine act so recent that the tumult of triumph has not yet subsided, and the waves of joy still run high. Only in Psalm xlvii. the effect of that God-wrought deliverance is principally regarded as the security and peace of Israel, and in this psalm as the drawing of the nations to obey Israel's King, and so to join the chorus of Israel's praise. While the psalm has many resemblances to the Songs of the King (Psalm xciii. *seqq.*), it is clearly in its right place here, as forming with the preceding and succeeding psalms a trilogy, occasioned by one great manifestation of God's care for the nation. No event is more appropriate than the usually accepted destruction of Sennacherib's army. The psalm has little of complexity in structure or thought. It is a gush of pure rapture. It rises to prophetic foresight, and, by reason of a comparatively small historical occasion, has a vision of the world-wide expansion of the kingdom of God. It falls into two strophes of four verses each, with one longer verse appended to the latter.

In the first strophe the nations are invited to welcome God as their King, not only because of His Divine exaltation and world-wide dominion, but also because of His deeds for "Jacob." The same Divine act which in Psalm xlvii. is represented as quelling wars and melting the earth, and in Psalm xlviii. as bringing dismay, pain, and flight, is here contemplated as attracting the nations to worship. The psalmist knows that destructive providences have their gracious aspect, and that God's true victory over men is not won when opposition is crushed and hearts made to quake, but when recognition of His sway and joy in it swell the heart. The quick clatter of clapping hands in sign of homage to the King (2 Kings xi. 12) blends with the shrill cries with which Easterns express joy, in "a tumult of acclaim." Hupfeld thinks that to suppose the heathen called upon to do homage because of the victory for Israel won over them is entirely mistaken. But unless that victory is the reason for the summons, the psalm offers none; and it is surely not difficult to suppose that the exhibition of God's power leads to reflection which issues in recognition of His sovereignty. Vv. 3, 4, seem to state the grounds for the summons in ver. 1. The tenses in these verses present a difficulty in the way of taking them for a historical retrospect of the conquest and partition of Canaan, which but for that objection would be the natural interpretation. It is possible to take them as "a truth of experience inferred from what has just been wit-

nessed, the historical fact being expressed not in historical form, but generalised and idealised" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The just accomplished deliverance repeated in essence the wonders of the first entrance on possession of the land, and revealed the continuous working of the same Divine hand, ever renewing the choice of Jacob's inheritance, and ever scattering its enemies. "The pride of Jacob" is a phrase in apposition with "our inheritance." The Holy Land was the object of "pride" to "Jacob," not in an evil sense but in that he boasted of it as a precious treasure intrusted to him by God. The root fact of all God's ancient and continued blessings is that He "loved." His own heart, not Jacob's deserts, prompted His mercies.

The second strophe is distinguished from the first by the increased fervour of its calls to praise, by its still more exultant rush, and by its omission of reference to Jacob. It is wholly concerned with the peoples whom it invites to take up the song. As in the former strophe the singer showed to the peoples God working in the world, here he bids them look up and see Him ascending on high. "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first?" The mighty deliverance of which the triumph throbs through this trilogy of pæans of victory was God's coming down. Now He has gone back to His throne and seated Himself thereon, not as having ceased to work in the world—for He is still King over it all—but as having completed a delivering work. He does not withdraw when He goes up. He does not cease to work here below when He sits throned in His palace-temple above. The "shout" and "voice of a trumpet," which accompany that ascent, are borrowed from the ordinary attendants on a triumphal procession. He soars as in a chariot of praises,—from whose lips the psalm does not say, but probably it intends Israel to be understood as the singer. To that choir the nations are called to join their voices and harps, since God is their King too, and not Jacob's only. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. (text) "with understanding" is a noun, the name of a description of psalm, which occurs in several psalm titles, and is best understood as "a skilful song." Ver. 8 gathers up the reasons for the peoples' homage to God. He has "become King" over them by His recent act, having manifested and established His dominion; and He has now "sat down on His throne," as having accomplished His purpose, and as thence administering the world's affairs.

A final verse, of double the length of the others, stands somewhat apart from the preceding strophe both in rhythm and in thought. It crowns the whole. The invitations to the nations are conceived of as having been welcomed and obeyed. And there rises before the poet's eye a fair picture of a great convocation, such as might wait before a world-ruling monarch's throne on the day of his coronation. The princes of the nations, like tributary kings, come flocking to do homage, "as if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by."

The obliteration of distinction between Israel and the nations, by the incorporation of the latter, so that "the peoples" become part of the "people of the God of Abraham," floats before the singer's prophetic eye, as the end of God's great manifestation of Himself. The two parts of that double choir, which the preceding strophes summon to song, coalesce at last, and in grand unison send

up one full-throated, universal melodious shout of praise. "The shields of the earth" are best understood as a figurative expression for the princes just spoken of, who now at last recognise to whom they belong. Thus God has exalted Himself by His deeds; and the result of these deeds is that He is greatly exalted by the praise of a world, in which Israel and the "peoples" dwell as one beneath His sceptre and celebrate His name.

The psalmist looked far ahead. His immediate experience was as "a little window through which he saw great matters." The prophecy of the universal spread of God's kingdom and the inclusion in it of the Gentiles is Messianic; and whether the singer knew that he spoke of a fair hope which should not be a fact for weary centuries, or anticipated wider and permanent results from that triumph which inspired his song, he spake of the Christ, and his strains are true prophecies of His dominion. There is no intentional reference in the psalm to the Ascension; but the thoughts underlying its picture of God's going up with a shout are the same which that Ascension sets forth as facts,—the merciful coming down into humanity of the Divine Helper; the completeness of His victory as attested by His return thither where He was before; His session in heaven, not as idle nor wearied, but as having done what He meant to do; His continuous working as King in the world; and the widening recognition of His authority by loving hearts. The psalmist summons us all to swell with our voices that great chorus of praise which, like a sea, rolls and breaks in music round His royal seat.

PSALM XLVIII.

- 1 Great is Jehovah, and much to be praised,
In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
- 2 Lovely in loftiness, a joy of all the earth,
Is Mount Zion, the recesses of the north, the
city of the great King.
- 3 God in her palaces
Has made Himself known as a high tower.
- 4 For, lo, the kings assembled themselves,
They marched onwards together.
- 5 They saw, then they were amazed;
They were terror-struck, they fled.
- 6 Trembling seized them there;
Pain, as [of] a woman in travail.
- 7 With an east wind
Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish.
- 8 According as we have heard, so have we seen
In the city of Jehovah of hosts, in the city of
our God:
God will establish her for ever. Selah.
- 9 We have thought, O God, of Thy lovingkind-
ness
In the midst of Thy Temple.
- 10 According to Thy name, O God,
So is Thy praise to the ends of the earth:
Thy right hand is full of righteousness.
- 11 Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah exult,
Because of Thy judgments.
- 12 Compass Zion, and walk round her:
Reckon her towers.
- 13 Give heed to her bulwark,
Pass through her palaces;
That ye may tell it to the generation after.

14 That such is God, our God:
For ever and aye He will guide us.
Al-Muth.

THE situation seems the same as in Psalm xlv., with which this psalm has many points of contact. In both we have the same triumph, the same proud affection for the holy city and sanctuary, the same confidence in God's dwelling there, the same vivid picturing of the mustering of enemies and their rapid dispersion, the same swift movement of style in describing that overthrow, the same thought of the diffusion of God's praise in the world as its consequence, the same closing summons to look upon the tokens of deliverance, with the difference that, in the former psalm, these are the shattered weapons of the defeated foe, and in this the unharmed battlements and palaces of the delivered city. The emphatic word of the refrain in Psalm xlv. also reappears here in ver. 3. The psalm falls into three parts, of which the first (vv. 1, 2) is introductory, celebrating the glory of Zion as the city of God; the second (vv. 3-8) recounts in glowing words the deliverance of Zion; and the third tells of the consequent praise and trust of the inhabitants of Zion (vv. 9-14).

The general sense of the first part is plain, but ver. 2 is difficult. "Mount Zion" is obviously subject, and "lovely in loftiness" and "joy of all the earth" predicates; but the grammatical connection of the two last clauses is obscure. Further, the meaning of "the sides of the north" has not been satisfactorily ascertained. The supposition that there is an allusion in the phrase to the mythological mountain of the gods, with which Zion is compared, is surely most unnatural. Would a Hebrew psalmist be likely to introduce such a parallel, even in order to assert the superiority of Zion? Nor is the grammatical objection to the supposition less serious. It requires a good deal of stretching and inserting to twist the two words "the sides of the north" into a comparison. It is more probable that the clause is topographical, describing some part of the city, but what part is far from clear. The accents make all the verse after "earth" the subject of the two preceding predicates, and place a minor division at "north," implying that "the sides of the north" is more closely connected with "Mount Zion" than with the "city of the great King," or than that last clause is.

Following these indications, Stier renders "Mount Zion [and] the northern side (*i.e.*, the lower city, on the north of Zion), which together make the city," etc. Others see here "the Holy City regarded from three points of view"—*viz.*, "the Mount Zion" (the city of David), "the sides of the north" (Mount Moriah and the Temple), "the city of the great King" (Jerusalem proper). So Perowne and others. Delitzsch takes Zion to be the Temple hill, and "the sides of the north" to be in apposition. "The Temple hill, or Zion, in the narrower sense, actually formed the northeastern corner of ancient Jerusalem," says he, and thus regards the subject of the whole sentence as really twofold, not threefold, as appears at first—Zion on the north, which is the palace-temple, and Jerusalem at its feet, which is "the city of the great King." But it must be admitted that no interpretation runs quite smoothly, though the summary ejection of the troublesome words "the sides of the north" from the text is too violent a remedy.

But the main thought of this first part is independent of such minute difficulties. It is that the one thing which made Zion-Jerusalem glorious was God's presence in it. It was beautiful in its elevation; it was safely isolated from invaders by precipitous ravines, inclosing the angle of the plateau on which it stood. But it was because God dwelt there and manifested Himself there that it was "a joy for all the earth." The name by which even the earthly Zion is called is "Jehovah-Shammah, The Lord is there." We are not forcing New Testament ideas into Old Testament words when we see in the psalm an eternal truth. An idea is one thing; the fact which more or less perfectly embodies it is another. The idea of God's dwelling with men had its less perfect embodiment in the presence of the Shechinah in the Temple, its more perfect in the dwelling of God in the Church, and will have its complete when the city "having the glory of God" shall appear, and He will dwell with men and be their God. God in her, not anything of her own, makes Zion lovely and gladdening. "Thy beauty was perfect through My comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord."

The second part pictures Zion's deliverance with picturesque vigour (vv. 3-8). Ver. 3 sums up the whole as the act of God, by which He has made Himself known as that which the refrain of Psalm xlv. declared Him to be—a refuge, or, literally, a high tower. Then follows the muster of the hosts. "The kings were assembled." That phrase need not be called exaggeration, nor throw doubt on the reference to Sennacherib's army, if we remember the policy of Eastern conquerors in raising their armies from their conquests, and the boast which Isaiah puts into the mouth of the Assyrian: "Are not my princes altogether kings?" They advance against the city. "They saw,"—no need to say what. Immediately they "were amazed." The sight of the city broke on them from some hill-crest on their march. Basilisk-like, its beauty was paralysing, and shot a nameless awe into their hearts. "They were terror-struck: they fled." As in Psalm xlv. 6, the clauses, piled up without cement of connecting particles convey an impression of hurry, culminating in the rush of panic-struck fugitives. As has been often noticed, they recall Cæsar's *Veni, vidi, vici*; but these kings came, saw, *were* conquered. No cause for the rout is named. No weapons were drawn in the city. An unseen hand "smites once, and smites no more"; for once is enough. The process of deliverance is not told; for a hymn of victory is not a chronicle. One image explains it all, and signalises the Divine breath as the sole agent. "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" is not history, but metaphor. The unwieldy, huge vessel, however strong for fight, is unfit for storms, and, caught in a gale, rolls heavily in the trough of the sea, and is driven on a lee shore and ground to pieces on its rocks. "God blew upon them, and they were scattered," as the medal struck on the defeat of the Armada had it. In the companion psalm God's uttered voice did all. Here the breath of the tempest, which is the breath of His lips, is the sole agent.

The past, of which the nation had heard from its fathers, lives again in their own history; and that verification of traditional belief by experience is to a devout soul the chief blessing of its deliverances. There is rapture in the thought that "As we have heard, so have we seen." The

present ever seems commonplace. The sky is farthest from earth right overhead, but touches the ground on the horizon behind and before. Miracles were in the past; God will be manifestly in the far-off future, but the present is apt to seem empty of Him. But if we rightly mark His dealings with us, we shall learn that nothing in His past has so passed that it is not present. As the companion psalm says, "The God of Jacob is our refuge," this exclaims, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

But not only does the deliverance link the present with the past, but it flings a steady light into the future. "God shall establish her for ever." The city is truly "the eternal city," because God dwells in it. The psalmist was thinking of the duration of the actual Jerusalem, the imperfect embodiment of a great idea. But whatever may be its fate, the heart of his confidence is no false vision; for God's city will outlast the world. Like the "maiden fortresses," of which there is one in almost every land, fondly believed never to have been taken by enemies, that city is inexpugnable, and the confident answer to every threatening assailant is, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." "God will establish her for ever." The pledges of that stability are the deliverances of the past and present.

The third part (vv. 9-14) deals with the praise and trust of the inhabitants of Zion. Deliverance leads to thankful meditation on the lovingkindness which it so signally displayed, and the ransomed people first gather in the Temple, which was the scene of God's manifestation of His grace, and therefore is the fitting place for them to ponder it. The world-wide consequences of the great act of lovingkindness almost shut out of sight for the moment its bearing on the worshippers. It is a lofty height to which the song climbs, when it regards national deliverance chiefly as an occasion for wider diffusion of God's praise. His "name" is the manifestation of His character in act. The psalmist is sure that wherever that character is declared praise will follow, because he is sure that that character is perfectly and purely good, and that God cannot act but in such a way as to magnify Himself. That great sea will cast up nothing but pearls. The words carry also a lesson for recipients of Divine lovingkindness, teaching them that they misapprehend the purpose of their blessings, if they confine these to their own well-being and lose sight of the higher object—that men may learn to know and love Him. But the deliverance not only produces grateful meditation and widespread praise; it sets the mother city and her daughter villages astir, like Miriam and her maidens, with timbrel and dance, and ringing songs which celebrate "Thy judgments," terrible as they were. That dead host was an awful sight, and hymns of praise seem heartless for its dirge. But it is not savage glee nor fierce hatred which underlies the psalmist's summons, and still less is it selfish joy. "Thy judgments" are to be hymned when they smite some giant evil; and when systems and their upholders that array themselves against God are drowned in some Red Sea, it is fitting that on its banks should echo, "Sing ye to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously."

The close of this part may be slightly separated from vv. 9-11. The citizens who have been cooped up by the siege are bidden to come forth,

and, free from fear, to compass the city without and pass between its palaces within, and so see how untouched they are. The towers and bulwark or rampart remain unharmed, with not a stone smitten from its place. Within, the palaces stand without a trace of damage to their beauty. Whatever perishes in any assaults, that which is of God will abide; and, after all musterings of the enemy, the uncaptured walls will rise in undiminished strength, and the fair palaces which they guard glitter in untarnished splendour. And this complete exemption from harm is to be told to the generation following, that they may learn what a God this God is, and how safely and well He will guide all generations.

The last word in the Hebrew text, which the A.V. and R.V. render "even unto death," can scarcely have that meaning. Many attempts have been made to find a signification appropriate to the close of such a triumphal hymn as this, but the simplest and most probable course is to regard the words as a musical note, which is either attached abnormally to the close of the psalm, or has strayed hither from the superscription of Psalm xlix. It is found in the superscription of Psalm ix. ("Al-Muth") as a musical direction, and has in all likelihood the same meaning here. If it is removed, the psalm ends abruptly, but a slight transposition of words and change of the main division of the verse remove that difficulty by bringing "for ever and aye" from the first half. The change improves both halves, laying the stress of the first exclusively on the thought that this God is such a God (or, by another rendering, "is here," *i.e.*, in the city), without bringing in reference to the eternity of His protection, and completing the second half worthily, with the thought of His eternal guidance of the people among whom He dwells.

PSALM XLIX.

- 1 Hear this, all ye peoples;
Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world:
- 2 Both low-born and high-born,
Rich and poor together.
- 3 My mouth shall speak wisdom;
And the meditation of my heart shall utter understanding.
- 4 I will bend my ear to a parable:
I will open my riddle on the harp.
- 5 Why should I fear in the days of evil,
When the malice of my pursuers surrounds me,
- 6 [Even of] those who rely on their riches,
And boast of their wealth?
- 7 No man can at all redeem a brother;
He cannot give to God a ransom for him
- 8 (Yea, too costly is the redemption price of
their soul,
And he must leave it alone for ever):
- 9 That he may continue living on for ever,
And may not see the pit.
- 10 Nay, he must see that the wise die,
The fool and the brutish perish alike,
And leave to others their riches.
- 11 Their inward thought [is that] their houses
[shall last] for ever,
Their dwellings to generation after generation;
They call their lands by their own names.
- 12 But man [being] in honour abides not:
He becomes like the beasts [that] are brought
to silence.

- 13 This is the lot of them to whom presumptuous confidence belongs:
And after them men approve their sayings.
Selah.
- 14 Like sheep they are folded in Sheol;
Death shepherds them:
And the upright shall rule over them in the morning;
And their form shall be wasted away by Sheol,
So that it is without a dwelling.
- 15 Surely God shall redeem my soul from the power of Sheol:
For He shall take me. Selah.
- 16 Fear not thou when a man becomes rich,
When the glory of his house increases:
- 17 For when he dies he will not take away any [of it];
His glory shall not go down after him.
- 18 Though in his lifetime he bless his soul
(And [men] praise thee when thou doest well for thyself)
- 19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
For evermore they see not light.
- 20 Man [who is] in honour, and has not understanding,
Becomes like the beasts that are brought to silence.

THIS psalm touches the high-water mark of Old Testament faith in a future life; and in that respect, as well as in its application of that faith to alleviate the mystery of present inequalities and non-correspondence of desert with condition, is closely related to the noble Psalm lxxiii., with which it has also several verbal identities. Both have the same problem before them—to construct a theodicy, or “to vindicate the ways of God to man”—and both solve it in the same fashion. Both appear to refer to the story of Enoch in their remarkable expression for ultimate reception into the Divine presence. But whether the psalms are contemporaneous cannot be determined from these data. Cheyne regards the treatment of the theme in Psalm lxxiii. as “more skilful,” and therefore presumably later than Psalm xlix., which he would place “somewhat before the close of the Persian period.” This date rests on the assumption that the amount of certitude as to a future life expressed in the psalm was not realised in Israel till after the exile.

After a solemn summons to all the world to hear the psalmist’s utterance of what he has learned by Divine teaching (vv. 1-4), the psalm is divided into two parts, each closed with a refrain. The former of these (vv. 5-12) contrasts the arrogant security of the prosperous godless with the end that awaits them; while the second (vv. 13-20) contrasts the dreary lot of these victims of vain self-confidence with the blessed reception after death into God’s own presence which the psalmist grasped as a certainty for himself, and thereon bases an exhortation to possess souls in patience while the godless prosper, and to be sure that their lofty structures will topple into hideous ruin.

The psalmist’s consciousness that he speaks by Divine inspiration, and that his message imports all men, is grandly expressed in his introductory summons. The very name which he gives to the world suggests the latter thought; for it means—the world considered as fleeting. Since we dwell in so transitory an abode, it becomes us to listen to the deep truths of the psalm. These have a message for high and low, for rich and poor. They

are like a keen lancet to let out too great fulness of blood from the former, and to teach moderation, lowliness, and care for the Unseen. They are a calming draught for the latter, soothing when perplexed or harmed by “the proud man’s contumely.” But the psalmist calls for universal attention, not only because his lessons fit all classes, but because they are in themselves “wisdom,” and because he himself had first bent his ear to receive them before he strung his lyre to utter them. The brother-psalmist, in Psalm lxxiii., presents himself as struggling with doubt and painfully groping his way to his conclusion. This psalmist presents himself as a divinely inspired teacher, who has received into purged and attentive ears, in many a whisper from God, and as the result of many an hour of silent waiting, the word which he would now proclaim on the housetops. The discipline of the teacher of religious truth is the same at all times. There must be the bent ear before there is the message which men will recognise as important and true.

There is no parable in the ordinary sense in the psalm. The word seems to have acquired the wider meaning of a weighty didactic utterance, as in Psalm lxxviii. 2. The expression “Open my riddle” is ambiguous, and is by some understood to mean the proposal and by others the solution of the puzzle; but the phrase is more naturally understood of solving than of setting a riddle, and if so, the disproportion between the characters and fortunes of good and bad is the mystery or riddle, and the psalm is its solution.

The main theme of the first part is the certainty of death, which makes infinitely ludicrous the rich man’s arrogance. It is one version of

“There is no armour against Fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings.”

Therefore how vain the boasting in wealth, when all its heaps cannot buy a day of life! This familiar thought is not all the psalmist’s contribution to the solution of the mystery of life’s unequal partition of worldly good; but it prepares the way for it, and it lays a foundation for his refusal to be afraid, however pressed by insolent enemies. Very significantly he sets the conclusion, to which observation of the transiency of human prosperity has led him, at the beginning of his “parable.” In the parallel psalm (lxxiii.) the singer shows himself struggling from the depths of perplexity up to the sunny heights of faith. But here the poet begins with the clear utterance of trustful courage, and then vindicates it by the thought of the impotence of wealth to avert death.

The hostility to himself of the self-confident rich boasters appears only for a moment at first. It is described by a gnarled, energetic phrase which has been diversely understood. But it seems clear that the “iniquity” (A.V. and R.V.) spoken of in ver. 5 *b* is not the psalmist’s sin, for a reference here to his guilt or to retribution would be quite irrelevant; and if it were the consequences of his own evil that dogged him at his heels, he had every reason to fear, and confidence would be insolent defiance. But the word rendered in the A.V. *heels*, which is retained in the R.V. with a change in construction, may be a participial noun, derived from a verb meaning to trip up or supplant; and this gives a natural coherence to the whole verse, and connects it with

the following one. "Pursuers" is a weak equivalent for the literal "those who would supplant me," but conveys the meaning, though in a somewhat enfeebled condition. Ver. 6 is a continuance of the description of the supplanters. They are "men of this world," the same type of man as excites stern disapproval in many psalms: as, for instance, in xvii. 14—a psalm which is closely related to this, both in its portrait of the godless and its lofty hope for the future. It is to be noted that they are not described as vicious or God-denying or defying. They are simply absorbed in the material, and believe that land and money are the real, solid goods. They are the same men as Jesus meant when He said that it was hard for those who trusted in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It has been thought that the existence of such a class points to a late date for the psalm; but the reliance on riches does not require large riches to rely on, and may flourish in full pernicousness in very primitive social conditions. A small elevation suffices to lift a man high enough above his fellows to make a weak head giddy. Those to whom material possessions are the only good have a natural enmity towards those who find their wealth in truth and goodness. The poet, the thinker, and, most of all, the religious man, are targets for more or less active "malice," or, at all events, are recognised as belonging to another class, and regarded as singular and "unpractical," if nothing worse. But the psalmist looks far enough ahead to see the end of all the boasting, and points to the great instance of the impotence of material good—its powerlessness to prolong life. It would be more natural to find in ver. 7 the statement that the rich man cannot prolong his own days than that he cannot do so for a "brother." A very slight change in the text would make the initial word of the verse ("brother") the particle of asseveration, which occurs in ver. 15 (the direct antithesis of this verse), and is characteristic of the parallel Psalm lxxiii. With that reading (Ewald, Cheyne, Baethgen, etc.) other slight difficulties are smoothed; but the present text is attested by the LXX. and other early versions, and is capable of defence. It may be necessary to observe that there is no reference here to any other "redemption" than that of the body from physical death. There is a distinct intention to contrast the man's limited power with God's, for ver. 15 points back to this verse, and declares that God can do what man cannot. Ver. 8 must be taken as a parenthesis, and the construction carried on from ver. 7 to ver. 9, which specifies the purpose of the ransom, if it were possible. No man can secure for another continuous life or an escape from the necessity of seeing the pit—i.e., going down to the depths of death. It would cost more than all the rich man's store; wherefore he—the would-be ransomer—must abandon the attempt for ever.

The "see" in ver. 10 is taken by many to have the same object as the "see" in ver. 9. "Yea, he shall see it." (So Hupfeld, Hitzig, Perowne, and others.) "The wise die" will then begin a new sentence. But the repetition is feeble, and breaks up the structure of ver. 10 undesirably. The fact stares the rich man in the face that no difference of position or of character affects the necessity of death. Down into that insatiable maw of Sheol ("the ever-asking"?) beauty, wisdom, wealth, folly, and animalism go alike, and it still gapes wide for fresh food. But a strange hallucination in the teeth of all experience is cherished in the

"inward thought" of "the men of this world"—namely, that their houses shall continue for ever. Like the godless man in Psalm x., this rich man has reached a height of false security, which cannot be put into words without exposing its absurdity, but which yet haunts his inmost thoughts. The fond imagination of perpetuity is not driven out by the plain facts of life and death. He acts on the presumption of permanence; and he whose working hypothesis is that he is to abide always as his permanent home in his sumptuous palace, is rightly set down as believing in the incredible belief that the common lot will not be his. A man's real belief is that which moulds his life, though he has never formulated it in words. This "inward thought" either underlies the rich godless man's career, or that career is inexplicable. There is an emphatic contrast drawn between what he "sees" and what he, all the while, hugs in his secret heart. That contrast is lost if the emendation found in the LXX. and adopted by many modern commentators is accepted, according to which, by the transposition of a letter, we get "their grave" instead of "their inward [thought]." A reference to the grave comes too early; and if the sense of ver. 11 *a* is that "their grave (or, the graves) are their houses for ever," there is no parallelism between ver. 11 *a* and *c*. The delusion of continuance is, on the other hand, naturally connected with the proud attempt to make their names immortal by impressing them on their estates. The language of ver. 11 *c* is somewhat ambiguous; but, on the whole, the rendering "they call their lands by their own names" accords best with the context.

Then comes with a crash the stern refrain which pulverises all this insanity of arrogance. The highest distinction among men gives no exemption from the grim law which holds all corporeal life in its gripe. The psalmist does not look, and probably did not see, beyond the external fact of death. He knows nothing of a future for the men whose portion is in this life. As we shall see in the second part of the psalm, the confidence in immortality is for him a deduction from the fact of communion with God here, and, apparently, his bent ear had received no whisper as to any distinction between the godless man and the beast in the regard to their deaths. They are alike "brought to silence." The awful dumbness of the dead strikes on his heart and imagination as most pathetic. "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once," and now the pale lips are locked in eternal silence, and some ears hunger in vain "for the sound of a voice that is still."

Hupfeld would transfer ver. 13, which begins the second part, so that it should stand before the refrain, which would then have the *Selah*, that now comes in peculiarly at the end of ver. 13. But there is nothing unnatural in the first verse of the second part summing up the contents of the first part; and such a summary is needed in order to bring out the contrast between the godless folly and end of the rich men on the one hand, and the hope of the psalmist on the other. The construction of ver. 13 is disputed. The "way" may either mean conduct or fate, and the word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "folly" has also the meaning of stupid security or self-confidence. It seems best to regard the sentence as not pronouncing again that the conduct described in vv. 6-11 is foolish, but that the end foretold in ver. 12 surely falls on such as have that dogged in-

sensibility to the facts of life which issues in such presumptuous assurance. Many commentators would carry on the sentence into ver. 13 *b*, and extend the "lot" to those who in after-generations approve their sayings. But the paradoxical fact that notwithstanding each generation's experience the delusion is obstinately maintained from father to son yields a fuller meaning. In either case the notes of the musical interlude fix attention on the thought, in order to make the force of the following contrast greater. That contrast first deals with the fate of godless men after death. The comparison with the "beasts" in the refrain may have suggested the sombre grandeur of the metaphor in ver. 14 *a* and *b*: Sheol is as a great fold into which flocks are driven. There Death rules as the shepherd of that dim realm. What a contrast to the fold and the flock of the other Shepherd, who guides His unterrified sheep through the "valley of the shadow of death"! The waters of stillness beside which this sad shepherd makes his flock lie down are doleful and sluggish. There is no cheerful activity for these, nor any fair pastures, but they are penned in compelled inaction in that dreadful fold.

So far the picture is comparatively clear, but with the next clause difficulties begin. Does the "morning" mean only the end of the night of trouble, the beginning in this life of the "upright's" deliverance, or have we here an eschatological utterance? The whole of the rest of the verse has to do with the unseen world, and to confine this clause to the temporal triumph of the righteous over their dead oppressors drags in an idea belonging to another sphere altogether. We venture to regard the interpretation of these enigmatical words, which sees in them a dim adumbration of a great morning which will yet stream its light into the land of darkness, and in which not this or that upright man but the class as a whole shall triumph, as the only one which keeps the parts of the verse in unity. It is part of the "riddle" of the psalmist, probably not perfectly explicable to himself. We cannot say that there is here the clear teaching of a resurrection, but there is the germ of it, whether distinctly apprehended by the singer or not. The first glimpses of truth in all regions are vague, and the gazer does not know that the star he sees is a sun. Not otherwise did the great truths of the future life rise on inspired men of old. This psalmist divined, or, more truly, heard in his bent ear, that Good and its lovers should triumph beyond the grave, and that somehow a morning would break for them. But he knew nothing of any such for the godless dead. And the remainder of the verse expresses in enigmatical brevity and obscurity the gloomy fate of those for whom there was no such awakening as he hoped for himself. Very different renderings have been given of the gnarled words. If we adhere to the accents, the literal translation is, "Their form is [destined] for the wasting of Sheol, from a dwelling-place for it," or "without its dwelling-place"—an obscure saying, which is, however, intelligible when rendered as above. It describes the wasting away of the whole man, not merely his corporeal form, in Sheol, of which the corruption of the body in the grave may stand as a terrible symbol, so that only a thin shred of personality remains, which wanders homeless, unclothed with any house either "of this tabernacle" or any other, and so found drearily naked. Homeless desolation of bare being, from which all that is fair or good has

been gnawed away, is awfully expressed in the words. Other renderings, neglecting the accents and amending the text, bring out other meanings: such as "Their form is for corruption; Hades [will be] its dwelling-place" (Jennings and Lowe); "Their form shall waste away. Sheol shall be their castle for ever" (so Cheyne in "Book of Psalms"; in "Orig. of Psalt." *frame* is substituted for *form*, and *palace* for *castle*. Baethgen gives up the attempt to render the text or to restore it, and takes to asterisks).

To this condition of dismal inactivity, as of sheep penned in a fold, of loss of beauty, of wasting and homelessness, the psalmist opposes the fate which he has risen to anticipate for himself. Ver. 15 is plainly antithetical, not only to ver. 14, but to ver. 7. The "redemption" which was impossible with men is possible with God. The emphatic particle of asseveration and restriction at the beginning is, as we have remarked, characteristic of the parallel Psalm lxxiii. It here strengthens the expression of confidence, and points to God as alone able to deliver His servant from the "hand of Sheol." That deliverance is clearly not escape from the universal lot, which the psalmist has just proclaimed so impressively as affecting wise and foolish alike. But while he expects that he, too, will have to submit to the strong hand that plucks all men from their dwelling-places, he has won the assurance that sameness of outward lot covers absolute difference in the conditions of those who are subjected to it. The faith that he will be delivered from the power of Sheol does not necessarily imply the specific kind of deliverance involved in resurrection, and it may be a question whether that idea was definitely before the singer's mind. But, without dogmatising on that doubtful point, plainly his expectation was of a life beyond death, the antithesis of the cheerless one just painted in such gloomy colours. The very brevity of the second clause of the verse makes it the more emphatic.

The same pregnant phrase occurs again with the same emphasis in Psalm lxxiii. 24. "Thou shalt take me," and in both passages the psalmist is obviously quoting from the narrative of Enoch's translation. "God took him" (Gen. v. 24). He has fed his faith on that signal instance of the end of a life of communion with God, and it has confirmed the hopes which such a life cannot but kindle, so that he is ready to submit to the common lot, bearing in his heart the assurance that, in experiencing it, he will not be driven by that grim shepherd into his gloomy fold, but lifted by God into His own presence. As in Psalms xvi. and xvii. we have here the certainty of immortality filling a devout soul as the result of present experience of communion with God. These great utterances as to the two contrasted conditions after death are, in one aspect, the psalmist's "riddle," in so far as they are stated in "dark and cloudy words," but, in another view, are the solution of the painful enigma of the prosperity of the godless and the afflictions of the righteous. Fittingly the *Selah* follows this solemn, great hope.

As the first part began with the psalmist's encouraging of himself to put away fear, so the whole ends with the practical application of the truths declared, in the exhortation to others not to be terrified nor bewildered out of their faith by the insolent inflated prosperity of the godless. The lofty height of wholesome mysticism reached in the anticipation of personal immortality is not

maintained in this closing part. The ground of the exhortation is simply the truth proclaimed in the first part, with additional emphasis on the thought of the necessary parting from all wealth and pomp. "Shrouds have no pockets." All the external is left behind, and much of the inward too—such as habits, desires, ways of thinking, and acquirements which have been directed to and bounded by the seen and temporal. What is not left behind is character and desert. The man of this world is wrenched from his possessions by death; but he who has made God his portion here carries his portion with him, and does not enter on that other state

"in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory does he come
To God who is his home."

Our Lord's parable of the foolish rich man has echoes of this psalm. "Whose shall those things be?" reminds us of "He will not take away any of it"; and "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up . . . take thine ease" is the best explanation of what the psalmist meant by "blessing his soul." The godless rich man of the psalm is a selfish and godless one. His condemnation lies not in his wealth, but in his absorption in it and reliance upon it, and in his cherishing the dream of perpetual enjoyment of it, or at least shunning the thought of its loss. Therefore, "when he dies, he goes to the generation of his fathers," who are conceived of as gathered in solemn assembly in that dark realm. "Generation" here implies, as it often does, moral similarity. It includes all the man's predecessors of like temper with himself. A sad company sitting there in the dark! *Going to them* is not identical with death nor with burial, but implies at least some rudimentary notion of companionship according to character, in that land of darkness. The *darkness* is the privation of all which deserves the name of light, whether it be joy or purity. Ver. 18 *b* is by some taken to be the psalmist's address to the rich man, and by others to be spoken to the disciple who had been bidden not to fear. In either case it brings in the thought of the popular applause which flatters success, and plays chorus to the prosperous man's own self-congratulations. Like ver. 13 *b*, it gibbets the servile admiration of such men, as indicating what the praisers would fain themselves be, and as a disclosure of that base readiness to worship the rising sun, which has for its other side contempt for the unfortunate who should receive pity and help.

The refrain is slightly but significantly varied. Instead of "abides not," it reads "and has not understanding." The alteration in the Hebrew is very slight, the two verbs differing only by one letter, and the similarity in sound is no doubt the reason for the selection of the word. But the change brings out the limitations under which the first form of the refrain is true, and guards the whole teaching of the psalm from being taken to be launched at rich men as such. The illuminative addition in this second form shows that it is the abuse of riches, when they steal away that recognition of God and of man's mortality which underlies the psalmist's conception of *understanding*, that is doomed to destruction like the beasts that are put to silence. The two forms of the refrain, are, then, precisely parallel to our Lord's two sayings, when He first declared that it was

hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, and then, in answer to His disciples' surprise, put His dictum in the more definite form, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom!"

PSALM L.

- 1 El, Elohim, Jehovah has spoken, and called the earth
From the place of sunrise to its going down.
- 2 From Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God has shone.
- 3 Our God will come, and cannot be silent:
Fire devours before Him,
And round Him it is tempestuous exceedingly.
- 4 He calls to the heavens above,
And to the earth, that He may judge His people:
- 5 "Assemble to Me My favoured ones,
Who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."
- 6 And the heavens declare His righteousness;
For God—the judge is He. Selah.
- 7 Harken, My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, and I will witness against thee:
Elohim, thy God am I.
- 8 Not on [account of] thy sacrifices will I reprove thee:
Yea, thy burnt offerings are before me continually.
- 9 I will not take a bullock out of thy house,
Nor out of thy folds he-goats.
- 10 For Mine is every beast of the forest,
The cattle on the mountains in thousands.
- 11 I know every bird of the mountains,
And whatever moves on the field is before Me.
- 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee:
For Mine is the world and its fulness.
- 13 Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or the blood of he-goats shall I drink?
- 14 Sacrifice to God thanksgiving;
And pay thy vows to the Most High:
- 15 And call on Me in the day of trouble.
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.
- 16 But to the wicked [man] God saith,
What hast thou to do to tell My statutes,
And that thou takest My covenant into thy mouth?
- 17 And [all the while] thou hatest correction,
And flingest My words behind thee.
- 18 If thou seest a robber, thou art pleased with him;
And with adulterers is thy portion.
- 19 Thy mouth thou dost let loose for evil,
And thy tongue weaves deceit.
- 20 Thou sittest [and] speakest against thy brother;
At thine own mother's son thou aimest a thrust.
- 21 These things hast thou done, and I was silent;
Thou thoughtest that I was altogether like thyself:
I will reprove thee, and order [the proofs] before thine eyes.
- 22 Consider now this, ye that forget God,
Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be no deliverer:
- 23 He who offers thanksgiving as sacrifice glorifies Me;
And he who orders his way [aright]—I will show him the salvation of God.

THIS is the first of the Asaph psalms, and is separated from the other eleven (Psalms lxxiii.-lxxxiii.) for reasons that do not appear. Probably they are no more recodite than the verbal resemblance between the summons to all the earth at the beginning of Psalm xlix. and the similar proclamation in the first verses of Psalm l. The arrangement of the Psalter is often obviously determined by such slight links. The group has certain features in common, of which some appear here: *e.g.*, the fondness for descriptions of theophanies; the prominence given to God's judicial action; the preference for the Divine names of El, Adonai (the Lord), Elyōn (Most High). Other peculiarities of the class—*e.g.*, the love for the designation "Joseph" for the nation, and delight in the image of the Divine Shepherd—are not found in this psalm. It contains no historical allusions which aid in dating it. The leading idea of it—*viz.*, the depreciation of outward sacrifice—is unhesitatingly declared by many to have been impossible in the days of the Levite Asaph, who was one of David's musical staff. But is it so certain that such thoughts were foreign to the period in which Samuel declared that obedience was better than sacrifice? Certainly the tone of the psalm is that of later prophets, and there is much probability in the view that Asaph is the name of the family or guild of singers from whom these psalms came rather than that of an individual.

The structure is clear and simple. There is, first, a magnificent description of God's coming to judgment and summoning heaven and earth to witness while He judges His people (vv. 1-6). The second part (vv. 7-15) proclaims the worthlessness of sacrifice; and the third (vv. 16-21) brands hypocrites who pollute God's statutes by taking them into their lips while their lives are foul. A closing strophe of two verses (22, 23) gathers up the double lesson of the whole.

The first part falls again into two, of three verses each, of which the former describes the coming of the judge, and the latter the opening of the judgment. The psalm begins with a majestic heaping together of the Divine names, as if a herald were proclaiming the style and titles of a mighty king at the opening of a solemn assize. No English equivalents are available, and it is best to retain the Hebrew, only noting that each name is separated from the others by the accents in the original, and that to render either "the mighty God" (A.V.) or "the God of gods" is not only against that punctuation, but destroys the completeness symbolised by the threefold designation. Hupfeld finds the heaping together of names "frosty." Some ears will rather hear in it a solemn reiteration like the boom of triple thunders. Each name has its own force of meaning. El speaks of God as mighty; Elohim, as the object of religious fear; Jehovah, as the self-existent and covenant God.

The earth from east to west is summoned, not to be judged, but to witness God judging His people. The peculiarity of this theophany is that God is not represented as coming from afar or from above, but as letting His light blaze out from Zion, where He sits enthroned. As His presence made the city "the joy of the whole earth" (Psalm xlviii. 2), so it makes Zion the sum of all beauty. The idea underlying the representation of His shining out of Zion is that His presence among His people makes certain His judgment of their worship. It is the poetic clothing of the prophetic announcement, "You only have I

known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." The seer beholds the dread pomp of the advent of the Judge, and describes it with accessories familiar in such pictures: devouring fire is His forerunner, as clearing a path for Him among tangles of evil, and wild tempests whirl round His stable throne. "He cannot be silent." The form of the negation in the original is emotional or emphatic, conveying the idea of the impossibility of His silence in the face of such corruptions.

The opening of the court or preparation for the judgment follows. That Divine voice speaks, summoning heaven and earth to attend as spectators of the solemn process. The universal significance of God's relation to and dealings with Israel, and the vindication of His righteousness by His inflexible justice dealt out to their faults, are grandly taught in this making heaven and earth assessors of that tribunal. The court having been thus constituted, the Judge on His seat, the spectators standing around, the accused are next brought in. There is no need to be prosaically definite as to the attendants who are bidden to escort them. His officers are everywhere, and to ask who they are in the present case is to apply to poetry the measuring lines meant for bald prose. It is more important to note the names by which the persons to be judged are designated. They are "My favoured ones, who have made a covenant with Me by (*lit. over*) sacrifice." These terms carry an indictment, recalling the lavish mercies so unworthily requited, and the solemn obligations so unthankfully broken. The application of the name "favoured ones" to the whole nation is noteworthy. In other psalms it is usually applied to the more devout section, who are by it sharply distinguished from the mass: here it includes the whole. It does not follow that the diversity of usage indicates difference of date. All that is certainly shown is difference of point of view. Here the ideal of the nation is set forth, in order to bring out more emphatically the miserable contrast of the reality. Sacrifice is set aside as worthless in the subsequent verses. But could the psalmist have given clearer indication that his depreciation is not to be exaggerated into entire rejection of external rites, than by thus putting in front of it the worth of sacrifice when offered aright, as the means of founding and sustaining covenant relations with God? If his own words had been given heed to, his commentators would have been saved the blunder of supposing that he is antagonistic to the sacrificial worship which he thus regards.

But before the assize opens, the heavens, which had been summoned to behold, declare beforehand His righteousness, as manifested by the fact that He is about to judge His people. The *Selah* indicates that a long-drawn swell of music fills the expectant pause before the Judge speaks from His tribunal.

The second part (vv. 7-15) deals with one of the two permanent tendencies which work for the corruption of religion—namely, the reliance on external worship, and neglect of the emotions of thankfulness and trust. God appeals first to the relation into which He has entered with the people, as giving Him the right to judge. There may be a reference to the Mosaic formula, "I am Jehovah, thy God," which is here converted, in accordance with the usage of this book of the Psalter, into "God (Elohim), thy God." The formula which was the seal of laws when enacted

is also the warrant for the action of the Judge. He has no fault to find with the external acts of worship. They are abundant and "continually before Him." Surely this declaration at the outset sets aside the notion that the psalmist was launching a polemic against sacrifices *per se*. It distinctly takes the ground that the habitual offering of these was pleasing to the Judge. Their presentation continually is not reproved, but approved. What then is condemned? Surely it can be nothing but sacrifice without the thanksgiving and prayer required in vv. 14, 15. The irony of vv. 9-13 is directed against the folly of believing that in sacrifice itself God delighted; but the shafts are pointless as against offerings which are embodied gratitude and trust. The gross stupidity of supposing that man's gift makes the offering to be God's more truly than before is laid bare in the fine, sympathetic glance at the free, wild life of forest, mountain, and plain, which is all God's possession, and present to His upholding thought, and by the side of which man's folds are very small affairs. "The cattle" in ver. 10 are not, as usually, domesticated animals, but the larger wild animals. They graze or roam "on the mountains of a thousand"—a harsh expression, best taken, perhaps, as meaning mountains where thousands [of the cattle] are. But the omission of one letter gives the more natural reading "mountains of God" (*cf.* Psalm xxxvi. 6). It is adopted by Olshausen and Cheyne, and smooths the construction, but has against it its obliteration of the fine thought of the multitudes of creatures peopling the untraveller hills. The word rendered "whatever moves" is obscure; but that meaning is accepted by most. Cheyne in his Commentary gives as alternative "that which comes forth abundantly," and in "Orig. of Psalt.," 473, "offspring." All these are "with Me"—*i.e.*, present to His mind—a parallel to "I know" in the first clause of the same verse.

Vv. 12, 13, turn the stream of irony on another absurdity involved in the superstition attacked—the grossly material thought of God involved in it. What good do bulls' flesh and goats' blood do to Him? But if these are expressions of thankful love, they are delightful to Him. Therefore the section ends with the declaration that the true sacrifice is thanksgiving and the discharge of vows. Men honour God by asking and taking, not by giving. They glorify Him when, by calling on Him in trouble, they are delivered; and then, by thankfulness and service, as well as by the evidence which their experience gives that prayer is not in vain, they again glorify Him. All sacrifices are God's before they are offered, and do not become any more His by being offered. He neither needs nor can partake of material sustenance. But men's hearts are not His without their glad surrender, in the same way as after it; and thankful love, trust, and obedience are as the food of God, sacrifices acceptable, well-pleasing to Him.

The third part of the psalm is still sterner in tone. It strikes at the other great corruption of worship by hypocrites. As has been often remarked, it condemns breaches of the second table of the law, just as the former part may be regarded as dealing with transgressions of the first. The eighth, seventh, and ninth commandments are referred to in vv. 18, 19, as examples of the hypocrites' sins. The irreconcilable contradiction of their professions and conduct is vividly brought out in the juxtaposition of "declare My statutes" and "castest My words behind thee."

They do two opposite things with the same words—at the same time proclaiming them with all lip-reverence, and scornfully flinging them behind their backs in their conduct. The word rendered in the A.V. "slandereſt" is better taken as in margin of the R.V., "givest a thrust," meaning to use violence so as to harm or overthrow.

Hypocrisy finds encouragement in impunity. God's silence is an emphatic way of expressing His patient tolerance of evil unpunished. Such "long-suffering" is meant to lead to repentance, and indicates God's unwillingness to smite. But, as experience shows, it is often abused, and "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is thoroughly set in them to do evil." The gross mind has gross conceptions of God. One nemesis of hypocrisy is the dimming of the idea of the righteous Judge. All sin darkens the image of God. When men turn away from God's self-revelation, as they do by transgression and most fatally by hypocrisy, they cannot but make a God after their own image. Browning has taught us in his marvellous "Caliban on Setebos" how a coarse nature projects its own image into the heavens and calls it God. God made man in His own likeness. Men who have lost that likeness make God in theirs, and so sink deeper in evil till He speaks. Then comes an apocalypse to the dreamer, when there is flashed before him what God is and what he himself is. How terror-stricken the gaze of these eyes before which God arrays the deeds of a life, seen for the first time in their true character! It will be the hypocrite's turn to keep silence then, and his thought of a complaisant God like himself will perish before the stern reality.

The whole teaching of the psalm is gathered up in the two closing verses. "Ye that forget God" includes both the superstitious formalists and the hypocrites. Reflection upon such truths as those of the psalm will save them from else inevitable destruction. "This" points on to ver. 23, which is a compendium of both parts of the psalm. The true worship, which consists in thankfulness and praise, is opposed in ver. 23 *a* to mere externalisms of sacrifice, as being the right way of glorifying God. The second clause presents a difficulty. But it would seem that we must expect to find in it a summing up of the warning of the third part of the psalm similar to that of the second part in the preceding clause. That consideration goes against the rendering in the R.V. margin (adopted from Delitzsch): "and prepares a way [by which] I may show," etc. The ellipsis of the relative is also somewhat harsh. The literal rendering of the ambiguous words is, "one setting a way." Graetz, who is often wild in his emendations, proposes a very slight one here—the change of one letter, which would yield a good meaning: "he that is perfect in his way." Cheyne adopts this, and it eases a difficulty. But the received text is capable of the rendering given in the A.V., and, even without the natural supplement "aright," is sufficiently intelligible. To order one's way or "conversation" is, of course, equivalent to giving heed to it according to God's word, and is the opposite of the conduct stigmatised in vv. 16-21. The promise to him who thus acts is that he shall see God's salvation, both in the narrower sense of daily interpositions for deliverance, and in the wider of a full and final rescue from all evil and endowment with all good. The psalm has as keen an edge for modern as for

ancient sins. Superstitious reliance on externals of worship survives, though sacrifices have ceased; and hypocrites, with their mouths full of the Gospel, still cast God's words behind them, as did those ancient hollow-hearted proclaimers and breakers of the Law.

PSALM LI.

- 1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness:
According to the greatness of Thy compassions blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And from my sin make me clean.
- 3 For I, I know my transgressions:
And my sin is before me continually.
- 4 Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,
And done what is evil in Thine eyes:
That Thou mightest appear righteous when
Thou speakest,
And clear when Thou judgest.
- 5 Behold, in iniquity was I born;
And in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6 Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
Therefore in the hidden part make me to know wisdom.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness;
That the bones Thou hast crushed may exult.
- 9 Hide Thy face from my sins, and all my iniquities blot out.
- 10 A clean heart create for me, O God;
And a steadfast spirit renew within me.
- 11 Cast me not out from Thy presence;
And Thy holy spirit take not from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation:
And with a willing spirit uphold me.
- 13 [Then] will I teach transgressors Thy ways;
And sinners shall return to Thee.
- 14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the
God of my salvation;
And my tongue shall joyfully sing Thy righteousness.
- 15 Lord, open my lips;
And my mouth shall declare Thy praise.
- 16 For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I
give it:
In burnt offering Thou hast no pleasure.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A heart broken and crushed, O God, Thou wilt
not despise.
- 18 Do good in Thy good pleasure to Zion:
O build the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then shalt Thou delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt offerings and whole burnt offering:
Then shall they offer bullocks on Thine altar.

THE main grounds on which the Davidic authorship of this psalm is denied are four. First, it is alleged that its conceptions of sin and penitence are in advance of his stage of religious development; or, as Cheyne puts it, "David could not have had these ideas" ("Aids to Dev. Study

of Crit.," 166). The impossibility depends on a theory which is not yet so established as to be confidently used to settle questions of date. Again, the psalmist's wail, "Against Thee only have I sinned," is said to be conclusive proof that the wrong done to Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah cannot be referred to. But is not *God* the correlative of *sin*, and may not the same act be qualified in one aspect as a crime and in another as a sin, bearing in the latter character exclusive relation to God? The prayer in ver. 18 is the ground of a third objection to the Davidic authorship. Certainly it is hopeless to attempt to explain "Build the walls of Jerusalem" as David's prayer. But the opinion held by both advocates and opponents of David's authorship, that vv. 18, 19, are a later liturgical addition, removes this difficulty. Another ground on which the psalm is brought down to a late date is the resemblances in it to Isa. xl.-lxvi., which are taken to be echoes of the prophetic words. The resemblances are undoubted; the assumption that the psalmist is the copyist is not.

The personified nation is supposed by most modern authorities to be the speaker; and the date is sometimes taken to be the Restoration period, before the rebuilding of the walls by Nehemiah (Cheyne, "Orig. of Psalt.," 162); by others, the time of the Babylonish exile; and, as usual, by some, the Maccabean epoch. It puts a considerable strain upon the theory of personification to believe that these confessions of personal sin, and longing cries for a clean heart, which so many generations have felt to fit their most secret experiences, were not the wallings of a soul which had learned the burden of individuality, by consciousness of sin, and by realisation of the awful solitude of its relation to God. There are also expressions in the psalm which seem to clog the supposition that the speaker is the nation with great difficulties—e.g., the reference to birth in ver. 5, the prayer for inward truth in ver. 6, and for a clean heart in ver. 10. Baethgen acknowledges that the two latter only receive their full meaning when applied to an individual. He quotes Olshausen, a defender of the national reference, who really admits the force of the objection to it, raised on the ground of these expressions, while he seeks to parry it by saying that "it is not unnatural that the poet, speaking in the singular, should, although he writes for the congregation, bring in occasional expressions here and there which do not fit the community so well as they do each individual in it." The acknowledgment is valuable; the attempt to turn its edge may be left to the reader's judgment.

In vv. 1-9 the psalmist's cry is chiefly for pardon; in vv. 10-12 he prays chiefly for purity; in vv. 13-17 he vows grateful service. Vv. 18, 19, are probably a later addition.

The psalm begins with at once grasping the character of God as the sole ground of hope. That character has been revealed in an infinite number of acts of love. The very number of the psalmist's sins drove him to contemplate the yet greater number of God's mercies. For where but in an infinite placableness and lovingkindness could he find pardon? If the Davidic authorship is adopted, this psalm followed Nathan's assurance of forgiveness, and its petitions are the psalmist's efforts to lay hold of that assurance. The revelation of God's love precedes and causes true penitence. Our prayer for forgiveness is the

appropriation of God's promise of forgiveness. The assurance of pardon does not lead to a light estimate of sin, but drives it home to the conscience.

The petitions of vv. 1, 2, teach us how the psalmist thought of sin. They are all substantially the same, and their repetition discloses the depth of longing in the suppliant. The language fluctuates between plural and singular nouns, designating the evil as "transgressions" and as "iniquity" and "sin." The psalmist regards it, first, as a multitude of separate acts, then as all gathered together into a grim unity. The single deeds of wrong-doing pass before him. But these have a common root; and we must not only recognise acts, but that alienation of heart from which they come—not only sin as it comes out in the life, but as it is coiled round our hearts. Sins are the manifestations of sin.

We note, too, how the psalmist realises his personal responsibility. He reiterates "my"—"my transgressions, my iniquity, my sin." He does not throw blame on circumstances, or talk about temperament or maxims of society or bodily organisation. All these had some share in impelling him to sin; but after all allowance made for them, the deed is the doer's, and he must bear its burden.

The same eloquent synonyms for evil deeds which are found in Psalm xxxii. occur again here. "Transgression" is literally *rebellion*; "iniquity," *that which is twisted or bent*; "sin," *missing a mark*. Sin is rebellion, the uprising of the will against rightful authority—not merely the breach of abstract propriety or law, but opposition to a living Person, who has right to obedience. The definition of virtue is obedience to God, and the sin in sin is the assertion of independence of God and opposition to His will.

Not less profound is that other name, which regards sin as "iniquity" or distortion. Then there is a straight line to which men's lives should run parallel. Our life's paths should be like these conquering Roman roads, turning aside for nothing, but going straight to their aim over mountain and ravine, stream or desert. But this man's passion had made for him a crooked path, where he found no end, "in wandering mazes lost." Sin is, further, missing an aim, the aim being either the Divine purpose for man, the true Ideal of manhood, or the satisfaction proposed by the sinner to himself as the result of his sin. In both senses every sin misses the mark.

These petitions show also how the psalmist thought of forgiveness. As the words for sin give a threefold view of it, so those for pardon set it forth in three aspects. "Blot out";—that petition conceives of forgiveness as being the erasure of a writing, perhaps of an indictment. Our past is a blurred manuscript, full of false and bad things. The melancholy theory of some thinkers is summed up in the despairing words, "What I have written, I have written." But the psalmist knew better than that; and we should know better than he did. Our souls may become palimpsests; and, as devotional meditations might be written by a saint on a parchment that had borne foul legends of false gods, the bad writing on them may be obliterated, and God's law be written there. "Wash me thoroughly" needs no explanation. But the word employed is significant, in that it probably means washing by kneading or beating, not by simple rinsing. The psalmist is ready to submit to any painful discipline, if only he may be cleansed. "Wash me,

beat me, tread me down, hammer me with mallets, dash me against stones, do anything with me, if only these foul stains are melted from the texture of my soul." The psalmist had not heard of the alchemy by which men can "wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb"; but he held fast by God's "lovingkindness," and knew the blackness of his own sin, and groaned under it; and therefore his cry was not in vain. An anticipation of the Christian teaching as to forgiveness lies in his last expression for pardon, "make me clean," which is the technical word for the priestly act of declaring ceremonial purity, and for the other priestly act of making as well as declaring clean from the stains of leprosy. The suppliant thinks of his guilt not only as a blotted record or as a polluted robe, but as a fatal disease, the "first-born of death," and as capable of being taken away only by the hand of the Priest laid on the feculent mass. We know who put out His hand and touched the leper, and said, "I will: be thou clean."

The petitions for cleansing are, in ver. 3, urged on the ground of the psalmist's consciousness of sin. Penitent confession is a condition of forgiveness. There is no need to take this verse as giving the reason why the psalmist offered his prayer, rather than as presenting a plea why it should be answered. Some commentators have adopted the former explanation, from a fear lest the other should give countenance to the notion that repentance is a meritorious cause of forgiveness; but that is unnecessary scrupulousness. "Sin is always sin, and deserving of punishment, whether it is confessed or not. Still, confession of sin is of importance on this account—that God will be gracious to none but to those who confess their sin" (Luther, quoted by Perowne).

Ver. 4 sounds the depths in both its clauses. In the first the psalmist shuts out all other aspects of his guilt, and is absorbed in its solemnity as viewed in relation to God. It is asked, How could David have thought of his sin, which had in so many ways been "against" others, as having been "against Thee, Thee only"? As has been noted above, this confession has been taken to demonstrate conclusively the impossibility of the Davidic authorship. But surely it argues a strange ignorance of the language of a penitent soul, to suppose that such words as the psalmist's could be spoken only in regard to sins which had no bearing at all on other men. David's deed had been a crime against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against his family and his realm; but these were not its blackest characteristics. Every crime against man is sin against God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto Me" is the spirit of the Decalogue as well as the language of Jesus. And it is only when considered as having relation to God that crimes are darkened into sins. The psalmist is stating a strictly true and profound thought when he declares that he has sinned "against Thee only." Further, that thought has, for the time being, filled his whole horizon. Other aspects of his shameful deed will torture him enough in coming days, even when he has fully entered into the blessedness of forgiveness; but they are not present to his mind now, when the one awful thought of his perverted relation to God swallows up all others. A man who has never felt that all-engrossing sense of his sin as against God only has much to learn.

The second clause of ver. 4 opens the question

whether "in order that" is always used in the Old Testament in its full meaning as expressing intention, or sometimes in the looser signification of "so that," expressing result. Several passages usually referred to on this point (*e.g.*, Psalm xxx. 12; Exod. xi. 9; Isa. xlv. 9; Hos. viii. 4) strongly favour the less stringent view, which is also in accordance with the genius of the Hebrew race, who were not metaphysicians. The other view, that the expression here means "in order that," insists on grammatical precision in the cries of a penitent heart, and clogs the words with difficulty. If their meaning is that the psalmist's sin was intended to show forth God's righteousness in judging, the intention must have been God's, not the sinner's; and such a thought not only ascribes man's sin directly to God, but is quite irrelevant to the psalmist's purpose in the words. For he is not palliating his transgression or throwing it on Divine predestination (as Cheyne takes him to be doing), but is submitting himself, in profoundest abasement of undivided guilt, to the just judgment of God. His prayer for forgiveness is accompanied with willingness to submit to chastisement, as all true desire for pardon is. He makes no excuses for his sin, but submits himself unconditionally to the just judgment of God. "Thou remainest the Holy One; I am the sinner; and therefore Thou mayest, with perfect justice, punish me and spurn me from Thy presence" (Stier).

Vv. 5, 6, are marked as closely related by the "Behold" at the beginning of each. The psalmist passes from penitent contemplation and confession of his acts of sin to acknowledge his sinful nature, derived from sinful parents. "Original sin" is theological terminology for the same facts which science gathers together under the name of "heredity." The psalmist is not responsible for later dogmatic developments of the idea, but he feels that he has to confess not only his acts but his nature. "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." The taint is transmitted. No fact is more plain than this, as all the more serious observers of human life and of their own characters have recognised. Only a superficial view of humanity or an inadequate conception of morality can jauntily say that "all children are born good." Theologians have exaggerated and elaborated, as is their wont, and so have made the thought repugnant; but the derived sinful bias of human nature is a fact, not a dogma, and those who know it and their own share of it best will be disposed to agree with Browning, in finding one great reason for believing in Biblical religion, that—

"'Tis the faith that launched point-blank her dart
At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,
The Corruption of Man's Heart."

The psalmist is not, strictly speaking, either extenuating or aggravating his sin by thus recognising his evil nature. He does not think that sin is the less his, because the tendency has been inherited. But he is spreading all his condition before God. In fact, he is not so much thinking of his criminality as of his desperate need. From a burden so heavy and so entwined with himself none but God can deliver him. He cannot cleanse himself, for self is infected. He cannot find cleansing among men, for they too have inherited the poison. And so he is driven to God, or else must sink into despair. He who once sees into the black depths of his own heart will give up

thereafter all ideas of "every man his own redeemer." That the psalmist's purpose was not to minimise his own guilt is clear, not only from the tone of the psalm, but from the antithesis presented by the Divine desire after inward truth in the next verse, which is out of place if this verse contains a palliation for sin.

We can scarcely miss the bearing of this verse on the question of whether the psalm is the confession of an individual penitent or that of the nation. It strongly favours the former view, though it does not make the latter absolutely impossible.

The discovery of inherent and inherited sinfulness brings with it another discovery—that of the penetrating depth of the requirements of God's law. He cannot be satisfied with outside conformity in deed. The more intensely conscience realises sin, the more solemnly rises before it the Divine ideal of man in its inwardness as well as in its sweep. Truth within—inward correspondence with His will, and absolute sincerity of soul are His desire. But I am "born in iniquity": a terrible antithesis, and hopeless but for one hope, which dawns over the suppliant like morning on a troubled sea. If we cannot ask God to make us what He wishes us to be, these two discoveries of our nature and of His will are open doorways to despair; but he who apprehends them wisely will find in their conjoint operation a force impelling him to prayer, and therefore to confidence. Only God can enable such a Being as man to become such as He will delight in; and since He seeks for truth within, He thereby pledges Himself to give the truth and wisdom for which He seeks.

Meditation on the sin which was ever before the psalmist, passes into renewed prayers for pardon, which partly reiterate those already offered in vv. 1, 2. The petition in ver. 7 for purging with hyssop alludes to sprinkling of lepers and unclean persons, and indicates both a consciousness of great impurity and a clear perception of the symbolic meaning of ritual cleansings. "Wash me" repeats a former petition; but now the psalmist can venture to dwell more on the thought of future purity than he could do then. The approaching answer begins to make its brightness visible through the gloom, and it seems possible to the suppliant that even his stained nature shall glisten like sunlit snow. Nor does that expectation exhaust his confidence. He hopes for "joy and gladness." His bones have been crushed—*i.e.*, his whole self has been, as it were, ground to powder by the weight of God's hand; but restoration is possible. A penitent heart is not too bold when it asks for joy. There is no real well-founded gladness without the consciousness of Divine forgiveness. The psalmist closes his petitions for pardon (ver. 9) with asking God to "hide His face from his sins," so that they be, as it were, no more existent for Him, and, by a repetition of the initial petition in ver. 1, for the blotting out of "all mine iniquities."

The second principal division begins with ver. 10, and is a prayer for purity, followed by vows of glad service. The prayer is contained in three verses (10-12), of which the first implores complete renewal of nature, the second beseeches that there may be no break between the suppliant and God, and the third asks for the joy and willingness to serve which would flow from the granting of the desires preceding. In each verse the second clause has "spirit" for its leading word, and the

middle one of the three asks for "*Thy* holy spirit." The petitions themselves, and the order in which they occur, are deeply significant, and deserve much more elucidation than can be given here. The same profound consciousness of inward corruption which spoke in the former part of the psalm shapes the prayer for renewal. Nothing less than a new creation will make this man's heart "clean." His past has taught him that. The word employed is always used of God's creative act; and the psalmist feels that nothing less than the power which brooded over the face of primeval chaos, and evolved thence an ordered world, can deal with the confused ruin within himself. What he felt that he must have is what prophets promised (Jer. xxiv. 7; Ezek. xxxvi. 26) and Christ has brought—a new creation, in which, while personality remains unaffected, and the components of character continue as before, a real new life is bestowed, which stamps new directions on affections, gives new aims, impulses, convictions, casts out inveterate evils, and gradually changes "all but the basis of the soul." A desire for pardon which does not unfold into such longing for deliverance from the misery of the old self is not the offspring of genuine penitence, but only of base fear.

"A steadfast spirit" is needful in order to keep a cleansed heart clean; and, on the other hand, when, by cleanness of heart, a man is freed from the perturbations of rebellious desires and the weakening influences of sin, his spirit will be steadfast. The two characteristics sustain each other. Consciousness of corruption dictated the former desire; penitent recognition of weakness and fluctuation inspires the latter. It may be observed, too, that the triad of petitions having reference to "spirit" has for its central one a prayer for God's Spirit, and that the other two may be regarded as dependent on that. Where God's spirit dwells, the human spirit in which it abides will be firm with uncreated strength. His energy, being infused into a tremulous, changeable humanity, will make it stable. If we are to stand fast, we must be stayed on God.

The group of petitions in ver. 11 is negative. It deprecates a possible tragic separation from God, and that under two aspects. "Part me not from Thee; part not Thyself from me." The former prayer, "Cast me not out from Thy presence," is by some explained according to the analogy of other instances of the occurrence of the phrase, where it means expulsion from the land of Israel; and is claimed, thus interpreted, as a clear indication that the psalmist speaks in the name of the nation. But however certainly the expression is thus used elsewhere, it cannot, without introducing an alien thought, be so interpreted in its present connection, imbedded in petitions of the most spiritual and individual character: much rather, the psalmist is recoiling from what he knows only too well to be the consequence of an unclean heart—separation from God, whether in the sense of exclusion from the sanctuary, or in the profounder sense, which is not too deep for such a psalm, of conscious loss of the light of God's face. He dreads being, Cain-like, shut out from that presence which is life; and he knows that, unless his previous prayer for a clean heart is answered, that dreary solitude of great darkness must be his lot. The sister petition, "Take not Thy holy spirit from me," contemplates the union between God and him from the other side. He regards himself as possessing that

Divine spirit; for he knows that, notwithstanding his sin, God has not left him, else he would not have these movements of godly sorrow and yearnings for purity. There is no reason to commit the anachronism of supposing that the psalmist had any knowledge of New Testament teaching of a personal Divine Spirit. But if we may suppose that he is David, this prayer has special force. That anointing which designated and fitted him for kingly office symbolised the gift of a Divine influence accompanying a Divine call. If we further remember how it had fared with his predecessor, from whom, because of impenitence, "the Spirit of the Lord departed, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him," we understand how Saul's successor, trembling as he remembers his fate, prays with peculiar emphasis, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

The last member of the triad, in ver. 12, looks back to former petitions, and asks for restoration of the "joy of Thy salvation," which had lain like dew on this man before he fell. In this connection the supplication for joy follows on the other two, because the joy which it desires is the result of their being granted. For what is "Thy salvation" but the gift of a clean heart and a steadfast spirit, the blessed consciousness of unbroken closeness of communion with God, in which the suppliant suns himself in the beams of God's face, and receives an uninterrupted communication of His Spirit's gifts? These are the sources of pure joy, lasting as God Himself, and victorious over all occasions for surface sorrow. The issue of all these gifts will be "a willing spirit," delighting to obey, eager to serve. If God's Spirit dwells in us, obedience will be delight. To serve God because we must is not service. To serve Him because we had rather do His will than anything else is the service which delights Him and blesses us. The word rendered "willing" comes by a very natural process, to mean nobles. God's servants are princes and lords of everything besides, themselves included. Such obedience is freedom. If desires flow with equable motion parallel to God's will, there is no sense of restraint in keeping within limits beyond which we do not desire to go. "I will walk at liberty; for I keep Thy precepts."

The last part of the psalm runs over with joyful vows—first, of magnifying God's name (vv. 13-15), and then of offering true sacrifices. A man who has passed through such experiences as the psalmist's and has received the blessings for which he prayed, cannot be silent. The instinct of hearts touched by God's mercies is to speak of them to others. And no man who can say "I will tell what He has done for my soul" is without the most persuasive argument to bring to bear on others. A piece of autobiography will touch men who are unaffected by elaborate reasonings and deaf to polished eloquence. The impulse and the capacity to "teach transgressors Thy ways" are given in the experience of sin and forgiveness; and if any one has not the former, it is questionable whether he has, in any real sense or large measure, received the latter. The prayer for deliverance from blood-guiltiness in ver. 14 breaks for a moment the flow of vows; but only for a moment. It indicates how amid them the psalmist preserved his sense of guilt, and how little he was disposed to think lightly of the sins of whose forgiveness he had prayed himself into the assurance. Its emergence here, like a black rock pushing its grimness up through a sparkling, sunny sea, is

no sign of doubt whether his prayers had been answered; but it marks the abiding sense of sinfulness, which must ever accompany abiding gratitude for pardon and abiding holiness of heart. It seems hard to believe, as the advocates of a national reference in the psalm are obliged to do, that "blood-guiltiness" has no special reference in the psalmist's crime, but is employed simply as typical of sin in general. The mention of it finds a very obvious explanation on the hypothesis of Davidic authorship, and a rather constrained one on any other.

Ver. 16 introduces the reason for the preceding vow of grateful praise, as is shown by the initial "For." The psalmist will bring the sacrifices of a grateful heart making his lips musical, because he has learned that these, and not ritual offerings, are acceptable. The same depreciation of external sacrifices is strongly expressed in Psalm xl. 6, and here, as there, is not to be taken as an absolute condemnation of these, but as setting them decisively below spiritual service. To suppose that prophets or psalmists waged a polemic against ritual observances *per se* misapprehends their position entirely. They do war against "the sacrifice of the wicked," against external acts which had no inward reality corresponding to them, against reliance on the outward and its undue exaltation. The authors of the later addition to this psalm had a true conception of its drift when they appended to it, not as a correction of a heretical tendency, but as a liturgical addition in full harmony with its spirit, the vow to "offer whole burnt offerings on" the restored "altar," when God should again build up Zion.

The psalmist's last words are immortal. "A heart broken and crushed, O God, Thou wilt not despise." But they derive still deeper beauty and pathos when it is observed that they are spoken after confession has been answered to his consciousness by pardon, and longing for purity by at least some bestowal of it. The "joy of Thy salvation," for which he had prayed, has begun to flow into his heart. The "bones" which had been "crushed" are beginning to reknit, and thrills of gladness to steal through his frame; but still he feels that with all these happy experiences contrite consciousness of his sin must mingle. It does not rob his joy of one rapture, but it keeps it from becoming careless. He goes safely who goes humbly. The more sure a man is that God has put away the iniquity of his sin, the more should he remember it; for the remembrance will vivify gratitude and bind close to Him without whom there can be no steadfastness of spirit nor purity of life. The clean heart must continue contrite, if it is not to cease to be clean.

The liturgical addition implies that Jerusalem is in ruins. It cannot be supposed without violence to come from David. It is not needed in order to form a completion to the psalm, which ends more impressively, and has an inner unity and coherence, if the deep words of ver. 17 are taken as its close.

PSALM LII.

- 1 Why boastest thou in wickedness, O tyrant?
God's lovingkindness lasts always.
- 2 Destructions does thy tongue devise;
Like a sharpened razor, thou framer of deceit!
- 3 Thou lovest evil rather than good;
A lie rather than speaking righteousness. Selah.

- 4 Thou lovest all words that swallow men up,
Thou deceitful tongue!
- 5 So God shall break thee down for ever,
Shall lay hold of thee and drag thee out of the tent,
And root thee out of the land of the living.
Selah.
- 6 And the righteous shall see and fear,
And at him shall they laugh.
- 7 "See! the man that made not God his stronghold,
And trusted in the abundance of his wealth,
And felt strong in his evil desire."
- 8 But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God:
I trust in the lovingkindness of God for ever and aye.
- 9 I will give Thee thanks for ever, for Thou hast done [this]:
And I will wait on Thy name before Thy favoured ones, for it is good.

THE progress of feeling in this psalm is clear, but there is no very distinct division into strophes and one of the two Selahs does not mark a transition, though it does make a pause. First, the poet, with a few indignant and contemptuous touches, dashes on his canvas an outline portrait of an arrogant oppressor, whose weapon was slander and his words like pits of ruin. Then, with vehement, exulting metaphors, he pictures his destruction. On it follow reverent awe of God, whose justice is thereby displayed, and deepened sense in righteous hearts of the folly of trust in anything but Him. Finally, the singer contrasts with thankfulness his own happy continuance in fellowship with God with the oppressor's fate, and renews his resolve of praise and patient waiting.

The themes are familiar, and their treatment has nothing distinctive. The portrait of the oppressor does not strike one as a likeness either of the Edomite herdsman Doeg, with whose betrayal of David's asylum at Nob the superscription connects the psalm, or of Saul, to whom Hengstenberg, feeling the difficulty of seeing Doeg in it, refers it. Malicious lies and arrogant trust in riches were not the crimes that cried for vengeance in the bloody massacre at Nob. Cheyne would bring this group of "Davidic" psalms (lii.-lix.) down to the Persian period ("Orig. of Psalt.," 121-23). Olshausen, after Theodore of Mopsuestia (see Cheyne *loc. cit.*) to the Maccabean. But the grounds alleged are scarcely strong enough to carry more than the weight of a "may be"; and it is better to recognise that, if the superscription is thrown over, the psalm itself does not yield sufficiently characteristic marks to enable us to fix its date. It may be worth considering whether the very absence of any obvious correspondences with David's circumstances does not show that the superscription rested on a tradition earlier than itself, and not on an editor's discernment.

The abrupt question at the beginning reveals the psalmist's long-pent indignation. He has been silently brooding over the swollen arrogance and malicious lies of the tyrant till he can restrain himself no longer, and out pours a fiery flood. Evil gloried in is worse than evil done. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "mighty man" is here used in a bad sense, to indicate that he has not only a giant's power, but uses it tyrannously, like a giant. How dramatically the abrupt

question is followed by the equally abrupt thought of the ever-during lovingkindness of God! That makes the tyrant's boast supremely absurd, and the psalmist's confidence reasonable, even in face of hostile power.

The prominence given to sins of speech is peculiar. We should have expected high-handed violence rather than these. But the psalmist is tracking the deeds to their source; and it is not so much the tyrant's words as his love of a certain kind of words which is adduced as proof of his wickedness. These words have two characteristics in addition to boastfulness. They are false and destructive. They are, according to the forcible literal meaning in ver. 4, "words of swallowing." They are, according to the literal meaning of "destructions," in ver. 2, "yawning gulfs." Such words lead to acts which make a tyrant. They flow from perverted preference of evil to good. Thus the deeds of oppression are followed up to their den and birthplace. Part of the description of the "words" corresponds to the fatal effect of Doeg's report; but nothing in it answers to the other part—falsehood. The psalmist's hot indignation speaks in the triple, direct address to the tyrant which comes in each case like a lightning flash at the end of a clause (vv. 1, 2, 4). In the second of these the epithet "framing deceit" does not refer to the "sharpened razor," but to the tyrant. If referred to the former, it weakens rather than strengthens the metaphor, by bringing in the idea that the sharp blade misses its proper aim, and wounds cheeks instead of shearing off hair. The *Selah* of ver. 3 interrupts the description, in order to fix attention, by a pause filled up by music, on the hideous picture thus drawn.

That description is resumed and summarised in ver. 4, which, by the *Selahs*, is closely bound to ver. 5 in order to enforce the necessary connection of sin and punishment, which is strongly underlined by the "also" or "so" at the beginning of the latter verse. The stern prophecy of destruction is based upon no outward signs of failure in the oppressor's might, but wholly on confidence in God's continual lovingkindness, which must needs assume attributes of justice when its objects are oppressed. A tone of triumph vibrates through the imagery of ver. 5, which is not in the same key as Christ has set for us.

It is easy for those who have never lived under grinding, godless tyranny to reprobate the exultation of the oppressed at the sweeping away of their oppressors; but if the critics had seen their brethren set up as torches to light Nero's gardens, perhaps they would have known some thrill of righteous joy when they heard that he was dead. Three strong metaphors describe the fall of this tyrant. He is broken down, as a building levelled with the ground. He is laid hold of, as a coal in the fire, with tongs (for so the word means), and dragged, as in that iron grip, out of the midst of his dwelling. He is uprooted like a tree with all its pride of leafage. Another blast of trumpets or clang of harps or clash of cymbals bids the listeners gaze on the spectacle of insolent strength laid prone, and withering as it lies.

The third movement of thought (vv. 6, 7) deals with the effects of this retribution. It is a conspicuous demonstration of God's justice and of the folly of reliance on anything but Himself. The fear which it produces in the "righteous" is reverential awe, not dread lest the same should happen to them. Whether or not history and ex-

perience teach evil men that "verily there is a God that judgeth," their lessons are not wasted on devout and righteous souls. But this is the tragedy of life, that its teachings are prized most by those who have already learned them, and that those who need them most consider them least. Other tyrants are glad when a rival is swept off the field, but are not arrested in their own course. It is left to "the righteous" to draw the lesson which all men should have learned. Although they are pictured as laughing at the ruin, that is not the main effect of it. Rather it deepens conviction, and is a "modern instance" witnessing to the continual truth of "an old saw." There is one safe stronghold, and only one. He who conceits himself to be strong in his own evil, and, instead of relying on God, trusts in material resources, will sooner or later be levelled with the ground, dragged, resisting vainly the tremendous grasp, from his tent and laid prostrate, as melancholy a spectacle as a great tree blown down by tempest with its roots turned up to the sky and its arms with drooping leaves trailing on the ground.

A swift turn of feeling carries the singer to rejoice in the contrast of his own lot. No uprooting does he fear. It may be questioned whether the words "in the house of God" refer to the psalmist or to the olive tree. Apparently there were trees in the Temple area (Psalm xcii. 13); but the parallel in the next clause, "in the lovingkindness of God," points to the reference of the words to the speaker. Dwelling in enjoyment of God's fellowship, as symbolised by and realised through presence in the sanctuary, whether it were at Nob or in Jerusalem, he dreads no such forcible removal as had befallen the tyrant. Communion with God is the source of flourishing and fruitfulness, and the guarantee of its own continuance. Nothing in the changes of outward life need touch it. The mists which lay on the psalmist's horizon are cleared away for us, who know that "for ever and aye" designates a proper eternity of dwelling in the higher house and drinking the full dew of God's lovingkindness. Such consciousness of present blessedness in communion lifts a soul to prophetic realisation of deliverance, even while no change has occurred in circumstances. The tyrant is still boasting; but the psalmist's tightened hold of God enables him to see "things that are not as though they were," and to anticipate actual deliverance by praise for it. It is the prerogative of faith to alter tenses, and to say, Thou hast done, when the world's grammar would say, Thou wilt do. "I will wait on Thy name" is singular, since what is done "in the presence of Thy favoured ones" would naturally be something seen or heard by them. The reading "I will declare" has been suggested. But surely the attitude of patient, silent expectance implied in "wait" may very well be conceived as maintained in the presence of, and perceptible by, those who had like dispositions, and who would sympathise and be helped thereby. Individual blessings are rightly used when they lead to participation in common thankfulness and quiet trust.

PSALM LIII.*

- I The fool says in his heart. There is no God.
They corrupt and make abominable their
iniquity;
There is no one doing good.

*Italics show variations from text of Psalm xiv.

- 2 *God* looketh down from heaven upon the sons of men,
To see if there is any having discernment seeking after God.
- 3 *Each of them is turned aside*; together they are become putrid;
There is no one doing good;
There is not even one.
- 4 Do the workers of iniquity not know
Who devour my people [as] they devour bread?
On *God* they do not call.
- 5 There they feared a [great] fear, *where no fear was*:
For *God has scattered the bones of him that encamps against thee*.
Thou hast put them to shame; for God has rejected them.
- 6 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!
When *God* brings back the captivity of His people,
May Jacob exult, may Israel be glad!

IN this psalm we have an Elohistie recast of Psalm xiv., differing from its original in substituting Elohim for Jehovah (four times) and in the language of ver. 5. There are also other slight deviations not affecting the sense. For the exposition the reader is referred to that of Psalm xiv. It is only necessary here to take note of the divergences.

The first of these occurs in ver. 1. The forcible rough construction "they corrupt, they make abominable," is smoothed down by the insertion of "and." The editor apparently thought that the loosely piled words needed a piece of mortar to hold them together, but his emendation weakens as well as smooths. On the other hand, he has aimed at increased energy of expression by substituting "iniquity" for "doings" in the same clause, which results in tautology and is no improvement. In ver. 3 the word for "turned aside" is varied, without substantial difference of meaning. The alteration is very slight, affecting only one letter, and may be due to error in transcription or to mere desire to amend. In ver. 4 "all," which in Psalm xiv. precedes "workers of iniquity," is omitted, probably as unnecessary.

The most important changes are in ver. 5, which stands for vv. 5 and 6 of Psalm xiv. The first is the insertion of "where no fear was." These words may be taken as describing causeless panic, or, less probably, as having a subjective reference, and being equal to "while in the midst of careless security." They evidently point to some fact, possibly the destruction of Sennacherib's army. Their insertion shows that the object of the alterations was to adapt an ancient psalm as a hymn of triumph for recent deliverance, thus altering its application from evil-doers within Israel to enemies without. The same purpose is obvious in the transformations effected in the remainder of this verse. Considerable as these are, the recast most ingeniously conforms to the sound of the original. If we could present the two versions in tabular form, the resemblance would appear more strikingly than we can here bring it out. The first variation—i. e., "scatters" instead of "in the generation"—is effected by reading "pizzar" for "b'dhor," a clear case of intentional assonance. Similarly the last word of the verse, "has rejected them," is very near in consonants and sound to "his refuge" in Psalm xiv. 6. The like effort at retaining the general sound of the

earlier psalm runs through the whole verse. Very significantly the complaint of the former singer is turned into triumph by the later, who addresses the delivered Israel with "Thou hast put them to shame," while the other psalm could but address the "fools" with "Ye would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted." In like manner the tremulous hope of the original, "God is his refuge," swells into commemoration of an accomplished fact in "God has rejected them." The natural supposition is that some great deliverance of Israel had just taken place, and inspired this singular attempt to fit old words to new needs. Whatever the historical occasion may have been, the two singers unite in one final aspiration, a sigh of longing for the coming of Israel's full salvation, which is intensified in the recast by being put in the plural ("salvations") instead of the singular, as in Psalm xiv., to express the completeness and manifoldness of the deliverance thus yearned for of old, and not yet come in its perfection.

PSALM LIV.

- 1 O God, by Thy name save me,
And by Thy might right me.
- 2 O God, hear my prayer;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
- 3 For strangers are risen up against me,
And violent men seek my soul:
They set not God before them. Selah.
- 4 Behold, God is a helper for me:
The Lord is He that sustains my soul.
- 5 He will requite evil to the liars in wait for me:
In Thy truth destroy them.
- 6 Of [my own] free impulse will I sacrifice to Thee:
I will thank Thy name, for it is good.
- 7 For from all distress it has delivered me;
And my eye has seen [its desire] on my enemies.

THE tone and language of this psalm have nothing special. The situation of the psalmist is the familiar one of being encompassed by enemies. His mood is the familiar one of discouragement at the sight of surrounding perils, which passes through petition into confidence and triumph. There is nothing in the psalm inconsistent with the accuracy of the superscription, which ascribes it to David, when the men of Ziph would have betrayed him to Saul. Internal evidence does not suffice to fix its date, if the traditional one is discarded. But there seems no necessity for regarding the singer as the personified nation, though there is less objection to that theory in this instance than in some psalms with a more marked individuality and more fervent expression of personal emotion, to which it is proposed to apply it.

The structure is simple, like the thought and expression. The psalm falls into two parts, divided by Selah—of which the former is prayer, spreading before God the suppliant's straits; and the latter is confident assurance, blended with petition and vows of thanksgiving.

The order in which the psalmist's thoughts run in the first part (vv. 1-3) is noteworthy. He begins with appeal to God, and summons before his vision the characteristics in the Divine nature on which he builds his hope. Then he pleads for the acceptance of his prayer, and only when thus heartened does he recount his perils. That is a

deeper faith which begins with what God is, and thence proceeds to look calmly at foes, than that which is driven to God in the second place, as a consequence of an alarmed gaze on dangers. In the latter case fear strikes out a spark of faith in the darkness; in the former, faith controls fear.

The name of God is His manifested nature or character, the sum of all of Him which has been made known by His word or work. In that rich manifoldness of living powers and splendours this man finds reserves of force, which will avail to save him from any peril. That name is much more than a collection of syllables. The expression is beginning to assume the meaning which it has in post-Biblical Hebrew, where it is used as a reverential euphemism for the ineffable Jehovah. Especially to God's power does the singer look with hopeful petitions, as in ver. 1 *b*. But the whole name is the agent of his salvation. Nothing less than the whole fulness of the manifested God is enough for the necessities of one poor man; and that prayer is not too bold, nor that estimate of need presumptuous, which asks for nothing less. Since it is God's "might" which is appealed to, to judge the psalmist's cause, the judgment contemplated is clearly not the Divine estimate of the moral desert of his doings, or retribution to him for these, but the vindication of his threatened innocence and deliverance of him from enemies. The reason for the prayer is likewise alleged as a plea with God to hear. The psalmist prays because he is ringed about by foes. God will hear because He is so surrounded. It is blessed to know that the same circumstances in our lot which drive us to God incline God to us.

"Strangers," in ver. 3, would most naturally mean foreigners, but not necessarily so. The meaning would naturally pass into that of enemies—men who, even though of the psalmist's own blood, behave to him in a hostile manner. The word, then, does not negative the tradition in the superscription: though the men of Ziph belonged to the tribe of Judah, they might still be called "strangers." The verse recurs in Psalm lxxxvi. 14, with a variation of reading—namely, "proud" instead of "strangers." The same variation is found here in some MSS. and in the Targum. But probably it has crept in here in order to bring our psalm into correspondence with the other, and it is better to retain the existing reading, which is that of the LXX. and other ancient authorities. The psalmist has no doubt that to hunt after his life is a sign of godlessness. The proof that violent men have not "set God before them" is the fact that they "seek his soul." That is a remarkable assumption, resting upon a very sure confidence that he is in such relation to God that enmity to him is sin. The theory of a national reference would make such identification of the singer's cause with God's most intelligible. But the theory that he is an individual, holding a definite relation to the Divine purposes and being for some end a Divine instrument, would make it quite as much so. And if David, who knew that he was destined to be king, was the singer, his confidence would be natural. The history represents that his Divine appointment was sufficiently known to make hostility to him a manifest indication of rebellion against God. The unhesitating fusion of his own cause with God's could scarcely have been ventured by a psalmist, however vigorous his faith, if all that he had to go on and desired to express was a devout soul's confidence that God would protect him. That

may be perfectly true, and yet it may not follow that opposition to a man is godlessness. We cannot regard ourselves as standing in such a relation; but we may be sure that the name, with all its glories, is mighty to save us too.

Prayer is, as so often in the Psalter, followed by immediately deepened assurance of victory. The suppliant rises from his knees, and points the enemies round him to his one Helper. In ver. 4 *b* a literal rendering would mislead. "The Lord is among the upholders of my soul" seems to bring God down to a level on which others stand. The psalmist does not mean this, but that God gathers up in Himself, and that supremely, the qualities belonging to the conception of an upholder. It is, in form, an inclusion of God in a certain class. It is, in meaning, the assertion that He is the only true representative of the class. Commentators quote Jephthah's plaintive words to his daughter as another instance of the idiom: "Alas, my daughter, . . . thou art one of them that trouble me"—i.e., my greatest troubler. That one thought, vivified into new power by the act of prayer, is the psalmist's all-sufficient buckler, which he plants between himself and his enemies, bidding them "behold." Strong in the confidence that has sprung in his heart anew, he can look forward in the certainty that his adversaries (lit. *those who lie in wait for me*) will find their evil recoiling on themselves. The reading of the Hebrew text is, *Evil shall return to*; that of the Hebrew margin, adopted by the A.V. and R.V., is, *He shall requite evil to*. The meanings are substantially the same, only that the one makes the automatic action of retribution more prominent, while the other emphasises God's justice in inflicting it. The latter reading gives increased force to the swift transition to prayer in ver. 5 *b*.

That petition is, like others in similar psalms, proper to the spiritual level of the Old Testament, and not to that of the New; and it is far more reverent, as well as accurate, to recognise fully the distinction than to try to slur it over. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten that the same lofty consciousness of the identity of his cause with God's, which we have already had to notice, operating here in these wishes for the enemies' destruction, gives another aspect to them than that of mere outbursts of private vengeance. That higher aspect is made prominent by the addition "in Thy troth." God's faithfulness to His purposes and promises was concerned in the destruction, because these were pledged to the psalmist's protection. His well-being was so intertwined with God's promises that the Divine faithfulness demanded the sweeping away of his foes. That is evidently not the language which fits our lips. It implies a special relation to God's plans, and it modifies the character of this apparently vindictive prayer.

The closing verses of this simple, little psalm touch very familiar notes. The faith which has prayed has grown so sure of answer that it already begins to think of the thank-offerings. This is not like the superstitious vow, "I will give so-and-so if Jupiter"—or the Virgin—"will hear me." This praying man knows that he is heard, and is not so much vowing as joyfully anticipating his glad sacrifice. The same incipient personification of the name as in ver. 1 is very prominent in the closing strains. Thank-offerings—not merely statutory and obligatory, but brought by free, uncommanded impulse—are to be offered to "Thy name," because that name is good: Ver. 7

probably should be taken as going even further in the same direction of personification, for "Thy name" is probably to be taken as the subject of "hath delivered." The tenses of the verbs in ver. 7 are perfects. They contemplate the deliverance as already accomplished. Faith sees the future as present. This psalmist, surrounded by strangers seeking his life, can quietly stretch out a hand of faith, and bring near to himself the to-morrow when he will look back on scattered enemies and present, glad sacrifices! That power of drawing a brighter future into a dark present belongs not to those who build anticipations on wishes, but to those who found their forecasts on God's known purpose and character. *The name* is a firm foundation for hope. There is no other.

The closing words express confidence in the enemies' defeat and destruction, with a tinge of feeling that is not permissible to Christians. But the supplement, "my desire," is perhaps rather too strongly expressive of wish for their ruin. Possibly there needs no supplement at all, and the expression simply paints the calm security of the man protected by God, who can "look upon" impotent hostility without the tremor of an eyelid, because he knows who is his Helper.

PSALM LV.

- 1 Give ear, O God, to my prayer;
And hide not Thyself from my entreaty.
- 2 Attend unto me, and answer me:
I am distracted as I muse, and must groan;
- 3 For the voice of [my] enemy,
On account of the oppression of the wicked;
For they fling down iniquity upon me,
And in wrath they are hostile to me.
- 4 My heart writhes within me:
And terrors of death have fallen upon me.
- 5 Fear and trembling come upon me,
Horror wraps me round.
- 6 Then I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away, and [there] abide.
- 7 Lo, then would I migrate far away,
I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah.
- 8 I would hasten my escape
From stormy wind and tempest.
- 9 Swallow [them up], Lord; confuse their
tongue:
For I see violence and strife in the city.
- 10 Day and night they go their rounds upon her
walls:
And iniquity and mischief are in her midst.
- 11 Destructions are in her midst:
And from her open market-place depart not
oppression and deceit.
- 12 For it is not an enemy that reviles me—that I
could bear:
It is not my hater that magnifies himself against
me—from him I could shelter myself:
- 13 But it is thou, a man my equal,
My companion, and my familiar friend.
- 14 We who together used to make familiar inter-
course sweet,
And walked to the house of God with the
crowd.
- 15 Desolations [fall] on them!
May they go down alive to Sheol!
For wickednesses are in their dwelling, in their
midst.

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- 16 As for me, I will cry to God;
And Jehovah will save me.
- 17 Evening, and morning, and noon will I muse
and groan:
And He will hear my voice.
- 18 He has redeemed my soul in peace, so that they
come not near me
For in great numbers were they round me.
- 19 God will hear, and answer them—
Even He that sitteth throned from of old—
Selah.
Them who have no changes
And who fear not God.
- 20 He has laid his hands on those who were at
peace with him:
He has broken his covenant.
- 21 Smooth are the buttery words of his mouth,
But his heart is war:
Softer are his words than oil,
Yet are they drawn swords.
- 22 Cast upon Jehovah thy burden,
And He, He will hold thee up:
He will never let the righteous be moved.
- 23 But Thou, O God, shall bring them down to the
depth of the pit:
Men of blood and deceit shall not attain half
their days;
But as for me, I will trust in Thee.

THE situation of the psalmist has a general correspondence with that of David in the period of Absalom's rebellion, and the identification of the traitorous friend with Ahithophel is naturally suggested. But there are considerable difficulties in the way of taking that view. The psalmist is evidently in the city, from which he longs to escape; but Ahithophel's treachery was not known to David till after his flight. Would a king have described his counsellor, however trusted, as "a man my equal"? The doubt respecting the identity of the traitor, however, does not seriously militate against the ordinary view of the date and occasion of the psalm, if we suppose that it belongs to the period immediately before the outburst of the conspiracy, when David was still in Jerusalem, but seeing the treason growing daily bolder, and already beginning to contemplate flight. The singularly passive attitude which he maintained during the years of Absalom's plotting was due to his consciousness of guilt and his submission to punishment. Hitzig ascribes the psalm to Jeremiah, principally on the ground of the resemblance of the prophet's wish for a lodge in the wilderness (Jer. ix. 2) to the psalmist's yearning in vv. 6-8. Cheyne brings it down to the Persian period: Olshausen, to the Maccabean. The Davidic authorship has at least as much to say for itself as any of these conjectures.

The psalm may be regarded as divided into three parts, in each of which a different phase of agitated feeling predominates, but not exclusively. Strong excitement does not marshal emotions or their expression according to artistic proprieties of sequence, and this psalm is all ablaze with it. That vehemence of emotion sufficiently accounts for both the occasional obscurities and the manifest want of strict accuracy in the flow of thought, without the assumption of dislocation of parts or piecing it with a fragment of another psalm. When the heart is writhing within, and tumultuous feelings are knocking at the door of the lips, the words will be troubled and heaped to-

gether, and dominant thoughts will repeat themselves in defiance of logical continuity. But, still, complaint and longing sound through the wailing, yearning notes of vv. 1-8; hot indignation and terrible imprecations in the stormy central portion (vv. 9-15); and a calmer note of confidence and hope, through which, however, the former indignation surges up again, is audible in the closing verses (vv. 16-23).

The psalmist pictures his emotions in the first part, with but one reference to their cause, and but one verse of petition. He begins, indeed, with asking that his prayer may be heard; and it is well when a troubled heart can raise itself above the sea of troubles to stretch a hand towards God. Such an effort of faith already prophesies firm footing on the safe shore. But very pathetic and true to the experience of many a sorrowing heart is the psalmist's immediately subsequent dilating on his griefs. There is a dumb sorrow, and there is one which unpacks its heart in many words and knows not when to stop. The psalmist is *distracted* in his bitter brooding on his troubles. The word means to move restlessly, and may either apply to body or mind, perhaps to both; for Eastern demonstrativeness is not paralysed, but stimulated to bodily tokens, by sorrow. He can do nothing but groan or moan. His heart "writhes" in him. Like an avalanche, deadly terrors have fallen on him and crushed him. Fear and trembling have pierced into his inner being, and "horror" (a rare word, which the LXX. here renders *darkness*) wraps him round or covers him, as a cloak does. It is not so much the pressure of present evil, as the shuddering anticipation of a heavier storm about to burst, which is indicated by these pathetic expressions. The cause of them is stated in a single verse (3). "The voice of the enemy" rather than his hand is mentioned first, since threats and reproaches precede assaults; and it is budding, not full-blown, enmity which is in view. In ver. 3 *b* "oppression" is an imperfect parallelism with "voice," and the conjectural emendation (which only requires the prefixing of a letter) of "cries," adopted by Cheyne, after Olshausen and others, is tempting. They "fling down iniquity" on him as rocks are hurled or rolled from a height on invaders—a phrase which recalls David's words to his servants, urging flight before Absalom, "lest he bring down evil upon us."

Then, from out of all this plaintive description of the psalmist's agitation and its causes, starts up that immortal strain which answers to the deepest longings of the soul, and has touched responsive chords in all whose lives are not hopelessly outward and superficial—the yearning for repose. It may be ignoble, or lofty and pure; it may mean only cowardice or indolence; but it is deepest in those who stand most unflinchingly at their posts, and crush it down at the command of duty. Unless a soul knows that yearning for a home in stillness, "afar from the sphere of our sorrow," it will remain a stranger to many high and noble things. The psalmist was moved to utter this longing by his painful consciousness of encompassing evils; but the longing is more than a desire for exemption from these. It is the cry of the homeless soul, which, like the dove from the ark, finds no resting-place in a world full of carrion, and would fain return whence it came. "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we are unquiet till we find rest in Thee." No obligation of duty keeps migratory birds in a land where

winter is near. But men are better than birds, because they have other things to think of than repose, and must face, not flee, storms and hurricanes. It is better to have wings "like birds of tempest-loving kind," and to beat up against the wind, than to outfly it in retreat. So the psalmist's wish was but a wish; and he, like the rest of us, had to stand to his post, or be tied to his stake, and let enemies and storms do their worst. The LXX. has a striking reading of ver. 8, which Cheyne has partially adopted. It reads for ver. 8 *a* "waiting for Him who saves me"; but beautiful as this is, as giving the picture of the restful fugitive in patient expectation, it brings an entirely new idea into the picture, and blends metaphor and fact confusedly. The *Selah* at the close of ver. 7 deepens the sense of still repose by a prolonged instrumental interlude.

The second part turns from subjective feelings to objective facts. A cry for help and a yearning for a safe solitude were natural results of the former; but when the psalmist's eye turns to his enemies, a flash of anger lights it, and, instead of the meek longings of the earlier verses, prayers for their destruction are vehemently poured out. The state of things in the city corresponds to what must have been the condition of Jerusalem during the incubation of Absalom's conspiracy, but is sufficiently general to fit any time of strained party feeling. The caldron simmers, ready to boil over. The familiar evils, of which so many psalms complain, are in full vigour. The psalmist enumerates them with a wealth of words which indicates their abundance. Violence, strife, iniquity, mischief, oppression, and deceit—a goodly company to patrol the streets and fill the open places of the city! Ver. 10 *a* is sometimes taken as carrying on the personification of Violence and Strife in ver. 9, by painting these as going their rounds on the walls, like sentries; but it is better to suppose that the actual foes are meant, and that they are keeping up a strict watch to prevent the psalmist's escape.

Several commentators consider that the burst of indignation against the psalmist's traitorous friend in vv. 12-14 interrupts the sequence, and propose rearrangements by which vv. 20, 21, will be united with vv. 12-14, and placed either before ver. 6 or after ver. 15. But the very abruptness with which the thought of the traitor is interjected here, and in the subsequent reference to him, indicates how the singer's heart was oppressed by the treason; and the return to the subject in ver. 20 is equally significant of his absorbed and pained brooding on the bitter fact. That is a slight pain which is removed by one cry. Rooted griefs, overwhelming sorrows, demand many repetitions. Trouble finds ease in tautology. It is absurd to look for cool, logical sequence in such a heart's cry as this psalm. Smooth continuity would be most unnatural. The psalmist feels that the defection of his false friend is the worst blow of all. He could have braced himself to bear an enemy's reviling; he could have found weapons to repel, or a shelter in which to escape from, open foes; but the baseness which forgets all former sweet companionship in secret, and all association in public and in worship, is more than he can bear up against. The voice of wounded love is too plain in the words for the hypothesis that the singer is the personified nation. Traitors are too common to allow of a very confident affirmation that the psalm must point to Ahithophel, and the description of the

perfidious friend as the *equal* of the psalmist does not quite fit that case.

As he thinks of all the sweetness of past intimacy, turned to gall by such dastardly treachery, his anger rises. The description of the city and of the one enemy in whom all its wickedness is, as it were, concentrated, is framed in a terrible circlet of prayers for the destruction of the foes. Ver. 9 *a* begins and ver. 15 ends this part with petitions which do not breathe the spirit of "Father, forgive them." There may be a reference to the confusion of tongues at Babel in the prayer of ver. 9. As then the impious work was stopped by mutual unintelligibility, so the psalmist desires that his enemies' machinations may be paralysed in like manner. In ver. 15 the translation "desolations" follows the Hebrew text, while the alternative and in some respects preferable reading "May death come suddenly" follows the Hebrew marginal correction. There are difficulties in both, and the correction does not so much smooth the language as to be obviously an improvement. The general sense is clear, whichever reading is preferred. The psalmist is calling down destruction on his enemies; and while the fact that he is in some manner an organ of the Divine purpose invests hostility to him with the darker character of rebellion against God, and therefore modifies the personal element in the prayer, it still remains a plain instance of the lower level on which the Old Testament saints and singers stood, when compared with the "least in the kingdom of heaven."

The third part of the psalm returns to gentler tones of devotion and trust. The great name of Jehovah appears here significantly. To that ever-living One, the Covenant God, will the psalmist cry, in assurance of answer. "Evening, and morning, and noon" designate the whole day by its three principal divisions, and mean, in effect, continually. Happy are they who are impelled to unintermitting prayer by the sight of unslumbering enmity! Enemies may go their rounds "day and night," but they will do little harm, if the poor, hunted man, whom they watch so closely, lifts his cries to Heaven "evening, and morning, and noon." The psalmist goes back to his first words. He had begun by saying that he was distracted as he mused, and could do nothing but groan, and in ver. 17 he repeats that he will still do so. Has he, then, won nothing by his prayer but the prolongation of his first dreary tone of feeling? He has won this—that his musing is not accompanied by distraction, and that his groaning is not involuntary expression of pain, but articulate prayer, and therefore accompanied by the confidence of being heard. Communion with God and prayerful trust in his help do not at once end sadness and sobbing, but do change their character and lighten the blackness of grief. This psalmist, like so many of his fellows, realises deliverance before he experiences it, and can sing "He has redeemed my soul" even while the calamity lasts. "They come not near me," says he. A soul hidden in God has an invisible defence which repels assaults. As with a man in a diving-bell, the sea may press on the crystal walls, but cannot crush them in or enter, and there is safe, dry lodging inside, while sea billows and monsters are without, close to the diver and yet far from him.

Ver. 19 is full of difficulty, and most probably has suffered some textual corruption. To "hear and answer" is uniformly an expression for

gracious hearing and beneficent answering. Here it can only mean the opposite, or must be used ironically. God will hear the enemies' threats, and will requite them. Various expedients have been suggested for removing the difficulty. It has been proposed to read "me" for "them" which would bring everything into order—only that, then, the last clauses of the verse, which begin with a relative ("who have no changes," etc.), would want an antecedent. It has been proposed to read "will humble them" for "will answer them," which is the LXX. translation. That requires a change in the vowels of the verb, and "answer" is more probable than "humble" after "hear." Cheyne follows Olshausen in supposing that "the cry of the afflicted" has dropped out after "hear." The construction of ver. 19 *b* is anomalous, as the clause is introduced by a superfluous "and," which may be a copyist's error. The *Selah* attached is no less anomalous. It is especially difficult to explain, in view of the relative which begins the third clause, and which would otherwise be naturally brought into close connection with the "them," the objects of the verbs in *a*. These considerations lead Hupfeld to regard ver. 19 as properly ending with *Selah*, and the remaining clauses as out of place, and properly belonging to ver. 15 or 18; while Cheyne regards the alternative supposition that they are a fragment of another psalm as possible. There is probably some considerable corruption of the text, not now to be remedied; but the existing reading is at least capable of explanation and defence. The principal difficulty in the latter part of ver. 19 is the meaning of the word rendered "changes." The persons spoken of are those whom God will hear and answer in His judicial character, in which He has been throned from of old. Their not having "changes" is closely connected with their not fearing God. The word is elsewhere used for changes of raiment, or for the relief of military guards. Calvin and others take the changes intended to be vicissitudes of fortune, and hence draw the true thought that unbroken prosperity tends to forgetfulness of God. Others take the changes to be those of mind or conduct from evil to good, while others fall back upon the metaphor of relieving guard, which they connect with the picture in ver. 10 of the patrols on the walls, so getting the meaning "they have no cessation in their wicked watchfulness." It must be acknowledged that none of these meanings is quite satisfactory; but probably the first, which expresses the familiar thought of the godlessness attendant on uninterrupted prosperity, is best.

Then follows another reference to the traitorous friend, which, by its very abruptness, declares how deep is the wound he has inflicted. The psalmist does not stand alone. He classes with himself those who remained faithful to him. The traitor has not yet thrown off his mask, though the psalmist has penetrated his still retained disguise. He comes with smooth words; but, in the vigorous language of ver. 21, "his heart is war." The fawning softness of words known to be false cuts into the heart, which had trusted and knows itself betrayed, more sharply than keen steel.

Ver. 22 has been singularly taken as the smooth words which cut so deep; but surely that is a very strained interpretation. Much rather does the psalmist exhort himself and all who have the same bitterness to taste, to commit themselves to Jehovah. What is it which he exhorts us to cast on Him? The word employed is used here only,

and its meaning is therefore questionable. The LXX. and others translate "care." Others, relying on Talmudical usage, prefer "burden," which is appropriate to the following promise of being held erect. Others (Hupfeld, etc.) would read "that which He has given thee." The general sense is clear, and the faith expressed in both exhortation and appended promise has been won by the singer through his prayer. He is counselling and encouraging himself. The spirit has to spur the "soul" to heroisms of faith and patience. He is declaring a universal truth. However crushing our loads of duty or of sorrow, we receive strength to carry them with straight backs, if we cast them on Jehovah. The promise is not that He will take away the pressure, but that He will hold us up under it; and, similarly, the last clause declares that the righteous will not be allowed to stumble. Faith is mentioned before righteousness. The two must go together; for trust which is not accompanied and manifested by righteousness is no true trust, and righteousness which is not grounded in trust is no stable or real righteousness.

The last verse sums up the diverse fates of the "men of blood and deceit" and of the psalmist. The terrible prayers of the middle portion of the psalm have wrought the assurance of their fulfilment, just as the cries of faith have brought the certainty of theirs. So the two closing verses of the psalm turn both parts of the earlier petitions into prophecies; and over against the trustful, righteous psalmist, standing erect and unmoved, there is set the picture of the "man of blood and deceit," chased down the black slopes to the depths of destruction by the same God whose hand holds up the man that trusts in Him. It is a dreadful contrast, and the spirit of the whole psalm is gathered into it. The last clause of all makes "I" emphatic. It expresses the final resolution which springs in the singer's heart in view of that dread picture of destruction and those assurances of support. He recoils from the edge of the pit, and eagerly opens his bosom for the promised blessing. Well for us if the upshot of all our meditations on the painful riddle of this unintelligible world, and of all our burdens and of all our experiences and of our observation of other men's careers, is the absolute determination, "As for me, I will trust in Jehovah!"

PSALM LVI.

- 1 Be gracious to me, O God; for man would swallow me up:
All day the fighting oppresses me.
- 2 My liers-in-wait would swallow me up all the day:
For many proudly fight against me.
- 3 [In] the day [when] I fear,
I will trust in Thee.
- 4 In God do I praise His word:
In God do I trust, I will not fear;
What can flesh do to me?
- 5 All day they wrest my words;
All their thoughts are against me for evil.
- 6 They gather together, they set spies,
They mark my steps,
Even as they have waited for my soul.
- 7 Shall there be escape for them because of iniquity?
In anger cast down the peoples, O God.

- 8 My wanderings hast Thou reckoned:
Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle;
Are they not in Thy reckoning?
- 9 Then shall my enemies turn back in the day [when] I call:
This I know, that God is for me (*or mine*).
- 10 In God will I praise the word:
In Jehovah will I praise the word.
- 11 In God have I trusted, I will not fear;
What can man do to me?
- 12 Upon me, O God, are Thy vows:
I will requite praises to Thee.
- 13 For Thou hast delivered my soul from death:
Hast Thou not delivered my feet from stumbling?
That I may walk before God in the light of the living.

THE superscription dates this psalm from the time of David's being in Gath. Probably his first stay there is meant, during which he had recourse to feigned insanity in order to secure his safety. What a contrast between the seeming idiot scrabbling on the walls and the saintly singer of this lovely song of purest trust! But striking as the contrast is, it is not too violent to be possible. Such heroic faith might lie very near such employment of pardonable dissimulation, even if the two moods of feeling can scarcely have been contemporaneous. Swift transitions characterise the poetic temperament; and, alas! fluctuations of courage and faith characterise the devout soul. Nothing in the psalm specially suggests the date assigned in the superscription; but, as we have already had occasion to remark, that may be an argument for, not against, the correctness of the superscription.

The psalm is simple in structure. Like others ascribed to David during the Sauline period, it has a refrain, which divides it into two parts; but these are of substantially the same purport, with the difference that the second part enlarges the description of the enemies' assaults, and rises to confident anticipation of their defeat. In that confidence the singer adds a closing expression of thankfulness for the deliverance already realised in faith.

The first part begins with that significant contrast which is the basis of all peaceful fronting of a hostile world or any evil. On one side stands man, whose very name here suggests feebleness, and on the other is God. "Man in ver. 1 is plainly a collective. The psalmist masses the foes, whom he afterwards individualises and knows only too well to be a multitude, under that generic appellation, which brings out their inherent frailty. Be they ever so many, still they all belong to the same class, and an infinite number of nothings only sums up into nothing. The Divine Unit is more than all these. The enemy is said to "pant after" the psalmist, as a wild beast open-mouthed and ready to devour; or, according to others, the word means to *crush*. The thing meant by the strong metaphor is given in ver. 1 b. 2; namely, the continual hostile activity of the foe. The word rendered "proudly" is literally "on high," and Baethgen suggests that the literal meaning should be retained. He supposes that the antagonists "held an influential position in a princely court." Even more literally the word may describe the enemies as occupying a post of vantage, from which they shower down missiles.

One brief verse, the brevity of which gives it emphasis, tells of the singer's fears, and of how he silences them by the dead lift of effort by which he constrains himself to trust. It is a strangely shallow view which finds a contradiction in this utterance, which all hearts, that have ever won calmness in agitation and security amid encompassing dangers by the same means, know to correspond to their own experience. If there is no fear, there is little trust. The two do co-exist. The eye that takes in only visible facts on the earthly level supplies the heart with abundant reasons for fear. But it rests with ourselves whether we shall yield to those, or whether, by lifting our eyes higher and fixing the vision on the Unseen and on Him who is invisible, we shall call such an ally to our side as shall make fear and doubt impossible. We have little power of directly controlling fear or any other feeling, but we can determine the objects on which we shall fix attention. If we choose to look at "man," we shall be unreasonable if we do not fear; if we choose to look at God, we shall be more unreasonable if we do not trust. The one antagonist of fear is faith. Trust is a voluntary action for which we are responsible.

The frequent use of the phrase "In the day when" is noticeable. It occurs in each verse of the first part, excepting the refrain. The antagonists are continually at work, and the psalmist, on his part, strives to meet their machinations and to subdue his own fears with as continuous a faith. The phrase recurs in the second part in a similar connection. Thus, then, the situation as set forth in the first part has three elements,—the busy malice of the foes; the effort of the psalmist, his only weapon against them, to hold fast his confidence; and the power and majesty of God, who will be gracious when besought. The refrain gathers up these three in a significantly different order. The preceding verses arranged them thus—God, man, the trusting singer. The refrain puts them thus—God, the trusting singer, man. When the close union between a soul and God is clearly seen and inwardly felt, the importance of the enemies dwindles. When faith is in the act of springing up, God, the refuge, and man, the source of apprehension, stand over against each other, and the suppliant, looking on both, draws near to God. But when faith has fruited, the believing soul is coupled so closely to the Divine Object of its faith, that He and it are contemplated as joined in blessed reciprocity of protection and trust, and enemies are in an outer region, where they cannot disturb its intercourse with its God. The order of thought in the refrain is also striking. First, the singer praises God's word. By God's gracious help he knows that he will receive the fulfilment of God's promises (not necessarily any special "word," such as the promise of a throne to David). And then, on the experience of God's faithfulness thus won, is reared a further structure of trust, which completely subdues fear. This is the reward of the effort after faith which the psalmist made. He who begins with determining not to fear will get such tokens of God's truth that fear will melt away like a cloud, and he will find his sky cleared, as the nightly heavens are swept free of cloud-rack by the meek moonlight.

The second part covers the same ground. Trust, like love, never finds it grievous to write the same things. There is delight, and there is strengthening for the temper of faith, in repeating the con-

templation of the earthly facts which make it necessary, and the super-sensuous facts which make it blessed. A certain expansion of the various parts of the theme, as compared with the first portion of the psalm, is obvious. Again the phrase "all the day" occurs in reference to the unwearying hostility which dogs the singer. "They wrest my words" may be, as Cheyne prefers, "They torture me with words." That rendering would supply a standing feature of the class of psalms to which this belongs. The furtive assembling, the stealthy setting of spies who watch his steps (lit. *heels*, as ready to spring on him from behind), are no new things, but are in accordance with what has long been the enemies' practice.

Ver. 7 brings in a new element not found in the first part—namely, the prayer for the destruction of these unwearied watchers. Its first clause is obscure. If the present text is adhered to, the rendering of the clause as a question is best. A suggested textual correction has been largely adopted by recent commentators, which by a very slight alteration gives the meaning "For their iniquity requite them." The alteration, however, is not necessary, and the existing text may be retained, though the phrase is singular. The introduction of a prayer for a world-wide judgment in the midst of so intensely individual a psalm is remarkable, and favours the theory that the afflicted man of the psalm is really the nation; but it may be explained on the ground that, as in Psalm vii. 8, the judgment on behalf of one man is contemplated as only one smaller manifestation of the same judicial activity which brings about the universal judgment. This single reference to the theme which fills so considerable a part of the other psalms of this class is in harmony with the whole tone of this gem of quiet faith, which is too much occupied with the blessedness of its own trust to have many thoughts of the end or others. It passes, therefore, quickly, to dwell on yet another phase of that blessedness.

The tender words of ver. 8 need little elucidation. They have brought comfort to many, and have helped to dry many tears. How the psalmist presses close to God, and how sure he is of His gentle care and love! "Thou reckonest my wandering." The thought is remarkable, both in its realisation of God's individualising relation to the soul that trusts Him, and as in some degree favouring the Davidic authorship. The hunted fugitive feels that every step of his weary interlacing tracks, as he stole from point to point as danger dictated, was known to God. The second clause of the verse is thought by prosaic commentators to interrupt the sequence, because it interjects a petition between two statements; but surely nothing is more natural than such an "interruption." What a lovely figure is that of God's treasuring up His servants' tears in His "bottle," the skin in which liquids were kept! What does He keep them for? To show how precious they are in His sight, and perhaps to suggest that they are preserved for a future use. The tears that His children shed and give to Him to keep cannot be tears of rebellious or unmeasured weeping, and will be given back one day to those who shed them, converted into refreshment, by the same Power which of old turned water into wine.

"Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near."

Not only in order to minister retribution to those who inflicted them, but also in order to give recompense of gladness to weepers, are these tears preserved by God; and the same idea is repeated by the other metaphor of ver. 8 *c*. God's book, or reckoning, contains the count of all the tears as well as wanderings of His servant. The certainty that it is so is expressed by the interrogative form of the clause.

The "then" of ver. 9 may be either temporal or logical. It may mean "things being so," or "in consequence of this," or it may mean "at the time when," and may refer to the further specification of period in the next clause. That same day which has already been designated as that of the enemies' panting after the psalmist's life, and wresting of his words, and, on the other hand, as that of his fear, is now the time of his prayer, and consequently of their defeat and flight. The confidence which struggled with fear in the closing words of the first part, is now consolidated into certain knowledge that God is on the singer's side, and in a very deep sense belongs to him. This is the foundation of his hope of deliverance; and in this clear knowledge he chants once more his refrain. As is often the case, slight differences, mainly due to artistic love of variety in uniformity, occur in the repeated refrain. "Word" stands instead of "His word"; "man," instead of "flesh"; and a line is intercalated, in which Jehovah is substituted for God. The addition may be a later interpolation, but is probably part of the original text, and due to the same intelligible motives which prompted the occasional use of the great Covenant Name in the Elohist psalms of this second book.

The psalmist's exuberant confidence overflows the limits of his song, in a closing couple of verses which are outside its scheme. So sure is he of deliverance, that, as often in similar psalms, his thoughts are busied in preparing his sacrifice of thanks before the actual advent of the mercy for which it is to be offered. Such swift-footed Gratitude is the daughter of very vivid Faith. The ground of the thankoffering is deliverance of "the soul," for which foes have "waited." "Thou hast delivered" is a perfect tense expressing confidence in the certainty of the as yet unrealised exercise of God's power. The question of ver. 13 *b*, like that of ver. 8 *c* (and perhaps that of ver. 7 *a*), is an emphatic affirmation, and the verb to be supplied is not "Wilt thou?" as the A.V. has it, but, as is plain from the context, and from the quotation of this verse in Psalm cxvi. 8. "Hast thou?" The Divine deliverance is complete,—not only doing the greater, but also the less; and not barely saving life, but sustaining the steps. God does not rescue by halves, either in the natural or spiritual realm; but in the former He first rescues and next preserves, and in the latter He delivers from the true death of the spirit, and then inspires to glad obedience. The psalm crowns its celebration of God's miracles of deliverance by declaring the aim of them all to be that their recipient may walk before God—i.e., in continual consciousness of His cognisance of his deeds, and "in the light of the living" or "of life." The expression seems here to mean simply the present life, as contrasted with the darkness and inactivity of Sheol; but we can scarcely help remembering the deeper meaning given to it by Him who said that to follow Him was to have the light of life. Whether any dim foreboding of a better light than streams from even an Eastern

sun, and of a truer life than the vain shadow which men call by that august name, floated before the singer or not, we can thankfully interpret his words, so as to make them the utterance of the Christian consciousness that the ultimate design of all God's deliverances of souls from death and of feet from falling is that, not only in ways of holiness here, but in the more perfect consciousness of His greater nearness hereafter, and in correspondingly increased perfectness of active service, we should walk before God in the light of the living.

PSALM LVII.

- 1 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me;
For in Thee has my soul taken refuge:
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I take
refuge,
Until the [tempest of] destructions is gone by.
- 2 I will cry to God Most High;
To God who accomplishes for me.
- 3 He will send from heaven, and save me;
[For] He that would swallow me up blas-
phemes. Selah.
God shall send His Lovingkindness and His
Truth.
- 4 My soul is among lions;
I must lie down among those who breathe out
fire—
Sons of men, whose teeth are spear and arrows,
Their tongue a sharp sword.
- 5 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
Above all the earth Thy glory.
- 6 A net have they prepared for my steps;
They have bowed down my soul:
They have digged before me a pit;
They have fallen into the midst of it. Selah.
- 7 Steadfast is my heart, O God, steadfast is my
heart:
I will sing and harp.
- 8 Awake, my glory; awake, harp and lute:
I will wake the dawn.
- 9 I will give Thee thanks among the peoples, O
Lord:
I will harp to Thee among the nations.
- 10 For great unto the heavens is Thy Loving-
kindness,
And unto the clouds Thy Truth.
- 11 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
Above all the earth Thy glory.

THIS psalm resembles the preceding in the singer's circumstances of peril and in his bold faith. It has also points of contact in the cry, "Be gracious," and in the remarkable expression for enemies, "Those that would swallow me up." It has also several features in common with the other psalms ascribed by the superscriptions to the time of the Sauline persecution. Like Psalm vii. are the metaphor of *lions* for enemies, that of *digging a pit* for their plots, the use of *glory* as a synonym for soul. The difficult word rendered "destructions" in ver. 1 connects this psalm with Psalm lv. 11, dated as belonging to the time of Saul's hostility, and with Psalms v. 9 and xxxviii. 12, both traditionally Davidic. There is nothing in the psalm against the attribution of it to David in the cave, whether of Adullam or Engedi, and the allusions to lying down among lions may possibly have been suggested by the wild beasts prowling round the psalmist's shelter. The use in ver. 1 of the

picturesque word for taking refuge derives special appropriateness from the circumstances of the fugitive, over whose else defenceless head the sides of his cave arched themselves like great wings, beneath which he lay safe, though the growls of beasts of prey echoed round. But there is no need to seek for further certainty as to the occasion of the psalm. Baethgen thinks that it can only have been composed after "the annihilation of the independence of the Israelite state," because the vow in ver. 9 to make God's name known among the nations can only be the utterance of the oppressed congregation, which is sure of deliverance, because it is conscious of its Divine call to sing God's praise to heathens. But that vow is equally explicable on the assumption that the individual singer was conscious of such a call.

There is no very sharp division of parts in the psalm. A grand refrain separates it into two portions, in the former of which prayer for deliverance and contemplation of dangers prevail, while in the latter the foe is beheld as already baffled, and exuberant praise is poured forth and vowed.

As in Psalm liv. and often, the first part begins with an act of faith reaching out to God, and strengthening itself by the contemplation of His character and acts. That energy of confidence wins assurance of help, and only after that calming certitude has filled the soul does the psalmist turn his eye directly on his enemies. His faith does not make him oblivious of his danger, but it minimises his dread. An eye that has seen God sees little terror in the most terrible things.

The psalmist knows that a soul which trusts has a right to God's gracious dealings, and he is not afraid to urge his confidence as a plea with God. The boldness of the plea is not less indicative of the depth and purity of his religious experience than are the tender metaphors in which it is expressed. What truer or richer description of trust could be given than that which likens it to the act of a fugitive betaking himself to the shelter of some mountain fastness, impregnable and inaccessible? What lovelier thought of the safe, warm hiding-place which God affords was ever spoken than that of "the shadow of Thy wings"? Very significant is the recurrence of the same verb in two different tenses in two successive clauses (1 *b*, *c*). The psalmist heartens himself for present and future trust by remembrance of past days, when he exercised it and was not put to shame. That faith is blessed, and cannot but be strong, which is nurtured by the remembrance of past acts of rewarded faith, as the leaves of bygone summers make rich mould for a new generation of flowers. When kites are in the sky, young birds seek protection from the mother's wing as well as warmth from her breast. So the singer betakes himself to his shelter till "destructions are gone by." Possibly these are likened to a wild storm which sweeps across the land, but is not felt in the stillness of the cave fortress. Hidden in God, a man "heareth not the loud winds when they call," and may solace himself in the midst of their roar by the thought that they will soon blow over. He will not cease to take refuge in God when the stress is past, nor throw off his cloak when the rain ceases; but he will nestle close while it lasts, and have as his reward the clear certainty of its transiency. The faith which clings to God after the tempest is no less close than that which screened itself in Him while it raged.

Hidden in his shelter, the psalmist, in ver. 2, tells himself the grounds on which he may be sure that his cry to God will not be in vain. His name is "Most High," and His elevation is the pledge of His irresistible might. He is the "God" (the Strong) who accomplishes all for the psalmist which he needs, and His past manifestations in that character make His future interventions certain. Therefore the singer is sure of what will happen. Two bright angels—Love-kindness and Truth or Faithfulness their names—will be despatched from heaven for the rescue of the man who has trusted. That is certain, because of what God is and has done. It is no less certain, because of what the psalmist is and has done; for a soul that gazes on God as its sole Helper, and has pressed, in its feebleness, close beneath these mighty pinions, cannot but bring down angel helpers, the executants of God's love.

The confidence expressed in ver. 2 is interrupted by an abrupt glance at the enemy. "He that would swallow me up blasphemes" is the most probable rendering of a difficult phrase, the meaning and connection of which are both dubious. If it is so rendered, the connection is probably that which we have expressed in the translation by inserting "For." The wish to destroy the psalmist is itself blasphemy, or is accompanied with blasphemy; and therefore God will surely send down what will bring it to nought. The same identification of his own cause with God's, which marks many of the psalms ascribed to the persecuted David, underlies this sudden reference to the enemy, and warrants the conclusion drawn, that help will come. The *Selah* at the end of the clause is unusual in the middle of a verse; but it may be intended to underscore, as it were, the impiety of the enemy, and so corresponds with the other *Selah* in ver. 6, which is also in an unusual place, and points attention to the enemy's ruin, as this does to his wickedness.

The description of the psalmist's circumstances in ver. 4 presents considerable difficulty. The division of clauses, the force of the form of the verb rendered *I must lie down*, and the meaning and construction of the word rendered "those who breathe out fire," are all questionable. If the accents are adhered to, the first clause of the verse is "My soul is among lions." That is by some—e.g., Delitzsch—regarded as literal description of the psalmist's environment, but it is more natural to suppose that he is applying a familiar metaphor to his enemies. In v. 4 *b* the verb rendered above "I must lie down" is in a form which has usually a cohortative or optative force, and is by some supposed to have that meaning here, and to express trust which is willing to lie down even in a lion's den. It seems, however, here to denote objective necessity rather than subjective willingness. Hupfeld would read *lies down* (third person), thus making "My soul" the subject of the verb, and getting rid of the difficult optative form. Cheyne suggests a further slight alteration in the word, so as to read, "My soul hath dwelt"—a phrase found in Psalm cxx. 6; and this emendation is tempting. The word rendered "those who breathe out fire" is by some taken to mean "those who devour," and is variously construed, as referring to the *lions* in *a*, taken literally, or as describing the *sons of men* in *c*. The general drift of the verse is clear. The psalmist is surrounded by enemies, whom he compares, as the Davidic psalms habitually do, to wild beasts.

They are ready to rend. Open-mouthed they seem to breathe out flames, and their slanders cut like swords.

The psalmist's contemplation of his forlorn lair among men worse than beasts of prey drives him back to realise again his refuge in God. He, as it were, wrenches his mind round to look at God rather than at the enemies. Clear perception of peril and weakness does its best work, when it drives to as clear recognition of God's help, and wings faithful prayer. The psalmist, in his noble refrain, has passed beyond the purely personal aspect of the desired deliverance, and wishes not only that he may be shielded from his foes, but that God would, in that deliverance, manifest Himself in His elevation above and power over all created things. To conceive of his experience as thus contributing to God's world-wide glory seems presumptuous; but even apart from the consideration that the psalmist was conscious of a world-wide mission, the lowliest suppliant has a right to feel that his deliverance will enhance the lustre of that Glory; and the lowlier he feels himself, the more wonderful is its manifestations in his well-being. But if there is a strange note in the apparent audacity of this identification, there is a deep one of self-suppression in the fading from the psalmist's prayer of all mention of himself, and the exclusive contemplation of the effects on the manifestation of God's character, which may follow his deliverance. It is a rare and lofty attainment to regard one's own well-being mainly in its connection with God's "Glory," and to desire the latter more consciously and deeply than the former.

It has been proposed by Hupfeld to transpose vv. 5, 6, on the ground that a recurrence to the description of dangers is out of place after the refrain, and incongruous with the tone of the second part of the psalm. But do the psalmists observe such accuracy in the flow of their emotions? and is it not natural for a highly emotional lyric like this to allow some surge of feeling to run over its barriers? The reference to the enemies in ver. 6 is of a triumphant sort, which naturally prepares for the burst of praise following, and worthily follows even the lyrical elevation of the refrain. The perfects seem at first sight to refer to past deliverances, which the psalmist recalls in order to assure himself of future ones. But this retrospective reference is not necessary, and the whole description in ver. 6 is rather to be taken as that of approaching retribution on the foes, which is so certain to come that the singer celebrates it as already as good as done. The familiar figures of the net and pit by both of which wild animals are caught, and the as familiar picture of the hunter trapped in his own pitfall, need no elucidation. There is a grim irony of events, which often seems to delight in showing "the engineer hoised with his own petard"; and whether that spectacle is forthcoming or not, the automatic effects of wrongdoing always follow, and no man digs pits for others but somehow and somehow he finds himself at the bottom of them, and his net wrapped round his own limbs. The *Selah* at the end of ver. 6 calls spectators to gather, as it were, round the sight of the ensnared plotter, lying helpless down there. A slight correction of the text does away with a difficulty in ver. 6 *b*. The verb there is transitive, and in the existing text is in the singular, but "He has bowed down my soul" would be awkward, though not impossible, when coming between two

clauses in which the enemies are spoken of in the plural. The emendation of the verb to the third person plural by the addition of a letter brings the clauses into line, and retains the usual force of the verb.

The psalmist has done with the enemies; they are at the bottom of the pit. In full confidence of triumph and deliverance, he breaks out into a grand burst of praise. "My heart is fixed," or "steadfast." Twice the psalmist repeats this, as he does other emphatic thoughts in this psalm (*cp.* vv. 2, 4, 8, 9). What power can steady that fluttering, wayward, agitated thing, a human heart? The way to keep light articles fixed on deck amidst rolling seas and howling winds, is to lash them to something fixed; and the way to steady a heart is to bind it to God. Built into the Rock, the building partakes of the steadfastness of its foundation. Knit to God, a heart is firm. The psalmist's was steadfast because it had taken refuge in God; and so, even before his rescue from his enemies came to pass, he was emancipated from the fear of them, and could lift this song of praise. He had said that he must lie down among lions. But wherever his bed may be he is sure that he will rise from it; and however dark the night, he is sure that a morning will come. In a bold and beautiful figure he says that he will "wake the dawn" with his song.

The world-wide destination of his praise is clear to him. It is plain that such anticipations as those of ver. 9 surpass the ordinary poetic consciousness, and must be accounted for on some special ground. The favourite explanation at present is that the singer is Israel, conscious of its mission. The old explanation that the singer is a king, conscious of his inspiration and divinely given office, equally meets the case.

The psalmist had declared his trust that God would send out His angels of Lovingkindness and Truth. He ends his song with the conviction, which has become to him matter of experience, that these Divine "attributes" tower to heaven, and in their height symbolise their own infinitude. Nor is the other truth suggested by ver. 10 to be passed over, that the manifestation of these attributes on earth leads to their being more gloriously visible in heaven. These two angels, who come forth from on high to do God's errands for His poor, trusting servant, go back, their work done, and are hailed as victors by the celestial inhabitants. By God's manifestation of these attributes to a man, His glory is exalted above the heavens and all the earth. The same thought is more definitely expressed in Paul's declaration that "to the principalities and powers in heavenly places is known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

PSALM LVIII.

- 1 Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O ye gods?
In uprightness do ye judge the sons of men?
- 2 Yea, in heart ye work iniquity;
In the earth ye weigh out the violence of your hands.
- 3 The wicked are estranged from the womb:
Gone astray from birth are the speakers of lies.
- 4 Their poison is like the poison of a serpent,
Like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
- 5 That will not hearken to the voice of the charmers.
The skilled weaver of spells.

- 6 O God, break their teeth in their mouth:
The grinders of the young lions wrench out,
Jehovah.
- 7 Let them melt like waters [that] run themselves [dry]:
[When] he shoots his arrows, let them be as if
pointless.
- 8 [Let them be] as a slug that dissolves as it
crawls:
As the premature birth of a woman, [that] has
not seen the sun.
- 9 Before your pots feel the thorns,
Whether it be green or burning, He shall whirl
it away.
- 10 The righteous shall rejoice that he has beheld
[the] vengeance:
His footsteps shall he bathe in the blood of the
wicked.
- 11 And men shall say, Surely there is fruit for the
righteous:
Surely there is a God judging in the earth.

THIS psalmist's fiery indignation against unjust judges and evil-doers generally is not kindled by personal wrongs. The psalm comes hot from a heart lacerated by the sight of widespread corruption, and constrained to seek for patience in the thought of the swift sweeping away of evil men before their plans are effected. Stern triumph in the punitive manifestations of God's rule, and keen sense of the need of such, are its keynotes. Vehement emotion stirs the poet's imagination to heap together strong and, in part, obscure metaphors. Here emphatically "Indignatio facit versus." The psalm is Dantesque in its wealth of sombre imagination, which produces the most solemn effects with the homeliest metaphors, and in its awed and yet satisfied contemplation of the fate of evil-doers. It parts itself into three portions,—a dark picture of abounding evil (vv. 1-5); its punishment prayed for (vv. 6-9); and the consequent joy of the righteous and widespread recognition of the rule of a just God (vv. 10, 11).

The abrupt question of ver. 1 speaks of long pent-up indignation, excited by protracted experience of injustice, and anticipates the necessary negative answer which follows. The word rendered by the A.V. and R.V. "in silence" or "dumb" can scarcely be twisted into intelligibility, and the small alteration of reading required for the rendering "gods" is recommended by the similar expressions in the kindred Psalm lxxxii. Taken thus, the question is hurled at the appointed depositaries of judicial power and supreme authority. There is no need to suppose, with Hupfeld and others, whom Cheyne follows, that these "gods" are supernatural beings intrusted with the government of the world. The explanation of the name lies in the conception of such power as bestowed by God, and in some sense a delegation of His attribute; or, as our Lord explained the similar name in Psalm lxxxii., as given because "to them the word of God came." It sets in sinister light the flagrant contradiction between the spirit in which these men exercised their office and the source from which they derived it, and thus sharpens the reproach of the question. The answer is introduced by a particle conveying a strong opposition to the previous supposition couched in the question. "Heart" and "hands" are so obviously antithetical, that the alteration of "in heart" to "ye

all" is not acceptable, though it removes the incongruity of plans being wrought in the heart, the seat of devices, not of actions. "Work" may be here used anomalously, as we say "work out," implying the careful preparation of a plan, and there may even be a hint that the true acts are the undone acts of the heart. The unaccomplished purpose is a deed, though never clothed in outward fact. Evil determined is, in a profound sense, done before it is done; and, in another equally solemn, not done when "'tis done," as Macbeth has taught us. The "act," as men call it, follows: "In the earth"—not only in the heart—"ye weigh out the violence of your hands." The scales of justice are untrue. Instead of dispensing equity, as they were bound to do, they clash into the balance the weight of their own violence.

It is to be noted that the psalm says no more about the sins of unjust authorities, but passes on to describe the "wicked" generally. The transition may suggest that under unjust rulers all wrongdoers find impunity, and so multiply and worsen; or it may simply be that these former are now merged in the class to which they belong. The type of "wickedness" gibbeted is the familiar one of malicious calumniators and persecutors. From birth onwards they have continuously been doers of evil. The psalmist is not laying down theological propositions about heredity, but describing the inveterate habit of sin which has become a second nature, and makes amendment hopeless. The reference to "lies" naturally suggests the image of the serpent's poison. An envenomed tongue is worse than any snake's bite. And the mention of the serpent stimulates the poet's imagination to yet another figure, which puts most graphically that disregard of warnings, entreaties, and every voice, human or Divine, that marks long-practised, customary sinfulness. There can be no more striking symbol of determined disregard to the calls of patient Love and the threats of outraged Justice than that of the snake lying coiled, with its head in the centre of its motionless folds, as if its ears were stopped by its own bulk, while the enchanter plays his softest notes and speaks his strongest spells in vain. There are such men, thinks this psalmist. There are none whom the mightiest spell, that of God's love in Christ, could not conquer and free from their poison; but there are such as will close their ears to its plaintive sweetness. This is the condemnation that light is come and men love darkness, and had rather lie coiled in their holes than have their fangs extracted.

The general drift of the second part (vv. 6-9) is to call down Divine retribution on these obstinate, irreclaimable evil-doers. Figure is heaped on figure in a fashion suggestive of intense emotion. The transiency of insolent evil, the completeness of its destruction, are the thoughts common to them all. There are difficulties in translation, and, in ver. 9, probable textual corruption; but these should not hide the tremendous power of gloomy imagination, which can lay hold of vulgar and in part loathsome things, and, by sheer force of its own solemn insight, can free them from all low or grotesque associations, and turn them into awful symbols. The intense desire for the sweeping away of evil-doers has met us in many previous psalms, and it is needless to repeat former observations on it. But it is nowhere expressed with such a wealth of metaphor as here. The first of these, that of crushing the jaws and

breaking the teeth of a beast of prey, occurs also in Psalm iii. 7. It is less terrible than the subsequent imprecations, since it only contemplates the wicked's deprivation of power to do harm. In ver. 7 *a* their destruction is sought, while, in the second clause of the same verse, the defeat of their attempts is desired. Ver. 8 then expands the former wish, and ver. 9 the latter. This plain symmetrical arrangement makes the proposals to resort to transposition unnecessary. Mountain torrents quickly run themselves dry; and the more furious their rush, the swifter their exhaustion. They leave a chaos of whitened stones, that lie bleaching in the fierce sun when the wild spate is past. So stormy and so short will be the career of evil-doers. So could a good man of old wish it to be; and so may we be sure of and desire the cessation of oppression and man's inhumanity to man. Ver. 7 *b* is obscure. All these figures are struck out with such parsimony of words that they are difficult. They remind one of some of the stern, unfinished work of Michael Angelo, where a blow or two of his chisel, or a dash or two of his brush, has indicated rather than expressed his purpose, and left a riddle, fascinating in its incompleteness, for smaller men to spell out. In ver. 7 *b* it may be asked, Who is the archer? If God, then the whole is a presentation as if of an occurrence taking place before our eyes. God shoots His arrow, and at once it lodges in the heart of the enemies, and they are as though cut off. But it is better to take the wicked as the subject of both verbs, the change from singular to plural being by no means unusual in successive clauses with the same subject. If so, this clause recurs to the thought of ver. 6, and prays for the neutralising of the wicked man's attempts. He fits his arrows, aims, and draws the bow. May they fall harmless, as if barbless! An emendation has been proposed by which the clause is made parallel with Psalm xxxvii. 2, "As grass let them be quickly cut off," thus securing a complete parallel with *a*, and avoiding the difficulty in the word rendered by us "pointless." But the existing text gives a vigorous metaphor, the peculiarity of which makes it preferable to the feebler image of withering grass.

The prayer for destruction is caught up again in ver. 8, in two daring figures which tremble on the verge of lowering the key of the whole; but by escaping that peril, produce the contrary effect, and heighten it. A slug leaves a shining track of slime as it creeps, which exudes from its soft body, and thus it seems to disintegrate itself by its own motion. It is the same thought of the suicidal character of bad men's efforts which was expressed by the stream foaming itself away in the nullah. It is the eternal truth that opposition to God's will destroys itself by its own activity. The unfulfilled life of a premature birth, with eyes which never opened to the light for which they were made, and possibilities which never unfolded, and which is huddled away into a nameless grave, still more impressively symbolises futility and transiency.

In ver. 9 the figure has given much trouble to commentators. Its broad meaning is, however, undoubted. It is, as ver. 6 and ver. 7 *b*, symbolic of the Divine intervention which wrecks wicked men's plans before they are wrought out. The picture before the psalmist seems to be that of a company of travellers round their camp fire, preparing their meal. They heap brush-wood under the pot, and expect to satisfy their hunger; but

before the pot is warmed through, not to say before the water boils or the meat is cooked, down comes a whirlwind, which sweeps away fire, pot, and all. Every word of the clause is doubtful, and with the existing text, the best that can be done is not wholly satisfactory. If emendation is resorted to, the suggestion of Bickell, adopted by Cheyne, gives a good sense: "[And] while your [flesh] is yet raw, the hot wrath [of Jehovah] shall sweep it away." Baethgen makes a slighter alteration, and renders, "While it is still raw, He sweeps it away in wrath." Retaining the existing text (which is witnessed by the LXX. and other old versions), probably the best rendering is, "Whether [it be] green or burning, He shall whirl it away." This general understanding of the words is shared by commentators who differ as to what is represented as swept away,—some making it the thorn fire, the twigs of which may be either full of sap or well alight; while others take the reference to be to the meat in the pot, which may be either "living," i.e. raw, or well on the way to being cooked. Neither application is quite free from difficulty, especially in view of the fact that some pressure has to be put on the word rendered "burning," which is not an adjective, but a noun, and is usually employed to designate the fiery wrath of God, as it is rendered in the amended text just mentioned. After all attempts at clearing up the verse, one must be content to put a mark of interrogation at any rendering. But the scope of the figure seems discoverable through the obscurity. It is a homely and therefore vigorous picture of half-accomplished plans suddenly reduced to utter failure, and leaving their concocters hungry for the satisfaction which seemed so near. The cookery may go on merrily and the thorns crackle cheerily, but the simoom comes, topples over the tripod on which the pot swung, and blows the fire away in a hundred directions. Peter's gibbet was ready, and the morning of his execution was near; but when day dawned, "there was no small stir what was become of him." The wind had blown him away from the expectation of the people of the Jews into safe quarters; and the fire was dispersed.

The closing part (vv. 10, 11) breathes a stern spirit of joy over the destruction of the wicked. That is a terrible picture of the righteous bathing his feet in the blood of the wicked (Psalm lxxviii. 23). It expresses not only the dreadful abundance of blood, but also the satisfaction of the "righteous" at its being shed. There is an ignoble and there is a noble and Christian satisfaction in even the destructive providences of God. It is not only permissible but imperative on those who would live in sympathy with His righteous dealings and with Himself, that they should see in these the manifestation of eternal justice, and should consider that they roll away burdens from earth and bring hope and rest to the victims of oppression. It is no unworthy shout of personal vengeance, nor of unfeeling triumph, that is lifted up from a relieved world when Babylon falls. If it is right in God to destroy, it cannot be wrong in His servants to rejoice that He does. Only they have to take heed that their emotion is untarnished by selfish gratulation, and is not untinged with solemn pity for those who were indeed doers of evil, but were themselves the greatest sufferers from their evil. It is hard, but not impossible, to take all that is expressed in the psalm, and to soften it by some effluence from the

spirit of Him who wept over Jerusalem, and yet pronounced its doom.

The last issue of God's judgments contemplated by the psalm warrants the joy of the righteous; for in these there is a demonstration to the world that there is "fruit" to the righteous, and that notwithstanding all bewilderments from the sight of prosperous wickedness and oppressed righteousness "there is a God who judges in the earth." The word "judging" is here in the plural, corresponding with "God" (Elohim), which is also plural in form. Possibly the construction is to be explained on the ground that the words describe the thoughts of surrounding, polytheistic nations, who behold the exhibition of God's righteousness. But more probably the plural is here used for the sake of the contrast with the "gods" of ver. 1. Over these unworthy representatives of Divine justice sits the true judge, in the manifoldness of His attributes, exercising His righteous though slow-footed judgments.

PSALM LIX.

- 1 Deliver me from my enemies, O my God:
Out of the reach of those who arise against me
set me on high.
- 2 Deliver me from workers of iniquity,
And from men of blood save me.
- 3 For, see, they have lain in wait for my soul,
The violent gather together against me:
Not for transgression or sin of mine, Jehovah.
- 4 Without [my] fault they run and set themselves
in array:
Awake to meet me, and behold.
- 5 And Thou, Jehovah, God of hosts, God of
Israel,
Rouse Thyself to visit all the nations:
Be not gracious to wicked apostates. *Selah.*
- 6 They return at evening, they snarl like dogs,
and prowl round the city.
- 7 See, they foam at the mouth;
Swords are in their lips:
For "Who hears?"
- 8 But Thou, Jehovah, shalt laugh at them;
Thou mockest at all the nations.
- 9 My Strength, for Thee will I watch:
For God is my high tower.
- 10 My God shall come to meet me with His lov-
ingkindness:
God will let me look on my adversaries.
- 11 Slay them not, lest my people forget:
Make them wanderers by Thy power (army?),
and cast them down,
O Lord our shield.
- 12 [Each] word of their lips is a sin of their
mouth,
And they snare themselves in their pride,
And for the cursing and lying [which] they
speak.
- 13 End [them] in wrath, end [them], that they be
no more:
And let them know that God is ruler in Jacob,
Unto the ends of the earth. *Selah.*
- 14 And they shall return at evening, they shall
growl like dogs,
And prowl round the city.
- 15 They—they shall wander about for food,
If they are not gorged, then [so must] they
pass the night.
- 16 And I will sing Thy strength,
And sound aloud Thy lovingkindness in the
morning,
For Thou hast been a high tower for me,
And a refuge in the day of my straits.
- 17 My strength, to Thee will I harp,
For God is my high tower, the God of my
lovingkindness.

THE superscription makes this the earliest of David's psalms, dating from the Sauline persecution. It has many points of connection with the others of that group, but its closest affinities are with Psalm lv., which is commonly considered to belong to the period of incubation of Absalom's rebellion (*cf.* Psalm lv. 10 with lix. 6, 14, and lv. 21 with lix. 7). The allusion to enemies patrolling the city, which is common to both psalms, seems to refer to a fact, and may in this psalm be founded on the watchfulness of Saul's emissaries: but its occurrence in both weakens its force as here confirmatory of the superscription. It does not necessarily follow from the mention of the "nations" that the psalmist's enemies are foreigners. Their presence in the city and the stress laid on words as their weapons are against that supposition. On the whole, the contents of the psalm do not negative the tradition in the title, but do not strongly attest it. If we have accepted the Davidic authorship of the other psalms of this group, we shall extend it to this one; for they clearly are a group, whether Davidic or not. The psalm falls into two principal divisions (vv. 1-9 and 10-17), each closing with a refrain, and each subdivided into two minor sections, the former of which in each case ends with *Selah*, and the latter begins with another refrain. The two parts travel over much the same ground of petition, description of the enemies, confidence in deliverance and in the defeat of the foes. But in the first half the psalmist prays for himself, and in the second he prays against his persecutors, while assured confidence in his own deliverance takes the place of alarmed gaze on their might and cruelty.

The former half of the first part begins and ends with petitions. Imbedded in these is a plaintive recounting of the machinations of the adversaries, which are, as it were, spread before God's eyes, accompanied with protestations of innocence. The prayers, which enclose as in a circlet, this description of unprovoked hatred, are varied, so that the former petitions are directed to the singer's deliverance, while the latter invoke judgment on his antagonists. The strong assertion of innocence is, of course, to be limited to the psalmist's conduct to his enemies. They attack him without provocation. Obviously this feature corresponds to the facts of Saul's hatred of David, and as obviously it does not correspond to the facts of Israel's sufferings from foreign enemies, which are supposed by the present favourite interpretation to be the occasion of the psalm. No devout singer could so misunderstand the reason of the nation's disasters as to allege that they had fallen upon innocent heads. Rather, when a psalmist bewailed national calamities, he traced them to national sins. "Anger went up against Israel, because they believed not in God." The psalmist calls God to look upon the doings of his enemies. Privy plots and open assaults are both directed against him. The enemy lie in wait for his life; but also, with fell eagerness, like that of soldiers making haste to rank themselves in battle-array

they "run and set themselves." This is probably simply metaphor, for the rest of the psalm does not seem to contemplate actual warfare. The imminence of peril forces an urgent prayer from the threatened man. So urgent is it that it breaks in on the parallelism of ver. 4, substituting its piercing cry "Awake, behold!" for the proper second clause carrying on the description in the first. The singer makes haste to grasp God's hand, because he feels the pressure of the wind blowing in his face. It is wise to break off the contemplation of enemies and dangers by crying to God. Prayer is a good interruption of a catalogue of perils. The petitions in ver. 5 are remarkable, both in their accumulation of the Divine names and in their apparent transcending of the suppliant's need. The former characteristic is no mere artificial or tautological heaping together of titles, but indicates repeated acts of faith and efforts of contemplation. Each name suggests something in God which encourages hope, and when appealed to by a trusting soul, moves Him to act. The very introductory word of invocation, "And Thou," is weighty. It sets the might of God in grand contrast to the hurrying hatred of the adversary; and its significance is enhanced if its recurrence in ver. 8 and its relation to "And I" in ver. 16 are taken into account.

The combination of the Divine names is remarkable here, from the insertion of God (Elohim) between the two parts of the standing name, Jehovah of hosts. The anomaly is made still more anomalous by the peculiar form of the word Elohim, which does not undergo the modification to be expected in such a construction. The same peculiarities occur in other Elohist psalms (lxxx. 4, 19, and lxxxiv. 8). The peculiar grammatical form would be explained if the three words were regarded as three co-ordinate names, Jehovah, Elohim, Zebaoth, and this explanation is favoured by good critics. But it is going too far to say, with Baethgen, that "Zebaoth *can only* be understood as an independent Divine name" (Komm., *in loc.*). Other explanations are at least possible, such as that of Delitzsch, that "Elohim, like Jehovah, has become a proper name," and so does not suffer modification. The supplicatory force of the names, however, is clear, whatever may be the account of the formal anomalies. They appeal to God and they hearten the appellant's confidence by setting forth the loftiness of God, who rules over the embattled forces of the universe, which "run and set themselves in array" at His bidding and for His servant's help, and before which the ranks of the foes seem thin and few. They set forth also God's relation to Israel, of which the single suppliant is a member.

The petition, grounded upon these names, is supposed by modern commentators to prove that the psalmist's enemies were heathens, which would, of course destroy the Davidic authorship, and make the singer a personification of the nation. But against this is to be observed the description of the enemies in the last clause of ver. 5 as "apostates," which must refer to Israelites. The free access to the "city," spoken of in ver. 6, is also unfavourable to that supposition, as is the prominence given to the *words* of the enemy. Foreign foes would have had other swords than those carried between their lips. The prayer that Jehovah would arise to visit "all nations" is much more naturally explained, as on the same principle as the judgment of "the peoples" in

Psalm vii. All special cases are subsumed under the one general judgment. The psalmist looks for his own deliverance as one instance of that world-wide manifestation of Divine justice which will "render to every man according to his deeds." Not only personal considerations move him to his prayer; but, pressing as these are, and shrill as is the cry for personal deliverance, the psalmist is not so absorbed in self as that he cannot widen his thoughts and desires to a world-wide manifestation of Divine righteousness, of which his own escape will be a tiny part. Such recognition of the universal in the particular is the prerogative in lower walks of the poet and the man of genius; it is the strength and solace of the man who lives by faith and links all things with God. The instruments here strike in, so as to fix attention on the spectacle of God aroused to smite and of the end of apostates.

The comparison of the psalmist's enemies to dogs occurs in another psalm ascribed to David (xxii. 16, 20). They are like the masterless, gaunt, savage curs which infest the streets of Eastern cities, hungrily hunting for offal and ready to growl or snarl at every passer-by. Though the dog is not a nocturnal animal, evening would naturally be a time when these would specially prowl round the city in search of food, if disappointed during the day. The picture suggests the enemies' eagerness, lawlessness, foulness, and persistency. If the psalm is rightly dated in the superscription, it finds most accurate realisation in the crafty, cruel watchfulness of Saul's spies. The word rendered by the A.V. and R.V. "make a noise" is "said usually of the growling of the bear and the cooing of the dove" (Delitzsch). It indicates a lower sound than barking, and so expresses rage suppressed lest its object should take alarm. The word rendered (A.V. and R.V.) "belch" means to gush out, and is found in a good sense in Psalm xix. 1. Here it may perhaps be taken as meaning "foam," with some advantage to the truth of the picture. "Swords are in their lips"—*i.e.*, their talk is of slaying the psalmist, or their slanders cut like swords; and the crown of their evil is their scoff at the apparently deaf and passive God.

With startling suddenness, as if one quick touch drew aside a curtain, the vision of God as He really regards the enemies is flashed on them in ver. 8. The strong antithesis expressed by the "And Thou," as in ver. 5, comes with overwhelming force. Below is the crowd of greedy foes, obscene, cruel, and blasphemous; above, throned in dread repose, which is not, as they dream, carelessness or ignorance, is Jehovah, mocking their fancied security. The tremendous metaphor of the laughter of God is too boldly anthropomorphic to be misunderstood. It sounds like the germ of the solemn picture in Psalm ii., and is probably the source of the similar expression in Psalm xxxvii. 13. The introduction of the wider thought of God's "mocking"—*i.e.*, discerning, and manifesting in act, the impotence of the ungodly efforts of "all nations"—is to be accounted for on the same principle of the close connection discerned by the devout singer between the particular and the general, which explains the similar extension of view in ver. 5.

Ver. 9 is the refrain closing the first part. The reading of the Hebrew text, "His strength," must be given up, as unintelligible, and the slight alteration required for reading "my" instead of

"his" adopted, as in the second instance of the refrain in ver. 17. The further alteration of text, however, by which "I will harp" would be read in ver. 9 instead of "I will watch" is unnecessary, and the variation of the two refrains is not only in accordance with usage, but brings out a delicate phase of progress in confidence. He who begins with waiting for God ends with singing praise to God. The silence of patient expectance is changed for the melody of received deliverance.

The first part of the second division, like the corresponding portion of the first division, is mainly prayer, but with the significant difference that the petitions now are directed, not to the psalmist's deliverance but to his enemies' punishment. For himself, he is sure that his God will come to meet him with His lovingkindness, and that, thus met and helped, he will look on, secure, at their ruin. The Hebrew margin proposes to read "The God of my lovingkindness will meet me"—an incomplete sentence, which does not tell with what God will meet him. But the text needs only the change of one vowel point in order to yield the perfectly appropriate reading, "My God shall meet me with His lovingkindness," which is distinctly to be preferred. It is singular that the substitution of "my" for "his," which is needlessly suggested by the Hebrew margin for ver. 10, is required but not suggested for ver. 9. One is tempted to wonder whether there has been a scribe's blunder attaching the correction to the wrong verse. The central portion of this part of the psalm is composed of terrible wishes for the enemies' destruction. There is nothing more awful in the imprecations of the Psalter than that petition that the boon of a swift end to their miseries may not be granted them. The dew of pity for suffering is dried up by the fire of stern desire for the exhibition of a signal instance of Divine judicial righteousness. That desire lifts the prayer above the level of personal vengeance, but does not lighten its awfulness. There may be an allusion to the fate of Cain, who was kept alive and made a "fugitive and a vagabond." Whether that is so or not, the wish that the foes may be kept alive to be buffeted by God's *strength*—or, as the word may mean, to be scattered in panic-struck rout by God's *army*—is one which marks the difference between the old and the new covenants. The ground of these fearful punishments is vehemently set forth in ver. 12. Every word which the adversaries speak is sin. Their own self-sufficient pride, which is revolt against dependence on God, is like a trap to catch them. They speak curses and lies, for which retribution is due. This recounting of their crimes, not so much against the psalmist, though involving him, as against God, fires his indignation anew, and he flames out with petitions which seem to forget the former ones for lingering destruction: "End them in wrath, end them." The contradiction may be apparent only, and this passionate cry may presuppose the fulfilment of the former. The psalmist will then desire two dreadful things—first, protracted suffering, and then a crushing blow to end it. His ultimate desire in both is the same. He would have the evil-doers spared long enough to be monuments of God's punitive justice; he would have them ended, that the crash of their fall may reverberate afar and proclaim that God rules in Jacob. "Unto the ends of the earth" may be connected either with "rules" or with "know." In the former

construction the thought will be, that from His throne in Israel God exercises dominion universally; in the latter, that the echo of the judgment on these evil-doers will reach distant lands. The latter meaning is favoured by the accents, and is, on the whole, to be preferred. But what a strange sense of his own significance for the manifestation of God's power to the world this singer must have had, if he could suppose that the events of his life were thus of universal importance! One does not wonder that the advocates of the personification theory find strong confirmation of it in such utterances; and, indeed, the only other explanation of them is that the psalmist held, and knew himself to hold, a conspicuous place in the evolution of the Divine purpose so that in his life, as in a small mirror, there were reflected great matters. If such anticipations were more than wild dreams, the cherisher of them must either have been speaking in the person of the nation, or he must have known himself to be God's instrument for extending His name through the world. No single person so adequately meets the requirements of such words as David.

The second part of this division (ver. 14) begins with the same words as the corresponding part of the first division (ver. 6), so that there is a kind of refrain here. The futures in vv. 14, 15, may be either simple futures or optatives. In the latter case the petitions of the preceding verses would be continued here and the pregnant truth would result that continuance in sin is the punishment of sin. But probably the imprecations are better confined to the former part, as the *Selah* draws a broad line of demarcation, and there would be an incongruity in following the petition "End them" with others which contemplated the continuance of the enemies. If the verses are taken as simply predictive, the point of the re-introduction of the figure of the pack of dogs hunting for their prey lies in ver. 15. There they are described as balked in their attempts, and having to pass the night unsatisfied. Their prey has escaped. Their eager chase, their nocturnal quest, their growling and prowling, have been vain. They lie down empty and in the dark—a vivid picture, which has wider meanings than its immediate occasion. "Ye lust and desire to have, and cannot obtain." An eternal nemesis hangs over godless lives, condemning them to hunger, after all efforts, and wrapping their pangs of unsatisfied desire in tragic darkness.

A clear strain of trust springs up like a lark's morning song. The singer contrasts himself with his baffled foes. The "they" at the beginning of ver. 15 is emphatic in the Hebrew, and is matched with the emphatic "And I" which begins ver. 16. His "morning" is similarly set over against their "night." So petition, complaint, imprecation, all merge into a song of joy and trust and the whole ends with the refrain significantly varied and enlarged. In its first form the psalmist said "For Thee will I watch"; in its second he rises to "To Thee will I harp." Glad praise is ever the close of the vigils of a faithful, patient heart. The deliverance won by waiting and trust should be celebrated by praise. In the first form the refrain ran "God is my high tower," and the second part of the psalm began with "My God shall meet me with His lovingkindness." In its second form the refrain draws into itself these words which had followed it, and so modifies them that the lovingkindness which in them was contemplated as

belonging to and brought by God is now joyfully clasped by the singer as his very own, by Divine gift and through his own acceptance. Blessed they who are led by occasion of foes and fears to take God's rich gifts, and can thankfully and humbly feel that His lovingkindness and all its results are theirs, because He Himself is theirs and they are His!

PSALM LX.

- 1 O God, Thou hast cast us off, hast broken us,
Hast been angry with us—restore us again.
- 2 Thou hast shaken the land, hast rent it—
Heal its breaches, for it trembles.
- 3 Thou hast made Thy people see hard things,
Thou hast given them to drink reeling as wine.
- 4 Thou hast given a banner to them that fear
Thee,
[Only] that they may flee before the bow.
Selah.
- 5 That Thy beloved ones may be delivered,
Save with thy right hand, and answer us.
- 6 God has spoken in His holiness,—I will exult:
I will divide Shechem, and measure out the
valley of Succoth.
- 7 Mine is Gilead, and mine Manasseh,
And Ephraim is the strength of my head,
Judah, my baton of command.
- 8 Moab is my wash basin,
Upon Edom will I throw my shoe,
Because of me, Philistia, shout aloud.
- 9 Who will bring me into the fenced city?
Who has guided me into Edom?
- 10 Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off?
And goest not out, O God, with our hosts.
- 11 Give us help from the oppressor,
For vain is help of man.
- 12 In God we shall do prowess:
And He, He will tread down our oppressors.

THIS psalm has evidently a definite historical background. Israel has been worsted in fight, but still continues its campaign against Edom. Meditating on God's promises, the psalmist anticipates victory, which will cover defeat and perfect partial successes, and seeks to breathe his own spirit of confidence into the ranks of his countrymen. But the circumstances answering to those required by the psalm are hard to find. The date assigned by the superscription cannot be called satisfactory; for David's war there referred to (2 Sam. viii.) had no such stunning defeats as are here lamented. The Divine Oracle of which the substance is given in the central part of the psalm, affords but dubious indications of date. At first sight it seems to imply the union of all the tribes in one kingdom, and therefore to favour the Davidic authorship. But it may be a question whether the united Israel of the Oracle is fact or prophecy. To one school of commentators, the mention of Ephraim in conjunction with Judah is token that the psalm is prior to the great revolt; to another, it is proof positive that the date is after the destruction of the northern kingdom. The Maccabean date is favoured by Olshausen, Hitzig, and Cheyne among moderns; but, apart from other objections, the reappearance of vv. 5-12 in Psalm cviii. implies that this piece of Hebrew psalmody was already venerable when a later compiler wove part of it into that psalm. On the

whole, the Davidic authorship is possible, though clogged with the difficulty already mentioned. But the safest conclusion seems to be Baethgen's modest one, which contrasts strongly with the confident assertions of some other critics—namely, that assured certainty in dating the psalm "is no longer possible."

It falls into three parts of four verses each, of which the first (vv. 1-4) is complaint of defeat and prayer for help; the second (vv. 5-8), a Divine Oracle assuring victory; and the third (vv. 9-12), the flash of fresh hope kindled by that God's-word.

The first part blends complaint and prayer in the first pair of verses, in each of which there is, first, a description of the desperate state of Israel, and then a cry for help. The nation is broken, as a wall is broken down, or as an army whose ordered ranks are shattered and scattered. Some crushing defeat is meant, which in ver. 2 is further described as an earthquake. The land trembles, and then gaps in hideous clefts, and houses become gaunt ruins. The state is disorganised as in consequence of defeat. It is an unpoetical mixture of fact and figure to see in the "rending" of the land allusion to the separation of the kingdoms, especially as that was not the result of defeat.

There is almost a tone of wonder in the designation of Israel as "Thy people," so sadly does the fate meted out to them contrast with their name. Stranger still and more anomalous is it, that, as ver. 3 *b* laments, God's own hand has commended such a chalice to their lips as should fill them with infatuation. The construction "wine of reeling," is grammatically impossible, and the best explanation of the phrase regards the nouns as in apposition—"wine which is reeling," or "reeling as wine." The meaning is that God not only sent the disaster which had shaken the nation like an earthquake, but had sent, too, the presumptuous self-confidence which had led to it.

Ver. 4 has received two opposite interpretations, being taken by some as a prolongation of the tone of lament over disaster, and by others as commemoration of God's help. The latter meaning violently interrupts the continuity of thought. "The only natural view is that which sees" in ver. 4 "a continuation of the description of calamity" in ver. 3 (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Taking this view, we render the second clause as above. The word translated "that they may flee" may indeed mean to lift themselves up, in the sense of gathering round a standard, but the remainder of the clause cannot be taken as meaning "because of the truth," since the preposition here used never means "because of." It is best taken here as *from before*. The word variously rendered *bow* and *truth* is difficult. It occurs again in Prov. xxii. 21, and is there parallel with "truth" or faithfulness in fulfilling Divine promises. But that meaning would be inappropriate here, and would require the preceding preposition to be taken in the impossible sense already noted. It seems better, therefore, to follow the LXX. and other old versions, in regarding the word as a slightly varied mode of spelling the ordinary word for a bow (the final dental letter being exchanged for a cognate dental). The resulting meaning is deeply coloured by sad irony. "Thou hast indeed given a banner—but it was a signal for flight rather than for gathering round." Such seems the best view of this difficult verse; but it is not free

from objection. "Those who fear Thee" is not a fitting designation for persons who were thus scattered in flight by God even if it is taken as simply a synonym for the nation. We have to make choice between two incongruities. If we adopt the favourite view, that the verse continues the description of calamity, the name given to the sufferers is strange. If we take the other, that it describes God's gracious rallying of the fugitives, we are confronted with a violent interruption of the tone of feeling in this first part of the psalm. Perowne accepts the rendering *from before the bow*, but takes the verb in the sense of mustering round, so making the banner to be a rallying-point and the giving of it a Divine mercy.

The second part (vv. 5-8) begins with a verse which Delitzsch and others regard as really connected, notwithstanding the *Selah* at the end ver. 4, with the preceding. But it is quite intelligible as independent, and is in its place as the introduction to the Divine Oracle which follows and makes the kernel of the psalm. There is beautiful strength of confidence in the psalmist's regarding the beaten, scattered people as still God's "darlings." He appeals to Him to answer, in order that a result so accordant with God's heart as the deliverance of His beloved ones may be secured. And the prayer has no sooner passed his lips than he hears the thunderous response, "God has spoken in His holiness." That infinite elevation of His nature above creatures is the pledge of the fulfilment of His word.

The following verses contain the substance of the Oracle; but it is too daring to suppose that they reproduce its words; for "I will exult" can scarcely be reverently put into the mouth of God. The substance of the whole is a twofold promise—of a united Israel, and a submissive heathendom. Shechem on the west and Succoth on the east of Jordan, Gilead and Manasseh on the east, and Ephraim and Judah on the west, are the possession of the speaker, whether he is king or representative of the nation. No trace of a separation of the kingdoms is here. Ephraim, the strongest tribe of the northern kingdom, is the "strength of my head," the helmet, or perhaps with allusion to the horns of an animal as symbols of offensive weapons. Judah is the ruling tribe, the commander's baton, or possibly "lawgiver," as in Gen. xlix. Israel thus compact together may count on conquests over hereditary foes.

Their defeat is foretold in contemptuous images. The basin for washing the feet was "a vessel unto dishonour"; and, in Israel's great house, no higher function for his ancestral enemy, when conquered, would be found. The meaning of casting the shoe upon or over Edom is doubtful. It may be a symbol for taking possession of property, though that lacks confirmation; or Edom may be regarded as the household slave to whom the master's shoes are thrown when taken off; or, better, in accordance with the preceding reference to Moab, Edom may be regarded as part of the master's house or furniture. The one was the basin for his feet; the other, the corner where he kept his sandals.

If the text of ver. 8 c is correct Philistia is addressed with bitter sarcasm, and bidden to repeat her ancient shouts of triumph over Israel now, if she can. But the edition of these verses in Psalm cviii. gives a more natural reading which may be adopted here: "Over Philistia will I shout aloud."

The third part (vv. 9-12) is taken by some commentators to breathe the same spirit as the first part. Cheyne, for instance, speaks of it as a "re-lapse into despondency," whilst others more truly hear in it the tones of rekindled trust. In ver. 9 there is a remarkable change of tense from "Who will bring?" in the first clause, to "Who has guided?" in the second. This is best explained by the supposition that some victory over Edom had preceded the psalm, which is regarded by the singer as a guarantee of success in his assault of "the fenced city," probably Petra. There is no need to supplement ver. 10, so as to read, "Wilt not Thou, O God, which," etc. The psalmist recurs to his earlier lament, not as if he thought that it still held true, but just because it does not. It explained the reason of past disasters; and, being now reversed by the Divine Oracle, becomes the basis of the prayer which follows. It is as if he had said, "We were defeated because Thou didst cast us off. Now help as Thou hast promised and we shall do deeds of valour." It is impossible to suppose that the result of the Divine answer, which makes the very heart of the psalm, should be a hopeless repetition of the initial despondency. Rather glad faith acknowledges past weakness and traces past failures to self-caused abandonment by a loving God, who let His people be worsted that they might learn who was their strength, and ever goes forth with those who go forth to war with the consciousness that all help but His is vain, and with the hope that in Him even their weakness shall do deeds of prowess. "Hast not Thou cast us off?" may be the utterance of despair; but it may also be that of assured confidence and the basis of a prayer that will be answered by God's present help.

PSALM LXI.

- 1 Hear, O God, my shrill cry,
Attend to my prayer.
- 2 From the end of the earth I cry to Thee, when
my heart is wrapped [in gloom]:
Lead me on to a rock that is too high for me
to [reach].
- 3 For Thou hast been a place of refuge for me,
A tower of strength from the face of the foe.
- 4 Let me dwell a guest in Thy tent for ever,
Let me find refuge in the covert of Thy wings.
Selah.
- 5 For Thou, O God, hast hearkened to my vows,
Thou hast given [me] the heritage of them that
fear Thy name.
- 6 Days mayest Thou add to the days of the king,
May his years be as many generations.
- 7 May he sit before God for ever:
Give charge to lovingkindness and truth, that
they guard him.
- 8 So will I harp to Thy name for aye,
That I may fulfil my vows day by day.

THE situation of the singer in this psalm is the same as in Psalm lxiii. In both he is an exile longing for the sanctuary, and in both "the king" is referred to in a way which leaves his identity with the psalmist questionable. There are also similarities in situation, sentiment, and expression with Psalms xlii. and xliii.—*e.g.*, the

singer's exile, his yearning to appear in the sanctuary, the command given by God to His Loving-kindness (xlii. 8 and lxi. 8) the personification of Light and Truth as his guides (xliii. 3), compared with the similar representation here of Lovingkindness and Truth as guards set by God over the psalmist. The traditional attribution of the psalm to David has at least the merit of providing an appropriate setting for its longings and hopes, in his flight from Absalom. No one of the other dates proposed by various critics seems to satisfy anybody but its proposer. Hupfeld calls Hitzig's suggestion "wunderbar zu lesen." Graetz inclines to the reign of Hezekiah, and thinks that "the connection gains" if the prayer for the preservation of the king's life refers to that monarch's sickness. The Babylonish captivity, with Zedekiah for "the king," is preferred by others. Still later dates are in favour now. Cheyne lays it down that "pre-Jeremian such highly spiritual hymns (*i.e.*, Psalms lxi. and lxiii.) obviously cannot be," and thinks that "it would not be unplausible to make them contemporaneous with Psalm xlii., the king being Antiochus the Great," but prefers to assign them to the Maccabean period, and to take "Jonathan, or (better) Simon" as the king. Are "highly spiritual hymns" probable products of that time?

If the *Selah* is accepted as marking the end of the first part of the psalm, its structure is symmetrical, so far as it is then divided into two parts of four verses each; but that division cuts off the prayer in ver. 4 from its ground in ver. 5. *Selah* frequently occurs in the middle of a period, and is used to mark emphasis, but not necessarily division. It is therefore better to keep vv. 4 and 5 together, thus preserving their analogy with vv. 2 and 3. The scheme of this little psalm will then be an introductory verse, followed by two parallel pairs of verses, each consisting of petition and its grounding in past mercies (vv. 2, 3, and 4, 5), and these again succeeded by another pair containing petitions for "the king," while a final single verse, corresponding to the introductory one, joyfully foresees life-long praise evoked by the certain answers to the singer's prayer.

The fervour of the psalmist's supplication is strikingly expressed by his use in the first clause, of the word which is ordinarily employed for the shrill notes of rejoicing. It describes the quality of the sound as penetrating and emotional, not the nature of the emotion expressed by it. Joy is usually louder-tongued than sorrow; but this suppliant's need has risen so high that his cry is resonant. To himself he seems to be at "the end of the earth"; for he measures distance not as a map-maker, but as a worshipper. Love and longing are potent magnifiers of space. His heart "faints," or is "overwhelmed." The word means literally "covered," and perhaps the metaphor may be preserved by some such phrase as *wrapped in gloom*. He is, then, an exile and therefore sunk in sadness. But while he had external separation from the sanctuary chiefly in view, his cry wakes an echo in all devout hearts. They who know most about the inner life of communion with God best know how long and dreary the smallest separation between Him and them seems, and how thick is the covering spread over the heart thereby.

The one desire of such a suppliant is for restoration of interrupted access to God. The psalmist embodies that yearning in its more outward

form, but not without penetrating to the inner reality in both the parallel petitions which follow. In the first of these, (ver. 2 *b*) the thought is fuller than the condensed expression of it. "Lead me on" or in, says he, meaning, Lead me *to* and set me *on*. His imagination sees towering above him a great cliff, on which, if he could be planted, he might defy pursuit or assault. But he is distant from it, and the inaccessibility which, were he in its clefts, would be his safety, is now his despair. Therefore he turns to God and asks Him to bear him up in His hands, that he may set his foot on that rock. The figure has been, strangely enough, interpreted to mean a rock of difficulty, but against the usage in the Psalter. But we do not reach the whole significance of the figure if we give it the mere general meaning of a place of safety. While it would be too much to say that "rock" is here an epithet of God (the absence of the definite article and other considerations are against that), it may be affirmed that the psalmist, like all devout men, knew that his only place of safety was in God. "A rock" will not afford adequate shelter; our perils and storms need "*the* Rock." And, therefore, this singer bases his prayer on his past experience of the safe hiding that he had found in God. "Place of refuge" and "strong tower" are distinctly parallel with "rock." The whole, then, is like the prayer in Psalm xxxi., 2, 3: "Be Thou to me a strong rock. For Thou art my rock."

The second pair of verses, containing petition and its ground in past experience (vv. 4, 5), brings out still more clearly the psalmist's longing for the sanctuary. The futures in ver. 4 may be taken either as simple expressions of certainty, or, more probably, as precatives, as is suggested by the parallelism with the preceding pair. The "tent" of God is the sanctuary, possibly so called because at the date of the psalm "the ark of God dwelt in curtains." The "hiding-place of Thy wings" may then be an allusion to the Shechinah and outspread pinions of the Cherubim. But the inner reality is more to the psalmist than the external symbols, however his faith was trained to connect the two more indissolubly than is legitimate for us. His longing was no superstitious wish to be near that sanctuary, as if external presence brought blessing, but a reasonable longing, grounded on the fact for his stage of revelation, that such presence was the condition of fullest realisation of spiritual communion, and of the safety and blessedness thence received. His prayer is the deepest desire of every soul that has rightly apprehended the facts of life, its own needs and the riches of God. The guests in God's dwelling have guest-rights of provision and protection. Beneath His wings are safety, warmth, and conscious nearness to His heart. The suppliant may feel far off, at the end of the world: but one strong desire has power to traverse all the distance in a moment. "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also"; and where the heart is, there the man is.

The ground of this second petition is laid in God's past listening to vows, and His having given the psalmist "the heritage of those that fear Thy name." That is most naturally explained as meaning primarily the land of Israel, and as including therein all other blessings needful for life there. While it is capable of being otherwise understood, it is singularly appropriate to the person of David during the period of Absa-

lom's rebellion, when victory was beginning to declare itself for the king. If we suppose that he had already won a battle (2 Sam. xviii. 6), we can understand how he takes that success as an omen and urges it as a plea. The pair of verses will then be one instance of the familiar argument which trustful hearts instinctively use, when they present past and incomplete mercies as reasons for continued gifts, and for the addition of all which is needed to "perfect that which concerneth" them. It rests on the confidence that God is not one who "begins and is not able to finish."

Very naturally, then, follows the closing prayer in vv. 6, 7. The purely individual character of the rest of the psalm, which is resumed in the last verse, where the singer speaking in the first person, represents his continual praise as the result of the answer to his petitions for the king, makes these petitions hopelessly irrelevant, unless the psalmist is the king and these prayers are for himself. The transition to the third person does not necessarily negative this interpretation, which seems to be required by the context. The prayer sounds hyperbolic, but has a parallel in Psalm xxi. 4, and need not be vindicated by taking the dynasty rather than the individual to be meant, or by diverting it to a Messianic reference. It is a prayer for length of days, in order that the deliverance already begun may be perfected, and that the psalmist may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (*cf.* Psalms xxiii. 6; xxvii. 4). He asks that he may sit enthroned before God for ever—that is, that his dominion may by God's favour be established and his throne upheld in peace. The psalm is in so far Messianic that the everlasting kingdom of the Christ alone fulfils its prayer.

The final petition has, as has been noticed above, parallels in Psalms xlii., xliii., to which may be added the personifications of Goodness and Lovingkindness in Psalm xxiii. 6. These bright harnessed angels stand sentries over the devout suppliant, set on their guard by the great Commander; and no harm can come to him over whom God's Lovingkindness and Faithfulness keep daily and nightly watch.

Thus guarded, the psalmist's prolonged life will be one long anthem of praise, and the days added to his days will be occupied with the fulfilment of his vows made in trouble and redeemed in his prosperity. What congruity is there between this closing verse, which is knit closely to the preceding by that "So," and the previous pair of verses, unless the king is himself the petitioner? "Let *him* sit before God for ever"—how comes that to lead up to "So will *I* harp to Thy name for ever"? Surely the natural answer is, Because "he" and "I" are the same person.

PSALM LXII.

- 1 Only upon God [waits] my soul [in] silence:
From Him is my salvation.
- 2 Only He is my rock and my salvation,
My high tower, I shall not be greatly moved.
- 3 How long will ye rush upon a man?
[How long] will ye all of you break him down,
Like a bulging wall, a tottering fence?
- 4 Only from his elevation do they consult to
thrust him down, they delight in lies:
Each blesses with his mouth, and in their inner
[part] they curse. Selah.

- 5 Only to God be silent, my soul,
For from Him is my expectation.
- 6 Only He is my rock and my salvation,
My high tower; I shall not be moved.
- 7 On God is my salvation and my glory,
The rock of my strength, my refuge, is in God.
- 8 Trust in him in every time, O people!
Pour out before Him your heart,
God is a refuge for us. Selah.
- 9 Only vanity are the sons of the lowly, a lie are
the sons of the lofty,
In the scales they go up, they are [lighter] than
vanity altogether.
- 10 Trust not in oppressions and in robbery become
not vain,
When wealth grows, set not your heart thereon.
- 11 Once has God spoken, twice have I heard this,
That strength [belongs] to God.
- 12 And to Thee, O God, [belongs] lovingkindness,
For Thou, Thou renderest to a man according
to his work.

THERE are several points of affinity between this psalm and the thirty-ninth—such as the frequent use of the particle of asseveration or restriction ("surely" or "only"); the rare and beautiful word for "silence," as expressing restful, still resignation; and the characterisation of men as "vanity." These resemblances are not proofs of identity of authorship, though establishing a presumption in its favour. Delitzsch accepts the psalm as Davidic, and refers it to the time of Absalom's revolt. The singer is evidently in a position of dignity ("elevation," ver. 4), and one whose exhortations come with force to the "people" (ver. 8), whether that word is understood as designating the nation or his immediate followers. Cheyne, who relegates the psalm to the Persian period, feels that the recognition of the singer as "a personage who is the Church's bulwark" is the natural impression on reading the psalm ("Orig. of Psalt.," 227, and 242, *n.*). If so, David's position is precisely that which is required. Whoever sang this immortal psalm, rose to the heights of conquering faith, and gave voice to the deepest and most permanent emotions of devout souls.

The psalm is in three strophes of four verses each, the divisions being marked by Selah. The two former have a long refrain at the beginning, instead of, as usually, at the end. In the first the psalmist sets his quiet trust in contrast with the furious assaults of his foes; while, in the second, he stirs himself to renewed exercise of it, and exhorts others to share with him in the security of God as a place of refuge. In the third strophe the nothingness of man is set in strong contrast to the power and lovingkindness of God, and the dehortation from trust in material wealth urged as the negative side of the previous exhortation to trust in God.

The noble saying of ver. 1 *a* is hard to translate without weakening. The initial word may have the meanings of "Only" or "Surely." The former seems more appropriate in this psalm, where it occurs six times, in one only of which (ver. 4) does the latter seem the more natural rendering, though even there the other is possible. It is, however, to be noticed that its restrictive power is not always directed to the adjacent word; and here it may either present God as the exclusive object of the psalmist's waiting trust, or his whole

soul as being nothing else but silent resignation. The reference to God is favoured by ver. 2, but the other is possible. The psalmist's whole being is, as it were, but one stillness of submission. The noises of contending desires, the whispers of earthly hopes, the mutterings of short-sighted fears, the self-asserting accents of an insisting will, are hushed, and all his nature waits mutely for God's voice. No wonder that a psalm which begins thus should end with "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this"; for such waiting is never in vain. The soul that cleaves to God is still; and, being still, is capable of hearing the Divine whispers which deepen the silence which they bless. "There is no joy but calm"; and the secret of calm is to turn the current of the being to God. Then it is like a sea at rest.

The psalmist's silence finds voice, which does not break it, in saying over to himself what God is to him. His accumulation of epithets reminds us of Psalm xviii. 1, 2. Not only does his salvation come from God, but God Himself is the salvation which He sends forth like an angel. The recognition of God as his defence is the ground of "silence"; for if He is "my rock and my salvation," what can be wiser than to keep close to Him, and let Him do as He will? The assurance of personal safety is inseparable from such a thought of God. Nothing which does not shake the rock can shake the frail tent pitched on it. As long as the tower stands, its inhabitant can look down from his inaccessible fastness with equanimity, though assailed by crowds. Thus the psalmist turns swiftly, in the latter pair of verses making up the first strophe, to address remonstrances to his enemies, as engaged in a useless effort, and then drops direct address and speaks of their hostility and treachery. The precise meaning of parts of ver. 3 has been misapprehended, by reason of the peculiarities of some of the words and the condensed character of the imagery in *b*, *c*. The rendering above is substantially that generally accepted now. It sets in striking contrast the single figure of the psalmist and the multitude of his assailants. "All of you" rush upon a man like a pack of hounds on one defenceless creature, and try to break him down, as men put their shoulders to a wall in order to overthrow it. The partial success of the assault is hinted in the epithets applied to wall and fence, which are painted as beginning to give under pressure. Language of confidence sounds strangely in such circumstances. But the toppling wall, with all these strong men pushing at it, will "not be greatly moved." The assailants might answer the psalmist's "How long?" with defiant confidence that a short time only was needed to complete the begun ruin; but he, firm in his faith, though tottering in his fortunes, knows better, and in effect, tells them by his question that, however long they may press against his feebleness, they will never overthrow him. The bulging wall outlasts its would-be destroyers. But appeal to them is vain; for they have one settled purpose absorbing them—namely, to cast him down from his height. He is then, probably in some position of distinction, threatened by false friends, who are plotting his deposition, while their words are fair. All these circumstances agree well with the Davidic authorship.

The second strophe reiterates the refrain, with slight but significant variations, and substitutes for the address to and contemplation of the plot-

ters a meditation on the psalmist's own security, and an invitation to others to share it. In ver. 5 the refrain is changed from a declaration of the psalmist's silent waiting to self-exhortation thereto. Cheyne would assimilate the two verses by making both verbs imperatives; but that change destroys the beautiful play of feeling, so true to experience, which passes from consciousness of one's attitude towards God to effort at preserving it. No emotions, however blessed, deep, and real, will last, unless perpetually renewed. Like carbon points in electric lights, they burn away as they burn, and the light dies, unless there is some impulse which presses a fresh surface forward to receive the fiery kiss that changes its blackness into radiance. The "expectation" in ver. 5 *b* is substantially equivalent to the "salvation" in ver. 1 *b*. It means not the emotion (which could not be said to be "from Him"), but the thing expected, just as "hope" is used for the *res sperata*. The change in expression from "salvation" to "expectation" makes prominent the psalmist's attitude. In his silence his wistful eyes look up, watching for the first far-off brightening which tells him that help is on its road from the throne. Salvation will not come unexpected, and expectation will not look for succours in vain.

There may be deep meaning in the slight omission of "greatly" in the second refrain. Confidence has grown. The first hope was that the waiting heart should not be much shaken, that the tottering fence should not be quite thrown down; the second is that it shall not be shaken at all. An access of faith has poured into the singer's soul with his song; and now he has no thought of the crowd of assailants, who have faded from his sight because he is gazing on God. Hence the second pair of verses in this strophe (vv. 7, 8) substitutes for the description of their fierce rush the triumphant reiteration of what God is to the psalmist, and an invitation to others to come with him into that strong refuge. The transition to addressing the "people" is natural, if the psalm is David's. The phrase would then apply to his immediate followers, who were one with him in peril, and whom he would fain have one with him in trust. But the LXX. has another reading, which involves only the insertion of a letter, that may easily have dropped out, in the word rendered "time," and which makes the verse run more smoothly. It reads "all the congregation of the people," in which it is followed by Baethgen, Cheyne, and others. Whoever the psalmist was, he felt the impulse which follows all deep experience of the security that comes from hiding in God—namely, the longing to beckon in others out of the storm into peace. Every man who has learned that God is a refuge for him is thereby assured that He is the same for all men, and thereby moved to beseech them to make the like blessed discovery. The way into that hiding-place is trust. "Pour out before Him your heart," says the psalmist. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," says Paul. They both mean the same thing. We take refuge in our refuge when we set our faith on God, and tell Him all that threatens or troubles us. When we do, we are no longer in the open, defenceless before the rush of enemies, but housed in God, or, as Paul puts it, guarded in Christ Jesus, as in a fortress. No wonder that the psalm pauses for a

moment on that thought, and lets the notes of harp and horn impress it on the listeners!

The third strophe sets the emptiness of men in strong contrast to the sufficiency of God. "Vanity" is literally "a breath," and would better be so rendered in ver. 9, but for the recurrence of the verb from the same root in ver. 10, which requires the rendering "be not vain." It is desirable to preserve identity of translation, so as to retain the play of words. But by doing so ver. 9 is somewhat weakened. The eyes that have been looking on God are cleared to see the shadowy nothingness of men of all degrees. The differences of high and low dwindle when seen from that "high tower," as lower lands appear flat when viewed from a mountain top. They are but "breath," so fleeting, unsubstantial are they. They are a "lie," in so far as hopes directed to them are deceived and trust misplaced. The singer is not cynically proclaiming man's worthlessness, but asserting his insufficiency as the object of man's trust. His point of view is different from that of Psalm xxxix., though his words are the same. The "Only" which begins ver. 9 carries us back to the similar beginning of the preceding strophes, and brings out the true force of the following words, by suggesting the contrast between men and the God on whom the psalmist's soul waits in silence. That contrast may be further continued in ver. 9 *b*. The lowly and the lofty are in one scale. What is in the other, the solid weight of which sends them aloft as lighter? Is it pressing the metaphor too far to suppose that the psalmist is weighing the whole mass of men against God only? Heap them all together and balance them against Him, and the gathered mass does not weigh as much as an imponderable breath. Who could trust in that emptiness when he has God to trust in? Who would grasp shadows when he may cling to that eternal Substance?

The natural conclusion from ver. 9 follows in the exhortation of ver. 10, which completes the positive presentation of the true object of trust (ver. 8) by the warning against false refuges. The introduction of "oppression" and "robbery" is singular, for it can scarcely be supposed that the assailants of the psalmist are here addressed, and still less that his followers needed to be warned against these crimes. Cheyne, therefore, follows Graetz and others in reading "perverseness" for "oppression," and "crookedness" for "robbery"; but the alteration throws the clause out of harmony with the next clause. It may be that in ver 10 *a* the psalmist has in view unjust gain and in *b* justly acquired wealth, and that thus his two dehortations cover the whole ground of material riches, as if he had said, "Whether rightly or wrongly won, they are wrongly used if they are trusted in." The folly and misery of such trust are vigorously set forth by that word "become vain." The curse of misplaced confidence is that it brings down a man to the level of what he trusts in, as the blessing of wisely placed trust is that it lifts him to that level. Trust in vanity is vain, and makes the truster "vanity." Wind is not a nourishing diet. It may inflate, or, as Paul says about knowledge, may "puff up," but not "build up." Men are assimilated to the objects of their trust; and if these are empty, "so is every one that trusteth in them."

So far the psalmist has spoken. But his silent waiting has been rewarded with a clear voice

from heaven, confirming that of his faith. It is most natural to regard the double revelation received by the psalmist as repeated in the following proclamation of the two great aspects of the Divine nature—Power and Lovingkindness. The psalmist has learned that these two are not opposed nor separate, but blend harmoniously in God's nature, and are confluent in all His works. Power is softened and directed by Lovingkindness. Lovingkindness has as its instrument Omnipotence. The synthesis of these two is in the God whom men are invited to trust; and such trust can never be disappointed; for His Power and His Lovingkindness will co-operate to "render to a man according to his work." The last word of the psalm adds the conception of Righteousness to those of Power and Lovingkindness. But the psalmist seems to have in view mainly one direction in which that rendering "to a man according to his work" is active—namely, in answering the trust which turns away from human power which is weakness, and from human love which may change and must die, to anchor itself on the might and tenderness of God. Such "work of faith" will not be in vain; for these twin attributes of Power and Love are pledged to requite it with security and peace.

PSALM LXIII.

- 1 O God, my God art Thou, I seek Thee earnestly,
My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh pines for Thee,
In a dry and weary land, without water.
- 2 So in the sanctuary have I gazed on Thee,
To see Thy power and Thy glory.
- 3 For Thy lovingkindness is better than life,
[Therefore] my lips shall praise Thee.
- 4 So will I bless Thee while I live,
In Thy name will I lift my hands.
- 5 As [with] fat and marrow shall my soul be satisfied,
And with lips that joyfully shout shall my mouth praise Thee,
- 6 When I remember Thee on my bed,
Through the watches [of the night] do I meditate on Thee.
- 7 For Thou hast been a help for me,
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I shout for joy.
- 8 My soul cleaves [to and presses] after Thee,
Me does Thy right hand uphold.
- 9 But these—for its destruction they seek my soul;
They shall go into the undermost parts of the earth.
- 10 They shall be given over to the power of the sword,
The portion of jackals shall they be.
- 11 But the king shall rejoice in God,
Every one that swears by Him shall glory,
For the mouth of them that speak a lie shall be stopped.

If the psalmist is allowed to speak, he gives many details of his circumstances in his song. He is in a waterless and weary land, excluded from the sanctuary, followed by enemies seeking his life. He expects a fight, in which they are to fall

by the sword, and apparently their defeat is to lead to his restoration to his kingdom.

These characteristics converge on David. Cheyne has endeavoured to show that they fit the faithful Jews in the Maccabean period, and that the "king" in ver. 2 is "Jonathan or [better] Simon" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 99, and "Aids to Dev. Study of Crit.," 308 *seqq.*). But unless we are prepared to accept the dictum that "Pre-Jeremian such highly spiritual hymns obviously cannot be" (*u. s.*), the balance of probability will be heavily in favour of the Davidic origin.

The recurrence of the expression "My soul" in vv. 1, 5, 8, suggests the divisions into which the psalm falls. Following that clue, we recognise three parts, in each of which a separate phase of the experience of the soul in its communion with God is presented as realised in sequence by the psalmist. The soul longs and thirsts for God (vv. 1-4). The longing soul is satisfied in God (vv. 5-7). The satisfied soul cleaves to and presses after God (vv. 8-11). These stages melt into each other in the psalm as in experience, but are still discernible.

In the first strophe the psalmist gives expression in immortal words to his longing after God. Like many a sad singer before and after him, he finds in the dreary scene around an image of yet drearier experiences within. He sees his own mood reflected in the grey monotony of the sterile desert, stretching waterless on every side, and seamed with cracks, like mouths gaping for the rain that does not come. He is weary and thirsty; but a more agonising craving is in his spirit, and wastes his flesh. As in the kindred Psalms xlii., xliii., his separation from the sanctuary has dimmed his sight of God. He longs for the return of that vision in its former clearness. But even while he thirsts, he in some measure possesses, since his resolve to "seek earnestly" is based on the assurance that God is his God. In the region of the devout life the paradox is true that we long precisely because we have. Every soul is athirst for God; but unless a man can say, "Thou art my God," he knows not how to interpret nor where to slake his thirst, and seeks, not after the living Fountain of waters, but after muddy pools and broken cisterns.

Ver. 2 is difficult principally because the reference of the initial "So" is doubtful. By some it is connected with the first clause of ver. 1: "So"—i.e., as my God—"have I seen Thee." Others suppose a comparison to be made between the longing just expressed and former ones, and the sense to be, "With the same eager desire as now I feel in the desert have I gazed in the sanctuary." This seems the better view. Hupfeld proposes to transpose the two clauses, as the A.V. has done in its rendering, and thus gets a smoother run of thought. The immediate object of the psalmist's desire is thus declared to be "to behold Thy power and glory," and the "So" is substantially equivalent to "According as." If we retain the textual order of the clauses, and understand the first as paralleling the psalmist's desert longing with that which he felt in the sanctuary, the second clause will state the aim of the ardent gaze—namely, to "behold Thy power and Thy glory." These attributes were peculiarly manifested amid the imposing sanctities where the light of the Shechinah, which was especially designated as "the Glory," shone above the ark.

The first clause of ver. 3 is closely connected

with the preceding, and gives the reason for some part of the emotion there expressed, as the introductory "For" shows. But it is a question to which part of the foregoing verses it refers. It is probably best taken as assigning the reason for their main subject—namely, the psalmist's thirst after God. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Our desires are shaped by our judgments of what is good. The conviction of God's transcendent excellence and absolute sufficiency for all our cravings must precede the direction of these to Him. Unless all enjoyments and possessions, which become ours through our corporeal life, and that life itself, are steadfastly discerned to be but a feather's weight in comparison with the pure gold of God's lovingkindness, we shall not long for it more than for them.

The deep desires of this psalmist were occasioned by his seclusion from outward forms of worship, which were to him so intimately related to the inward reality, that he felt farther away from God in the wilderness than when he caught glimpses of His face, through the power and glory which he saw visibly manifested in the sanctuary. But in his isolation he learns to equate his desert yearnings with his sanctuary contemplations, and thus glides from longing to fruition. His devotion, nourished by forms, is seen in the psalm in the very act of passing on to independence of form; and so springs break out for him in the desert. His passion of yearning after God rebukes and shames our faint desires. This man's soul was all on the stretch to grasp and hold God. His very physical frame was affected by his intense longing. If he did not long too much, most men, even those who thirst after God most, long terribly too little. Strong desire has a joy in its very aching; feeble desire only makes men restless and uncomfortable. Nothing can be more preposterous than tepid aspirations after the greatest and only good. To hold as creed that God's lovingkindness is better than life, and to wish a little to possess it, is surely irrational, if anything is so.

The remaining clauses of ver. 3 and ver. 4 form a transition to the full consciousness of satisfaction which animates the psalmist in the second part. The resolve to praise, and the assurance that he will have occasion to praise, succeed his longing with startling swiftness. The "So" of ver. 4 seems to be equivalent to "Accordingly"—i. e., since Thy lovingkindness is such supreme good, and is mine because I have desired it. Continual praise and as continual invocation are the fitting employments of those who receive it, and by these alone can their possession of the lovingkindness bestowed be made permanent. If empty palms are not ever lifted towards God, His gifts will not descend. When these are received, they will fall like morning sunbeams on stony and dumb lips, which before were only parted to let out sighs, and will draw forth music of praise. There are longings which never are satisfied; but God lets no soul that thirsts for Him perish for lack of the water of life. Wisdom bids us fix our desires on that Sovereign Good, to long for which is ennobling and blessed, and to possess which is rest and the beginning of heaven.

Thus the psalmist passes imperceptibly to the second strophe, in which the longing soul becomes the satisfied soul. The emblem of a feast is naturally suggested by the previous metaphor of thirst. The same conviction, which urged the

psalmist forward in his search after God, now assures him of absolute satisfaction in finding Him. Since God's lovingkindness is better than life, the soul that possesses Him can have no unappeased cravings, nor any yet hungry affections or wishes. In the region of communion with God, fruition is contemporaneous with and proportioned to desire. When the rain comes in the desert, what was baked earth is soon rich pasture, and the dry torrent beds, where the white stones glittered ghastly in the sunshine, are musical with rushing streams and fringed with budding oleanthers. On that telegraph a message is flashed upwards and an answer speeds downwards, in a moment of time. Many of God's gifts are delayed by Love; but the soul that truly desires Him has never long to wait for a gift that equals its desire.

When God is possessed, the soul is satisfied. So entire is the correspondence between wants and gift, that every concavity in us finds, as it were, a convexity to match it in Him. The influx of the great ocean of God fills every curve of the shore to the brim, and the flashing glory of that sunlit sea covers the sands, and brings life where stagnation reigned and rotted. So the satisfied soul lives to praise, as the psalm goes on to vow. Lips that drink such draughts of Lovingkindness will not be slow to tell its sweetness. If we have nothing to say about God's goodness, the probable cause is our want of experience of it.

That feast leaves no bitter taste. The remembrance of it is all but as sweet as its enjoyment was. Thus, in ver. 6, the psalmist recounts how, in the silent hours of night, when many joys are seen to be hollow, and conscience wakes to condemn coarse delights, he recalled his blessednesses in God, and, like a ruminant animal, tasted their sweetness a second time. The verse is best regarded as an independent sentence. So blessed was the thought of God, that, if once it rose in his wakeful mind as he lay on his bed, he "meditated" on it all the night. Hasty glances show little of anything great. Nature does not unveil her beauty to a cursory look; much less does God disclose His. If we would feel the majesty of the heavens, we must gaze long and steadfastly into their violet depths. The mention of the "night-watches" is appropriate, if this psalm is David's. He and his band of fugitives had to keep vigilant guard as they lay down shelterless in the desert; but even when thus ringed by possible perils, and listening for the shout of nocturnal assailants, the psalmist could recreate and calm his soul by meditation on God. Nor did his experience of God's sufficiency bring only remembrances; it kindled hopes. "For Thou hast been a help for me; and in the shadow of Thy wings will I shout for joy." Past deliverances minister to present trust and assure of future joy. The prerogative of the soul, blessed in the sense of possessing God, is to discern in all that has been the manifestations of His help, and to anticipate in all that is to come the continuance of the same. Thus the second strophe gathers up the experiences of the satisfied soul as being fruition, praise, sweet lingering memories that fill the night of darkness and fear, and settled trust in the coming of a future which will be of a piece with such a present and past.

The third strophe (vv. 8-11) presents a stage in the devout soul's experience which naturally follows the two preceding. Ver. 8 has a beauti-

fully pregnant expression for the attitude of the satisfied soul. Literally rendered, the words run, "cleaves after Thee," thus uniting the ideas of close contact and eager pursuit. Such union, however impossible in the region of lower aims, is the very characteristic of communion with God, in which fruition subsists along with longing, since God is infinite, and the closest approach to and fullest possession of Him are capable of increase. Satisfaction tends to become satiety when that which produces it is a creature whose limits are soon reached; but the cup which God gives to a thirsty soul has no cloying in its sweetness. On the other hand, to seek after Him has no pain nor unrest along with it, since the desire for fuller possession comes from the felt joy of present attainment. Thus, in constant interchange satisfaction and desire beget each other, and each carries with it some trace of the other's blessedness.

Another beautiful reciprocity is suggested by the very order of the words in the two clauses of ver. 8. The first ends with "Thee"; the second begins with "Me." The mutual relation of God and the soul is here set forth. He who "cleaves after God" is upheld in his pursuit by God's hand. And not in his pursuit only, but in all his life; for the condition of receiving sustaining help is desire for it, directed to God and verified by conduct. Whoever thus follows hard after God will feel his outstretched, seeking hand inclosed in a strong and loving palm, which will steady him against assaults and protect him in dangers. "No man is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand," if only they do not let it go. It may slip from slack fingers.

We ascend from the heights of mystic communion in the remainder of the psalm. But in the singer's mind his enemies were God's enemies, and, as ver. 11 shows, were regarded as apostates from God in being traitors to "the king." They did not "swear by Him"—i.e., they did not acknowledge God as God. Therefore, such being their character, the psalmist's confidence that God's right hand upheld him necessarily passes into assurance of their defeat. This is not vindictiveness, but confidence in the sufficiency of God's protection, and is perfectly accordant with the lofty strains of the former part of the psalm. The picture of the fate of the beaten foe is partly drawn from that of Korah and his company. These rebels against God's king shall go where those rebels against His priest long ago descended. "They shall be poured out upon the hands of the sword," or, more literally still, "They shall pour him out," is a vigorous metaphor, incapable of transference into English, describing how each single enemy is given over helplessly, as water is poured out, to the sword, which is energetically and to our taste violently, conceived of as a person with hands. The meaning is plain—a battle is impending, and the psalmist is sure that his enemies will be slain, and their corpses torn by beasts of prey.

How can the "king's" rejoicing in God be the consequence of their slaughter, unless they are rebels? And what connection would the defeat of a rebellion have with the rest of the psalm unless the singer were himself the king? "This one line devoted to the king is strange," says Cheyne. The strangeness is unaccounted for, but on the supposition that David is the king and singer. If so, it is most natural that his song should end with

a note of triumph, and should anticipate the joy of his own heart and the "glorying" of his faithful followers, who had been true to God in being loyal to His anointed.

PSALM LXIV.

- 1 Hear, O God, my voice in my complaint,
From the fear of the enemy guard my life.
- 2 Hide me from the secret assembly of evil-doers,
From the noisy crowd of workers of iniquity:
- 3 Who whet, like a sword, their tongue,
[Who] aim [as] their arrow a bitter word,
- 4 To shoot in hiding-places [at] the upright:
Suddenly they shoot [at] him, and fear not.
- 5 They strengthen themselves [in] an evil plan,
They talk of laying snares,
They say, Who looks at them?
- 6 They scheme villainies,
We have perfected [say they] a scheme [well] schemed:
And the inward part of each, and [his] heart, is deep.
- 7 But God shoots [at] them [with] an arrow,
Suddenly come their wounds.
- 8 And they are made to stumble,
Their own tongue [comes] upon them,
All who look on them shake the head.
- 9 And all men fear,
And declare the act of God,
And understand His work.
- 10 The righteous shall rejoice in Jehovah, and
take refuge in Him,
And all the upright in heart shall glory.

FAMILIAR notes are struck in this psalm, which has no very distinctive features. Complaint of secret slanderers, the comparison of their words to arrows and swords, their concealed snares, their blasphemous defiance of detection, the sudden flashing out of God's retribution, the lesson thereby read to and learned by men, the vindication of God's justice, and praise from all true hearts, are frequent themes. They are woven here into a whole which much resembles many other psalms. But the singer's heart is none the less in his words because many others before him have had to make like complaints and to stay themselves on like confidence. "We have all of us one human heart," and well-worn words come fresh to each lip when the grip of sorrow is felt.

The division into pairs of verses is clear here. The burdened psalmist begins with a cry for help, passes on to dilate on the plots of his foes, turns swiftly from these to confidence in God, which brings future deliverance into present peril and sings of it as already accomplished, and ends with the assurance that his enemies' punishment will witness for God and gladden the upright.

In the first pair of verses complaint is sublimed into prayer, and so becomes strengthening instead of weakening. He who can cry "Hear, O God, guard, hide" has already been able to hide in a safe refuge. "The terror caused by the enemy" is already dissipated when the trembling heart grasps at God; and escape from facts which warrant terror will come in good time. This man knows himself to be in danger of his life. There

are secret gatherings of his enemies, and he can almost hear their loud voices as they plan his ruin. What can he do, in such circumstances, but fling himself on God? No thought of resistance has he. He can *but* pray, but he *can* pray; and no man is helpless who can look up. However high and closely engirdling may be the walls that men or sorrows build around us, there is always an opening in the dungeon roof, through which heaven is visible and prayers can mount.

The next two pairs of verses (3-6) describe the machinations of the enemies in language for the most part familiar, but presenting some difficulties. The metaphors of a slanderous tongue as a sword and mischief-meaning words as arrows have occurred in several other psalms (e.g., lv. 21; lvii. 4; lix. 7). The reference may either be to calumnies or to murderous threats and plans. The latter is the more probable. Secret plots are laid, which are suddenly unmasked. From out of some covert of seeming friendship an unlooked-for arrow whizzes. The archers "shoot, and fear not." They are sure of remaining concealed, and fear neither man's detection of them nor God's.

The same ideas are enlarged on in the third verse-pair (5, 6) under a new metaphor. Instead of arrows flying in secret, we have now snares laid to catch unsuspecting prey. "They strengthen themselves [in] an evil plan" (lit. *word*) pictures mutual encouragement and fixed determination. They discuss the best way of entrapping the psalmist, and, as in the preceding verse, flatter themselves that their subtle schemes are too well buried to be observed, whether by their victim or by God. Ver. 6 tells without a figure the fact meant in both figures. "They scheme villainies," and plume themselves upon the cleverness of their unsuspected plots. The second clause of the verse is obscure. But the suppositions that in it the plotters speak as in the last clause of the preceding verse, and that "they say" or the like expression is omitted for the sake of dramatic effect, remove much of the difficulty. "We have schemed a well-schemed plan" is their complacent estimate.

God's retribution scatters their dreams of impunity, as the next pair of verses (7, 8) tells. The verbs are in the past tense, though the events described are still in the future; for the psalmist's faith reckons them to be as good as done. They were shooting at him. God will shoot at them. The archer becomes a target. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Punishment is moulded after the guise of sin. The allusion to ver. 4 is made more obvious by adopting a different division of ver. 7 from that directed by the accents, and beginning the second half with "Suddenly," as in ver. 4. Ver. 8 *b* is with difficulty made intelligible with the existing reading. Probably the best that can be done with it is to render it as above, though it must be acknowledged that "their tongue comes upon them" needs a good deal of explanation to be made to mean that the consequences of their sins of speech fall on them. The drift of the clause must be that retribution falls on the offending tongue; but there is probably some textual corruption now unremovable. Cheyne wisely falls back on asterisks. Whatever is the precise nature of the instance of *lex talionis* in the clause, it is hailed with gestures of scornful approval by all beholders. Many men approve the Divine punishments, who have no deep horror of the sins that are punished.

There is something of a noble, if rough, sense of justice in most men, and something of an ignoble satisfaction in seeing the downfall of the powerful, and both sentiments set heads nodding approval of God's judgments.

The psalm closes with the familiar thought that these judgments will move to wholesome awe and be told from lip to lip while they become to the righteous occasion of joy, incitements to find refuge in God, and material for triumph. These are large consequences to flow from one man's deliverance. The anticipation would be easily explained if we took the speaker to be the personified nation. But it would be equally intelligible if he were in any way a conspicuous or representative person. The humblest may feel that his experience of Divine deliverance witnesses, to as many as know it, of a delivering God. That is a high type of godliness which, like this psalmist, counts the future as so certain that it can be spoken of as present even in peril. It augurs a still higher to welcome deliverance, not only for the ease it brings to the suppliant, but for the glory it brings to God.

PSALM LXV.

- 1 To Thee silence is praise, O God, in Zion,
And to Thee shall the vow be paid.
- 2 O Thou hearer of prayer,
To Thee all flesh comes.
- 3 Deeds of iniquity have been too strong for me:
Our transgressions—Thou, Thou coverest them.
- 4 Blessed is he whom Thou choosest and bringest near,
That he may dwell in Thy courts:
We would be filled with the goodness of Thy house,
Thy holy temple.
- 5 By dread deeds in righteousness Thou dost answer us, O God of our salvation.
The confidence of all the ends of the earth and of the remotest sea:
- 6 Setting fast the mountains by His strength,
Being girded with might,
- 7 Stilling the roar of the seas, the roar of their billows,
And the tumult of the peoples.
- 8 So that the inhabitants of the ends [of the earth] become afraid at Thy signs:
The regions whence morning and evening come forth
Thou makest to shout for joy.
- 9 Thou hast visited the land and watered it,
Thou enrichest it abundantly [by] a river of God, full of water.
Thou providest their corn when thus Thou preparest it:
- 10 Watering its furrows, levelling its ridges,
With showers Thou softenest it,
Its outgrowth Thou dost bless.
- 11 Thou hast crowned the year of Thy goodness,
And Thy chariot-tracks drop fatness.
- 12 The pastures of the wilderness drop,
And the heights gird themselves with leaping gladness.
- 13 The meadows are clothed with flocks,
And the valleys are covered with corn,
They shout for joy, they also sing.

THIS and the two following psalms form a little group, with one great thought dominant in each—namely, that God's manifestations of grace and providence to Israel are witnesses to the world. They all reach out to "the ends of the earth" in yearning and confidence that God's name will be adored there, and they all regard His dealings with His people as His appeals to mankind, which will not always be vain. Psalm lxxv. begins with that privilege of approach to God with which Psalm lxxvi. ends. In both, iniquity in heart is regarded as hindering access to God; and, in both, the psalmist's experience of answered prayer is treated as testimony for the world of the blessedness of worshipping Israel's God. This psalm falls into three parts, which set forth a threefold revelation of God in His acts. The first (vv. 1-4) deals with the most intimate privileges of the men who dwell in His house. The second (vv. 5-8) points to His rule in nature, the tokens of God's power in the mighty things of creation—mountains, ocean, day and night, the radiant east, the solemn sunset-west. The third (vv. 9-13) gives a lovely picture of the annual miracle which brings harvest joys. The underlying thought binding these three parts into unity seems to be the witness to God's name which each set of His acts bears—a witness which "they that dwell in the uttermost parts" hear sounded in their ears. If this is the true view of the psalm, we may hear a reminiscence of it in Paul's remonstrance with the rude Lycaonian peasants: "He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness."

The first strophe is wholly concerned with the glory of God as answering prayer. It begins with enigmatical words, which, if the existing text is adhered to, carry a deep truth. There are two kinds of prayer—wordless submission of will and spoken vows. The former is truly praise. The same thought is found in Psalm lxxii. It goes down to the root of the matter. The true notion of prayer is not that of swaying God's will to gratify ours, but that of bringing ours into unremonstrating acceptance of His. When the accents of eager desire or of impatient murmuring and vain sobs and weeping are hushed, the still soul enters into closeness of communion, else unattainable. Beautiful and profoundly true as this is, it is not indubitably the psalmist's meaning; and there is much to be said for the rendering which is adopted from the LXX. by many commentators, and which only requires a slight change in the vocalisation—namely, "Praise is meet for Thee." But that idea is expressed in Psalm xxxiii. 1 by a different word, and the meaning of the one used here is not *to be suitable for*, but *to be like*. So that we have to choose between altering the text and then imposing a somewhat unusual meaning on the word gained, and adhering to the present reading and gaining a meaning which is admitted to be "fine" but alleged to be "unbiblical." On the whole, that meaning seems preferable. The convictions that God accepts silent devotion and answers vows, so that the thank-offering promised in trouble will be called for by deliverance, "fill the psalmist with a longing that all mankind may have recourse to the same Divine Friend" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). His experience of accepted prayers has taught him that it is God's nature and property to be "the hearer of prayer" (the word is a par-

tiple, expressive of a permanent characteristic), and therefore he is sure that "all flesh," in its weariness and need of an ear into which to pour necessities and sorrows, will come to Him. His eye travels far beyond Israel, and contemplates mankind as coming to worship. But one black barrier rises between men and God, the separating power of which the singer has painfully felt. Sin chokes the stream that would flow from seeking hearts into the ocean of God. The very act of gathering himself up to pray and praise quickens the sense of sinfulness in the psalmist. Therefore his look turns swiftly inwards, for the only time in the psalm. The consciousness of transgression wakes the sense of personality and isolation as nothing else will, and for one bitter moment the singer is, as it were, prisoned in the awful solitude of individual responsibility. His words reflect his vivid sight of his sins in their manifoldness, for he says that "matters of iniquities" have overcome him. The exuberant expression is not tautological, but emotional. And then he passes into sunshine again, and finds that, though he had to be alone in guilt, he is one of a company in the experience of forgiveness. Emphatically he reduplicates "Thou" in his burst of confidence in God's covering of sins; for none but God can cope with the evil things that are too strong for man. I can neither keep them out, nor drive them out when they have come in, nor cleanse the stains that their hoofs have made; but Thou, Thou earnest and dost cover them. Is not that an additional reason for "all flesh" coming to God, and almost a guarantee that they will?

The strophe ends with an exclamation celebrating the blessedness of dwelling with God. That refers, no doubt, to Israel's prerogative of access to the Temple; but the inward and outward are blended, as in many places in the Psalter where dwelling in the house of the Lord is yearned for or rejoiced in. The universalism of the psalm does not forget the special place held by the nation whom God "has chosen and brought near." But the reality beneath the symbol is too familiar and sweet to this singer for him to suppose that mere outward access exhausts the possibilities of blessed communion. It is no violent forcing more into his words than they contain, if we read in them deeply spiritual truths. It is noteworthy that they follow the reference to forgiveness, and, when taken in conjunction therewith, may be called an itinerary of the road to God. First comes forgiveness by expiation, for such is the meaning of "covering." Then the cleansed soul has "access with confidence"; then approaching, it happily dwells a guest in the house and is supplied with that which satisfies all desires. The guest's security in the house of his host, his right to protection, help, and food, are, as usual, implied in the imagery. The prerogative of his nation, which the psalmist had in mind, is itself imagery, and the reality which it shadowed is that close abiding in God which is possible by faith, love, communion of spirit, and obedience of life, and which, wherever realised, keeps a soul in a great calm, whatever tempests rave, and satisfies its truest needs and deepest longings, whatever famine may afflict the outward life. Forgiven men may dwell with God. They who do are blessed.

The second strophe (vv. 5-8) celebrates another aspect of God's manifestation by deeds, which has, in like manner, a message for the ends of the earth. Israel is again the immediate recipient of

God's acts, but they reverberate through the world. Therefore in ver. 5 the two clauses are not merely adjacent, but connected. It is because God is ever revealing Himself to the nation (for the tense of the verb "answer" expresses continuous action) that He is revealed as the trust of the whole earth. God's grace fructifies through Israel to all. How clearly the psalmist had grasped the truth that God has limited the knowledge of Himself to one spot of earth in order to its universal diffusion!

The light is focussed and set in a tower that it may shine out over sea and storm. The fire is gathered into a brasier that it may warm all the house. Some commentators take that strong expression "the trust of all the ends of the earth" as asserting that even the confidences of idolaters in their gods are at bottom trust in Jehovah and find their way to Him. But such a view of idolatry is foreign to the Old Testament, and is not needed to explain the psalmist's words. God is the only worthy object of trust, and remains so whether men do in fact trust Him or not. And one day, thinks the psalmist, God's patient manifestation of His grace to Israel will tell, and all men will come to know Him for what He is. "The remotest sea" is not translation, but paraphrase. The psalmist speaks in vague terms, as one who knew not what lay beyond the horizon of that little-traversed western ocean. Literally his words are "the sea of the remote [peoples]"; but a possible emendation has been suggested, reading instead of *sea* "regions" or "nations." The change is slight, and smooths an awkward expression, but destroys the antithesis of earth and sea, and makes the second clause a somewhat weak repetition of the first.

From the self-revelation of God in history the psalm passes to His mighty deeds in nature (vv. 6, 7 *a*), and from these it returns to His providential guidance of human affairs (ver. 7 *b*). The two specimens of Divine power celebrated in vv. 6, 7, are suggested by the closing words of ver. 5. "The ends of the earth" were, according to ancient cosmography, girdled by mountains; and God has set these fast. The dash of "the remotest seas" is hushed by Him. Two mighty things are selected to witness to the Mightier who made and manages them. The firm bulk of the mountains is firm because He is strong. The tossing waves are still because He bids them be silent. How transcendently great then is He, and how blind those who, seeing hill and ocean, do not see God! The mention of the sea, the standing emblem of unrest and rebellious power suggests the "tumult of the peoples," on which similar repressive power is exercised. The great deeds of God, putting down tyranny and opposition to Israel, which is rebellion against Himself, strike terror, which is wholesome and is purified into reverence, into the distant lands; and so, from the place where the sun rises to the "sad-coloured end of evening" where it sinks in the west, *i.e.*, through all the earth, there rings out a shout of joy. Such glowing anticipations of universal results from the deeds of God, especially for Israel, are the products of diseased national vanity, unless they are God-taught apprehension of the Divine purpose of Israel's history, which shall one day be fulfilled, when the knowledge of the yet more wondrous deeds which culminated in the Cross is spread to the ends of the earth and the remotest seas.

God reveals Himself not only in the sanctities of His house, nor in His dread "signs" in nature and history, but in the yearly recurring harvest, which was waving as yet unreaped, while the poet sang. The local colouring which regards rain as the chief factor in fertility and the special gift of God is noticeable. In such a land as Palestine, irrigation seems the one thing needful to turn desert into fruitful field. To "water" the soil is there emphatically to "enrich" it. The psalmist uses for "river" the technical word for an irrigation cutting, as if he would represent God in the guise of the cultivator, who digs his ditches that the sparkling blessing may reach all his field. But what a difference between men-made water-courses and God's! The former are sometimes flooded, but often dry; His are full of water. The prose of the figure is, of course, abundant rain. It prepares the earth for the seed, and "so" in effect prepares the corn. The one is the immediate, the other the ultimate issue and purpose. Spring showers prepare autumn fruits. It is so in all regions of man's endeavour and of God's work; and it is practical wisdom to train ourselves to see the assurance of the end in His means, and to be confident that whatever His doings have a manifest tendency to effect shall one day be ripened and harvested. How lovingly and patiently the psalm represents the Divine Husbandman as attending to all the steps of the process needed for the great ingathering! He guides the showers, he fills the little valleys of the furrows, and smooths down the tiny hills of the intervening ridges. He takes charge of the germinating seed, and His sunshine smiles a benediction on the tender green blade, as it pricks through the earth which has been made soft enough for it to pierce from beneath. This unhesitating recognition of the direct action of God in all "natural" processes is the true point of view from which to regard them. God is the only force; and His immediate action is present in all material changes. The Bible knows nothing of self-moving powers in nature, and the deepest conception of God's relations to things sensible knows as little. "There is no power but of God" is the last word of religion and of true philosophy.

The poet stands in the joyous time when all the beauty of summer flushes the earth, and the harvest is yet a hope, not a possibly disappointing reality. It is near enough to fill his song with exultation. It is far enough off to let him look on the whitened fields, and not on the bristly stubble. So he regards the "crown" as already set on a year of goodness. He sees God's chariot passing in triumph and blessing over the land, and leaving abundance wherever its wheel-tracks go. Out in the uncultivated prairie, where sweet grass unsown by man grows, is the flush of greenery, where, before the rain, was baked and gaping earth. The hills, that wear a girdle of forest trees half-way up towards their barren summits, wave their foliage, as if glad. The white fleeces of flocks are dotted over the vivid verdure of every meadow, and one cannot see the ground for the tall corn that stands waiting **for the sickle, in each fertile plain.** The psalmist hears a hymn of glad praise rising from all these happy and sunny things; and for its melody he hushes his own, that he and we may listen to

"The fair music that all creatures make
To their great Lord."

PSALM LXVI.

- 1 Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
- 2 Harp [unto] the glory of His name,
Render glory [to Him by] His praise.
- 3 Say to God, How dread are Thy works!
For the greatness of Thy strength shall Thy
enemies feign [submission] to Thee.
- 4 All the earth shall bow down to Thee, and
harp to Thee,
They shall harp [to] Thy name. Selah.
- 5 Come, and behold the deeds of God;
He is dread in His doing towards the sons of
men.
- 6 He turned the sea to dry land,
They went through the river on foot,
There let us rejoice in Him.
- 7 He rules by His might for ever;
His eyes watch the nations,
The rebellious—let them not exalt themselves.
Selah.
- 8 Bless our God, ye peoples,
And let the voice of His praise be heard!
- 9 Who has set our soul in life,
And has not let our foot slip.
- 10 For Thou hast proved us, O God,
Thou hast refined us, as silver is refined.
- 11 Thou hast brought us into the fortress-dun-
geon,
Thou hast laid a heavy burden on our loins.
- 12 Thou hast caused men to ride over our head,
We have come into the fire and into the water,
But Thou broughtest us out into abundance.
- 13 I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings,
I will render to Thee my vows,
- 14 Which my lips uttered,
And my mouth spoke, in my straits.
- 15 Burnt offerings of fatlings will I offer to Thee,
With the savour of rams,
I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah.
- 16 Come, hearken, and I will recount, all ye that
fear God,
What He has done for my soul.
- 17 To Him did I cry with my mouth,
And a song extolling [Him] was [already]
under my tongue.
- 18 If I had intended iniquity in my heart,
The Lord would not hear:
- 19 But surely God has heard,
He has attended to the voice of my prayer.
- 20 Blessed be God,
Who has not turned away my prayer, nor His
lovingkindness from me.

THE most striking feature of this psalm is the transition from the plural "we" and "our," in vv. 1-12, to the singular "I" and "my," in vv. 13-20. Ewald supposes that two independent psalms have been united, but ver. 12 is as abrupt for an ending as ver. 13 is for a beginning; and the "Come, hear," of ver. 16 echoes the "Come, and see," of ver. 5. It is possible that the "I" of the second part is identical with the "we" of the first; in other words, that the personified community speaks here" (Baethgen); but the supposition that the psalm was meant for public worship, and is composed of a choral and a solo part, accounts for the change of number. Such expressions as "my soul" and "my heart" favour the individual reference. Of course, the deliverance magnified by the single voice is the same as that

celebrated by the loud acclaim of many tongues; but there is a different note in the praise of the former—there is a tone of inwardness in it, befitting individual appropriation of general blessings. To this highest point, that of the action of the single soul in taking the deliverances of the community for its very own, and pouring out its own praise, the psalm steadily climbs. It begins with the widest outlook over “all the earth,” summoned to ring forth joyous praise. It ends focussed to one burning point, in a heart fired by the thought that God “has not turned away his lovingkindness from me.” So we learn how each single soul has to claim its several part in world-wide blessings, as each flower-calyx absorbs the sunshine that floods the pastures.

The psalm has no superscription of date or author, and no clue in its language to the particular deliverance that called it forth. The usual variety of conjectures have been hazarded. The defeat of Sennacherib occurs to some; the return from Babylon to others; the Maccabean period to yet another school of critics. It belongs to a period when Israel's world-significance and mission were recognised (which Cheyne considers a post-exilic feature, “Orig. of Psalt.” 176), and when the sacrificial worship was in full force; but beyond these there are no clear data for period of composition.

It is divided into five strophes, three of which are marked by *Selah*. That musical indication is wanting at the close of the third strophe (ver. 12), which is also the close of the first or choral part, and its absence may be connected with the transition to a single voice. A certain progress in thought is noticeable, as will appear as we proceed. The first strophe calls upon all the earth to praise God for His works. The special deeds which fire the psalmist are not yet mentioned, though they are present to his mind. The summons of the world to praise passes over into the prophecy that it shall praise. The manifestation of God's character by act will win homage. The great thought that God has but to be truly known in order to be revered is an axiom with this psalmist; and no less certain is he that such knowledge and such praise will one day fill the world. True, he discerns that submission will not always be genuine; for he uses the same word to express it as occurs in Psalm xviii. 44, which represents “feigned homage.” Every great religious awakening has a fringe of adherents, imperfectly affected by it, whose professions outrun reality, though they themselves are but half-conscious that they feign. But though this sobering estimate of the shallowness of a widely diffused recognition of God tones down the psalmist's expectations, and has been abundantly confirmed by later experience, his great hope remains as an early utterance of the conviction, which has gathered assurance and definiteness by subsequent Revelation, and is now familiar to all. The world is God's. His Self-revelation will win hearts. There shall be true submission and joyous praise girdling the earth as it rolls. The psalmist dwells mainly on the majestic and awe-inspiring aspect of God's acts. His greatness of power bears down opposition. But the later strophes introduce other elements of the Divine nature and syllables of the Name, though the inmost secret of the “power of God” in the weakness of manhood and the all-conquering might of Love is not yet ripe for utterance.

The second strophe advances to a closer contemplation of the deeds of God, which the nations are summoned to behold. He is not only “dread” in His doings towards mankind at large, but Israel's history is radiant with the manifestation of His name, and that past lives on, so that ancient experiences give the measure and manner of to-day's working. The retrospect embraces the two standing instances of God's delivering help—the passage of the Red Sea and of Jordan—and these are not dead deeds in a far-off century. For the singer calls on his own generation to rejoice “there” in Him. Ver. 6 c is by some translated as “There did we rejoice,” and more accurately by others, “Let us rejoice.” In the former case the essential solidarity of all generations of the nation is most vividly set forth. But the same idea is involved in the correct rendering, according to which the men of the psalmist's period are entitled and invoked to associate themselves in thought with that long-past generation, and to share in their joy, since they do possess the same power which wrought then. God's work is never antiquated. It is all a revelation of eternal activities. What He has been, He is. What He did, He does. Therefore faith may feed on all the records of old time, and expect the repetition of all that they contain. Such an application of history to the present makes the nerve of this strophe. For ver. 7, following on the retrospect, declares the perpetuity of God's rule, and that His eyes still keep an outlook, as a watchman on a tower might do, to mark the enemies' designs, in order that He may intervene, as of old, for His people's deliverance. He “looked forth upon the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud” (Exod. xiv. 24). Thus He still marks the actions and plans of Israel's foes. Therefore it were wise for the “rebellious” not to rear their heads so high in opposition.

The third strophe comes still closer to the particular deliverance underlying the psalm. Why should all “peoples” be called upon to praise God for it? The psalmist has learned that Israel's history is meant to teach the world what God is, and how blessed it is to dwell under His wing. No exclusiveness taints his enjoyment of special national privileges. He has reached a height far above the conceptions of the rest of the world in his day, and even in this day, except where the Christian conception of “humanity” has been heartily accepted. Whence came this width of view, this purifying from particularism, this anticipation by so many centuries of a thought imperfectly realised even now? Surely a man who in those days and with that environment could soar so high must have been lifted by something mightier than his own spirit. The details of the Divine dealings described in the strophe are of small consequence in comparison with its fixed expectation of the world's participation in Israel's blessings. The familiar figures for affliction reappear—namely, proving and refining in a furnace. A less common metaphor is that of being prisoned in a *dungeon*, as the word rendered “net” in the A.V. and R.V. probably means. Another peculiar image is that of ver. 12: “Thou hast caused men to ride over our head.” The word for “men” here connotes feebleness and frailty, characteristics which make tyranny more intolerable; and the somewhat harsh metaphor is best explained as setting forth insolent and crushing domination, whether the picture intended is

that of ruthless conquerors driving their chariots over their prone victims, or that of their sitting as an incubus on their shoulders and making them like beasts of burden. Fire and water are standing figures for affliction. With great force these accumulated symbols of oppression are confronted by one abrupt clause ending the strophe, and describing in a breath the perfect deliverance which sweeps them all away: "Thou broughtest us out into abundance." There is no need for the textual alteration of the last word into "a wide place" (Hupfeld), a place of liberty (Cheyne), or freedom (Baethgen). The word in the received text is that employed in Psalm xxiii. 5. "My cup is *overflowing*" and "abundance" yields a satisfactory meaning here, though not closely corresponding to any of the preceding metaphors for affliction.

The fourth strophe (vv. 13-15) begins the solo part. It clothes in a garb appropriate to a sacrificial system the thought expressed in more spiritual dress in the next strophe, that God's deliverance should evoke men's praise. The abundance and variety of sacrifices named, and the fact that "rams" were not used for the offerings of individuals, seem to suggest that the speaker is, in some sense, representing the nation, and it has been supposed that he may be the high priest. But this is merely conjecture, and the explanation may be that there is a certain ideal and poetical tone over the representation, which does not confine itself to scrupulous accuracy.

The last strophe (vv. 16-20) passes beyond sacrificial symbols, and gives the purest utterance to the emotions and resolves which ought to well up in a devout soul on occasion of God's goodness. Not only does the psalmist teach us how each individual must take the general blessing for his very own—of which act the faith which takes the world's Christ for my Christ is the supreme example—but he teaches us that the obligation laid on all recipients of God's mercy is to tell it forth, and that the impulse is as certain to follow real reception as the command is imperative. Just as Israel received deliverances that the whole earth might learn how strong and gracious was Israel's God, we receive His blessings, and chiefly His highest gift of life in Christ, not only that we may live, but that, living, we may "declare the works of the Lord." He has little possession of God's grace who has not felt the necessity of speech, and the impossibility of the lips being locked when the heart is full.

The psalmist tells his experience of God's answers to his prayer in a very striking fashion. Ver. 17 says that he cried to God; and while his uttered voice was supplication, the song extolling God for the deliverance asked was, as it were, lying under his tongue, ready to break forth,—so sure was he that his cry would be heard. That is a strong faith which prepares banners and music for the triumph before the battle is fought. It would be presumptuous folly, not faith, if it rested on anything less certain than God's power and will.

"I find David making a syllogism in mood and figure. . . . 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; but verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer.' Now, I expected that David would have concluded thus 'Therefore I regard not wickedness in my heart.' But far otherwise he concludes: 'Blessed be God, who hath not turned

away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.' Thus David hath deceived but not wronged me. I looked that he should have clapped the crown on his own, and he puts it on God's head. I will learn this excellent logic." So says Fuller ("Good Thoughts in Bad Times," p. 34, Pickering's ed., 1841). No doubt, however, the psalmist means to suggest, though he does not state, that his prayer was sincere. There is no self-complacent attribution of merit to his supplication, in the profession that it was untainted by any secret, sidelong looking towards evil; and Fuller is right in emphasising the suppression of the statement. But even the appearance of such is avoided by the jet of praise which closes the psalm. Its condensed brevity has induced some critics to mend it by expansion, as they regard it as incongruous to speak of turning away a man's prayer from himself. Some would therefore insert "from Him" after "my prayer," and others would expand still further by inserting an appropriate negative before "His lovingkindness." But the slight incongruity does not obscure the sense, and brings out strongly the flow of thought. So fully does the psalmist feel the connection between God's lovingkindness and his own prayer, that these are, as it were, smelted into one in his mind, and the latter is so far predominant in his thoughts that he is unconscious of the anomaly of his expression. To expand only weakens the swing of the words and the power of the thought. It is possible to tame lyric outbursts into accuracy at the cost of energy. Psalmists are not bound to be correct in style. Rivers wind; canals are straight.

PSALM LXVII.

- 1 God be gracious to us, and bless us,
And cause His face to shine among us; Selah.
- 2 That Thy way may be known upon earth,
Thy salvation among all nations.
- 3 Let peoples give Thee thanks, O God,
Let peoples, all of them, give Thee thanks.
- 4 Let tribes rejoice and shout aloud,
For Thou wilt judge peoples in equity,
And tribes on the earth wilt Thou lead. Selah.
- 5 Let peoples give Thee thanks, O God,
Let peoples, all of them, give Thee thanks.
- 6 The earth has yielded her increase:
May God, [even] our God, bless us!
- 7 May God bless us,
And may all the ends of the earth fear Him!

THIS little psalm condenses the dominant thought of the two preceding into a series of aspirations after Israel's blessing, and the consequent diffusion of the knowledge of God's way among all lands. Like Psalm lxv., it sees in abundant harvests a type and witness of God's kindness. But, whereas in Psalm lxv. the fields were covered with corn, here the increase has been gathered in. The two psalms may or may not be connected in date of composition as closely as these two stages of one harvest-time.

The structure of the psalm has been variously conceived. Clearly the Selahs do not guide as to divisions in the flow of thought. But it may be noted that the seven verses in the psalm have each two clauses, with the exception of the middle one

(ver. 4), which has three. Its place and its abnormal length mark it as the core, round which, as it were, the whole is built up. Further, it is as if encased in two verses (vv. 3, 5), which, in their four clauses, are a fourfold repetition of a single aspiration. These three verses are the heart of the psalm—the desire that all the earth may praise God, whose providence blesses it all. They are again enclosed in two strophes of two verses each (vv. 1, 2, and 6, 7), which, like the closer wrapping round the core, are substantially parallel and, unlike it, regard God's manifestation to Israel as His great witness to the world. Thus, working outwards from the central verse, we have symmetry of structure, and intelligible progress and distinctness of thought.

Another point of difficulty is the rendering of the series of verbs in the psalm. Commentators are unanimous in taking those of ver. 1 as expressions of desire; but they bewilderingly diverge in their treatment of the following ones. Details of the divergent interpretations, or discussions of their reasons, cannot be entered on here. It may be sufficient to say that the adherence throughout to the optative rendering, admitted by all in ver. 1, gives a consistent colouring to the whole. It is arbitrary to vary the renderings in so short a psalm. But, as is often the case, the aspirations are so sure of their correspondence with the Divine purpose that they tremble on the verge of being prophecies, as, indeed, all wishes that go out along the line of God's "way" are. Every deep, God-inspired longing whispers to its utterer assurance that so it shall be; and therefore such desires have ever in them an element of fruition, and know nothing of the pain of earthly wishes. They who stretch out empty hands to God never "gather dust and chaff."

The priestly blessing (Numb. vi. 24-26) moulds ver. 1, but with the substitution of *God* for *Jehovah*, and of "among us" for "upon us." The latter variation gives an impression of closer contact of men with the lustre of that Divine Light, and of yet greater condescension in God. The soul's longing is not satisfied by even the fullest beams of a Light that is fixed on high; it dares to wish for the stooping of the Sun to dwell among us. The singer speaks in the name of the nation; and, by using the priestly formula, claims for the whole people the sacerdotal dignity which belonged to it by its original constitution. He gives that idea its widest extension. Israel is the world's high priest, lifting up intercessions and holy hands of benediction for mankind. What self-effacement, and what profound insight into and sympathy with the mind of God breathe in that collocation of desires, in which the gracious lustre of God's face shining on us is longed for, chiefly that thence it may be reflected into the dark places of earth, to gladden sad and seeking eyes! This psalmist did not know in how true a sense the Light would come to dwell among men of Israel's race, and thence to flood the world; but his yearning is a foreshadowing of the spirit of Christianity, which forbids self-regarding monopoly of its blessings. If a man is "light in the Lord," he cannot but shine. "God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." A Church illuminated with a manifestly Divine light is the best witness for God. Eyes which cannot look on the Sun may gaze at the clouds, which tone down its colourless radiance into purple and gold.

The central core of the psalm may either be taken as summons to the nations or as expression of desire for them. The depth of the longing or the stringency of the summons is wonderfully given by that fourfold repetition of the same words in vv. 3 and 5, with the emphatic "all of them" in the second clause of each. Not less significant is the use of three names for the aggregations of men—nations (ver. 2), peoples, and tribes. All are included, whatever bond knits them in communities, whatever their societies call themselves, however many they are. The very vagueness gives sublimity and universality. We can fill the vast outline drawn by these sweeping strokes; and wider knowledge should not be attended with narrowed desires, nor feebler confidence that the Light shall lighten every land. It is noticeable that in this central portion the deeds of God among the nations are set forth as the ground of their praise and joy in Him. Israel had the light of His face, and that would draw men to Him. But all peoples have the strength of His arm to be their defender, and the guidance of His hand by providences and in other ways unrecognised by them. The "judgments" here contemplated are, of course, not retribution for evil, but the aggregate of dealings by which God shows His sovereignty in all the earth. The psalmist does not believe that God's goodness has been confined to Israel, nor that the rest of the world has been left orphaned. He agrees with Paul, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God manifested it to them."

The final strophe (vv. 6, 7) is substantially a repetition of vv. 1, 2, with the addition that a past fact is laid as the foundation of the desires or hopes of future blessings. "The earth has yielded her increase." This may show that the psalm is a harvest hymn, but it does not necessarily imply this. The thought may have been born at any time. The singer takes the plain fact that, year by year, by mysterious quickening which he recognises as of God, the fertile earth "causes the things sown in it to bring forth and bud," as an evidence of Divine care and kindness, which warrants the desire and the confidence that all blessings will be given. It seems a large inference from such a premise; but it is legitimate for those who recognise God as working in nature, and have eyes to read the parables amid which we live. The psalmist reminds God of His own acts, and further, of His own name, and builds on these his petitions and his faith. Because He is "our God" He will bless us; and since the earth has, by His gift, "yielded her increase," He will give the better food which souls need. This the singer desires, not only because he and his brethren need it, but because a happy people are the best witnesses for a good King, and worshippers "satisfied with favour and full of the blessing of the Lord" proclaim most persuasively, "Taste, and see that God is good." This psalm is a truly missionary psalm, in its clear anticipation of the universal spread of the knowledge of God, in its firm grasp of the thought that the Church has its blessings in order to the evangelisation of the world, and in its intensity of longing that from all the ends of the earth a shout of praise may go up to the God who has sent some rays of His light into them all, and committed to His people the task of carrying a brighter illumination to every land.

PSALM LXVIII.

- 1 Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,
And let them who hate Him flee before Him.
- 2 As smoke is whirled, whirl [them] away:
As wax melts before fire,
May the wicked perish before God!
- 3 But may the righteous rejoice [and] exult
before God,
And be mirthful in joy.
- 4 Sing to God, harp [to] His name:
Throw up a way for Him who rides through
the deserts
[In] Jah is His name; and exult ye before
Him;
- 5 The orphans' father and the widows' advocate,
God in His holy dwelling-place,
- 6 God who makes the solitary to dwell in a home,
Who brings out the prisoners into prosperity:
Yet the rebellious inhabit a burnt-up land.
- 7 O God, at Thy going forth before Thy people,
At Thy marching through the wilderness;
Selah.
- 8 The earth quaked, the heavens also dropped
before God
Yonder Sinai [quaked] before God, the God of
Israel.
- 9 With a gracious rain, O God, Thou didst be-
sprinkle Thine inheritance;
And [when it was] faint, Thou didst refresh it.
- 10 Thine assembly dwelt herein:
Thou didst prepare in Thy goodness for the
poor, O God.
- 11 The Lord gives the word:
The women telling the good tidings are a great
army.
- 12 Kings of armies flee, they flee:
And the home-keeping [woman] divides the
spoil.
- 13 Will ye lie among the sheep-pens?
[Ye shall be as] the wings of a dove that is
covered with silver, (?)
And her pinions with yellow gold.
- 14 When the Almighty scattered kings in it,
It snowed in Salmon.
- 15 A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan,
A many-peaked mountain is the mountain of
Bashan.
- 16 Why look ye with envy, O many-peaked moun-
tains,
On the mountain which God has desired to
dwell in?
Yea, God will abide in it for ever.
- 17 The chariots of God are myriads and myriads,
thousands on thousands:
God is among them;
Sinai is in the sanctuary.
- 18 Thou hast ascended on high,
Thou hast led captive a band of captives,
Thou hast taken gifts among men,
Yea, even the rebellious shall dwell with Jah,
God.
- 19 Blessed be the Lord!
Day by day He bears our burdens,
Even the God [who is] our salvation.
- 20 God is to us a God of deliverances,
And Jehovah the Lord has escape from death.
- 21 Yea, God will crush the head of His enemies,
The hairy skull of him that goes on in his
guiltiness.
- 22 The Lord has said, From Bashan I will bring
back,
I will bring back from the depths of the sea:
23 That Thou mayest bathe thy foot in blood,
That the tongue of thy dogs may have its por-
tion from the enemy.
- 24 They have seen Thy goings, O God,
The goings of my God, my King, into the sanc-
tuary.
- 25 Before go singers, after [come] those who
strike the strings,
In the midst of maidens beating timbrels.
- 26 "In the congregations bless ye God,
The Lord, [ye who spring] from the fountain
of Israel."
- 27 There was little Benjamin their ruler, (?)
The princes of Judah, their shouting multitude,
The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naph-
tali.
- 28 Command, O God, Thy strength,
Show Thyself strong, O God, Thou that hast
wrought for us.
- 29 From Thy temple above Jerusalem
Unto Thee shall kings bring presents.
- 30 Rebuke the beast of the reeds,
The herd of bulls, with the calves of the
peoples;
Tread down those that have pleasure in sil-
ver; (?)
Scatter the peoples that delight in wars.
- 31 Great ones shall come from Egypt,
Cush shall quickly stretch out her hands to God.
- 32 Ye kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
Harp [unto] the Lord; Selah.
- 33 To Him who rides on the heavens of heavens,
[which are] of old;
Lo, He utters His voice, a voice of strength.
- 34 Ascribe to God strength,
Whose majesty is over Israel, and His strength
in the clouds.
- 35 Dread [art Thou], O God, from Thy sanc-
tuaries,
The God of Israel,
He gives strength and fulness of might to His
people.
Blessed be God!

THIS superb hymn is unsurpassed, if not un-
equalled, in grandeur, lyric fire, and sustained rush
of triumphant praise. It celebrates a victory; but it
is the victory of the God who enters as a conqueror
into His sanctuary. To that entrance (vv. 15-18)
all the preceding part of the psalm leads up; and
from it all the subsequent part flows down. The
Exodus is recalled as the progress of a king at the
head of his hosts, and old pæans re-echo. That
dwelling of God in the sanctuary is "for ever."
Therefore in the second part of the psalm (vv.
19-35) its consequences for the psalmist's genera-
tion and for the future are developed—Israel's
deliverance, the conquest of the nations, and fi-
nally the universal recognition of God's sover-
eignty and ringing songs sent up to Him.

The Davidic authorship is set aside as impos-
sible by most recent commentators, and there is
much in the psalm which goes against it; but, on
the other hand, the Syro-Ammonite war (2 Sam.
xi.), in which the ark was taken into the field, is
not unnaturally supposed by Delitzsch and others
to explain the special reference to the entrance of
God into the sanctuary. The numerous quota-

tions and allusions are urged as evidence of late date, especially the undeniable resemblance with Isaiah II. But the difficulty of settling which of two similar passages is original and which copy is great; and if by one critical canon such allusions are marks of lateness, by another, rugged obscurities, such as those with which this psalm bristles, are evidences of an early date.

The mention of only four tribes in ver. 27 is claimed as showing that the psalm was written when Judæa and Galilee were the only orthodox districts, and central Palestine was in the hands of the Samaritans. But could there be any talk of "princes of Zebulun and Naphtali" then? The exultant tone of the psalm makes its ascription to such a date as the age of the Ptolemies unlikely, when "Israel is too feeble, too depressed, to dream of self-defence; and if God does not soon interpose, will be torn to pieces" (Cheyne, "Aids to the Devout Study," etc., 335).

To the present writer it does not appear that the understanding and enjoyment of this grand psalm depend so much on success in dating it as is supposed. It may be post-exilic. Whoever fused its reminiscences of ancient triumph into such a glowing outburst of exultant faith, his vision of the throned God and his conviction that ancient facts reveal eternal truths remain for all generations as an encouragement of trust and a prophecy of God's universal dominion.

The main division at ver. 18 parts the psalm into two equal halves, which are again easily subdivided into strophes.

The first strophe (vv. 1-6) may be regarded as introductory to the chief theme of the first half—namely, the triumphant march of the conquering God to His sanctuary. It consists of invocation to Him to arise, and of summons to His people to prepare His way and to meet Him with ringing gladness. The ground of both invocation and summons is laid in an expansion of the meaning of His name as Helper of the helpless, Deliverer of the captive, righteous, and plentifully rewarding the proud doer. The invocation echoes the Mosaic prayer "when the ark set forward" (Numb. x. 35), with the alteration of the tense of the verb from a simple imperative into a precative future, and of "Jehovah" into God. This is the first of the quotations characteristic of the psalm, which is penetrated throughout with the idea that the deeds of the past are revelations of permanent relations and activities. The ancient history grows with present life. Whatever God has done He is doing still. No age of the Church needs to look back wistfully to any former, and say, "Where be all His wondrous works which our fathers have told us of?" The twofold conditions of God's intervention are, as this strophe teaches, Israel's cry to Him to arise, and expectant diligence in preparing His way. The invocation, which is half of Israel's means of insuring His coming, being a quotation, the summons to perform the other half is naturally regarded by the defenders of the post-exilic authorship as borrowed from Isaiah II. (*e.g.*, xl. 3, lvii. 14, lxii. 10), while the supporters of an earlier date regard the psalm as the primary passage from which the prophet has drawn.

God "arises" when He displays by some signal act His care for His people. That strong anthropomorphism sets forth the plain truth that there come crises in history, when causes, long silently working, suddenly produce their world-shaking

effects. God has seemed to sit passive; but the heavens open, and all but blind eyes can see Him, standing ready to smite that He may deliver. When He rises to His feet, the enemy scatters in panic. His presence revealed is enough. The emphatic repetition of "before" in these verses is striking, especially when fully rendered,—from His face (ver. 1); from the face of the fire (ver. 2); from the face of God (ver. 2); before His face (vv. 3, 4). To His foes that face is dreadful, and they would fain cower away from its light; His friends sun themselves in its brightness. The same fire consumes and vivifies. All depends on the character of the recipients. In the psalm "the righteous" are Israel, the ideal nation; the "wicked" are its heathen foes; but the principle underlying the fervid words demands a real assimilation of moral character to the Divine, as a condition of being at ease in the Light.

The "deserts" are, in consonance with the immediately following reminiscences, those of the Exodus. Hupfeld and those who discover in the psalm the hopes of the captives in Babylon, take them to be the waste wilderness stretching between Babylon and Palestine. But it is better to see in them simply a type drawn from the past, of guidance through any needs or miseries. Vv. 5, 6, draw out at length the blessed significance of the name Jah, in order to hearten to earnest desire and expectance of Him. They are best taken as in apposition with "Him" in ver. 4. Well may we exult before Him who is the orphans' father, the widows' advocate. There may be significance in the contrast between what He is "in His holy habitation" and when He arises to ride through the deserts. Even in the times when he seems to be far above, dwelling in the separation of His unapproachable holiness, He is still caring and acting for the sad and helpless. But when He comes forth, it is to make the solitary to dwell in a home, to bring out prisoners into prosperity. Are these simply expressions for God's general care of the afflicted, like the former clauses, or do they point back to the Exodus? A very slight change in the text gives the reading, "Makes the solitary to return home": but even without that alteration, the last clause of the verse is so obviously an allusion to the disobedient, "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness," that the whole verse is best regarded as pointing back to that time. The "home" to which the people were led is the same as the "prosperity" into which the prisoners are brought—namely, the rest and well-being of Canaan; while the fate of the "rebellious" is, as it ever is, to live and die amidst the drought-stricken barrenness which they have chosen.

With the second strophe (vv. 7-10) begins the historical retrospect, which is continued till, at the end of the fourth (ver. 18), God is enthroned in the sanctuary, there to dwell for ever. In the second strophe the wilderness life is described. The third (vv. 11-14) tells of the victories which won the land. The fourth triumphantly contrasts the glory of the mountain where God at last has come to dwell, with the loftier peaks across the Jordan on which no such lustre gleams.

Vv. 7, 8, are from Deborah's song, with slight omissions and alterations, notably of "Jehovah" into "God." The phrase "before" still rings in the psalmist's ears, and he changes Deborah's words, in the first clause of ver. 7, so as to give

the picture of God marching in front of His people, instead of, as the older song represented Him, coming from the east, to meet them marching from the west. The majestic theophany at the giving of the Law is taken as the culmination of His manifestations in the wilderness. Vv. 9, 10, are capable of two applications. According to one, they anticipate the chronological order, and refer to the fertility of the land, and the abundance enjoyed by Israel when established there. According to the other they refer to the sustenance of the people in the wilderness. The former view has in its favour the ordinary use of "inheritance" for the land, the likelihood that "rain" should be represented as falling on soil rather than on people, and the apparent reference in "dwelt therein," to the settlement in Canaan. The objection to it is that reference to peaceful dwelling in the land is out of place, since the next strophe pictures the conquest. If, then, the verses belong to the age of wandering, to what do they refer? Hupfeld tries to explain the "rain" as meaning the manna, and, still more improbably, takes the somewhat enigmatical "assembly" of ver. 10 to mean (as it certainly does) "living creatures," and to allude (as it surely does not) to the quails that fell round the camp. Most commentators now agree in transferring "thine inheritance" to the first clause, and in understanding it of the people, not of the land. The verse is intelligible either as referring to gifts of refreshment of spirit and courage bestowed on the people, in which case "rain" is symbolical; or to actual rainfall during the forty years of desert life, by which sowing and reaping were made possible. The division of the verse as in our translation is now generally adopted. The allusion to the provision of corn in the desert is continued in ver. 10, in which the chief difficulty is the ambiguous word "assembly." It may mean "living creatures," and is so taken here by the LXX. and others. It is twice used in 2 Sam. xxii. 11 (?), 13, for an army. Delitzsch takes it as a comparison of Israel to a flock, thus retaining the meaning of *creatures*. If the verse is interpreted as alluding to Israel's wilderness life, "therein" must be taken in a somewhat irregular construction, since there is no feminine noun at hand to which the feminine pronominal suffix in the word can be referred. In that barren desert, God's flock dwelt for more than a generation, and during all that time His goodness provided for them. The strophe thus gives two aspects of God's manifestation in the wilderness—the majestic and terrible, and the gentle and beneficent. In the psalmist's triumphant retrospect no allusion is made to the dark obverse—Israel's long ingratitude. The same history which supplies other psalmists and prophets with material for penetrating accusations yields to this one only occasion of praise. God's part is pure goodness; man's is shaded with much rebellious murmuring.

The next strophe (vv. 11-14) is abrupt and disconnected, as if echoing the hurry of battle and the tumult of many voices on the field. The general drift is unmistakable, but the meaning of part is the despair of commentators. The whole scene of the conflict, flight, and division of the spoil is flashed before us in brief clauses, panting with excitement and blazing with the glow of victory. "The Lord giveth the word." That "word" may be the news which the women immediately repeat. But it is far more vivid and truer to the

spirit of the psalm, which sees God as the only actor in Israel's history, to regard it as the self-fulfilling decree which scatters the enemy. This battle is the Lord's. There is no description of conflict. But one mighty word is hurled from heaven, like a thunder-clap (the phrase resembles that employed so often, "the Lord gave His voice," which frequently means thunder-peals), and the enemies' ranks are broken in panic. Israel does not need to fight. God speaks, and the next sound we hear is the clash of timbrels and the clear notes of the maidens chanting victory. This picture of a battle, with the battle left out, tells best Who fought, and how He fought it. "He spake, and it was done." What scornful picture of the flight is given by the reduplication "they flee, they flee"! It is like Deborah's fierce gloating over the dead Sisera: "He bowed, he fell, he lay: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell." What confidence in the power of weakness, when God is on its side, in the antithesis between the mighty kings scattered in a general *sauve qui peut*, and the matrons who had "tarried at home" and now divide the spoil! Sisera's mother was pictured in Deborah's song as looking long through her lattice for her son's return, and solacing herself with the thought that he delayed to part the plunder and would come back laden with it. What she vainly hoped for Israel's matrons enjoy.

Vv. 13, 14, are among the hardest in the Psalter. The separate clauses offer no great difficulties, but the connection is enigmatical indeed. "Will (lit. if) ye lie among the sheepfolds?" comes from Deborah's song (Judg. v. 16), and is there a reproach flung at Reuben for preferring pastoral ease to warlike effort. Is it meant as reproach here? It is very unlikely that a song of triumph like this should have for its only mention of Israel's warriors a taunt. The lovely picture of the dove with iridescent wings is as a picture perfect. But what does it mean here? Herder, whom Hupfeld follows, supposes that the whole verse is rebuke to recreants, who preferred lying stretched at ease among their flocks, and bidding each other admire the glancing plumage of the doves that flitted round them. But this is surely violent, and smacks of modern æstheticism. Others suppose that the first clause is a summons to be up and pursue the flying foe, and the second and third a description of the splendour with which the conquerors (or their households) should be clothed by the spoil. This meaning would require the insertion of some such phrase as "ye shall be" before the second clause. Delitzsch regards the whole as a connected description of the blessings of peace following on victory, and sees a reference to Israel as God's dove. "The new condition of prosperity is compared with the play of colours of a dove basking in the rays of the sun." All these interpretations assume that Israel is addressed in the first clause. But is this assumption warranted? Is it not more natural to refer the "ye" to the "kings" just mentioned, especially as the psalmist recurs to them in the next verse? The question will then retain the taunting force which it has in Deborah's song, while it pictures a very different kind of couching among the sheepfolds—namely, the hiding there from pursuit. The kings are first seen in full flight. Then the triumphant psalmist flings after them the taunt, "Will ye hide among the cattle?" If the initial particle retains its liter-

al force, the first clause is hypothetical, and the suppression of the conclusion speaks more eloquently than its expression would have done: "If ye couch—" The second and third clauses are then parallel with the second of ver. 12, and carry on the description of the home-keeping matron, "the dove," adorned with rich spoils and glorious in her apparel. We thus have a complete parallelism between the two verses, which both lay side by side the contrasted pictures of the defeated kings and the women; and we further establish continuity between the three verses (13-15), in so far as the "kings" are dealt with in them all.

Ver. 14 is even harder than the preceding. What does "in it" refer to? Is the second clause metaphor, requiring to be eked out with "It is like as when"? If figure, what does it mean? One is inclined to say with Baethgen, at the end of his comment on the words, "After all this, I can only confess that I do not understand the verse." Salmon was an inconsiderable hill in Central Palestine, deriving its name (Shady), as is probable, from forests on its sides. Many commentators look to that characteristic for explanation of the riddle. Snow on the dark hill would show very white. So after the defeat the bleached bones of the slain, or, as others, their glittering armour, would cover the land. Others take the point of comparison to be the change from trouble to joy which follows the foe's defeat, and is likened to the change of the dark hillside to a gleaming snow-field. Hupfeld still follows Herder in connecting the verse with the reproach which he finds in the former one, and seeing in the words "It snowed on Salmon" the ground of the recreants' disinclination to leave the sheepfolds—namely, that it was bad weather, and that, if snow lay on Salmon in the south, it would be worse in the north, where the campaign was going on! He acknowledges that this explanation requires "a good deal of acuteness to discover," and says that the only alternative to accepting it, provisionally, at all events, is to give up the hope of any solution. Cheyne follows Bickell in supposing that part of the text has dropped out, and proposes an additional clause at the beginning of the verse and an expansion of the last clause, arriving at this result: "[For full is our land of spoil]. When Shaddai scatters kings therein, [As the snow,] when it snows in Salmon." The adoption of these additions is not necessary to reach this meaning of the whole, which appears the most consonant with the preceding verses, as continuing the double reference which runs through them—namely, to the fugitive kings and the dividers of the spoil. On the one side we see the kings driven from their lurking-places among the sheepfolds; on the other, the gleam of rich booty, compared now to the shining white wrapping the dark hill, as formerly to the colours that shimmer on sunlit pinions of peaceful doves. If this is not the meaning, we can only fall back on the confession already quoted.

The battle is over, and now the Conqueror enters His palace-temple. The third strophe soars with its theme, describing His triumphal entry thither and permanent abiding there. The long years between the conquest of Canaan and the establishment of the ark on Zion dwindle to a span; for God's enthronement there was in one view the purpose of the conquest, which was incomplete till that was effected. There is no need to

suppose any reference in the mention of Bashan to the victories over Og, its ancient king. The noble figure needs no historic allusion to explain it. These towering heights beyond Jordan had once in many places been seats of idol worship. They are emblems of the world's power. No light rests upon them, lofty though they are, like that which glorifies the insignificant top of Zion. They may well look enviously across the Jordan to the hill which God has desired for His abode. His triumphal procession is not composed of earthly warriors, for none such had appeared in the battle. He had conquered, not by employing human hands, but by His own "bright-harnessed angels." They now surround Him in numbers innumerable, which language strains its power in endeavouring to reckon. "Myriads doubled, thousands of repetition," says the psalmist—indefinite expressions for a countless host. But all their wide-flowing ranks are clustered round the Conqueror, whose presence makes their multitude an unity, even as it gives their immortal frames their life and strength, and their faces all their lustrous beauty. "God is in the midst of them"; therefore they conquer and exult. "Sinai is in the sanctuary." This bold utterance has led to a suggested emendation, which has the advantage of bringing out clearly a quotation from Deut. xxxiii. 2. It combines the second and third clauses of ver. 17, and renders "The Lord hath come from Sinai into the sanctuary." But the existing text gives a noble thought—that now, by the entrance of God thither, Sinai itself is in the sanctuary, and all the ancient sanctities and splendours, which flamed round its splintered peaks, are housed to shine lambent from that humble hill. Sinai was nothing but for God's presence. Zion has that presence; and all that it ever meant it means still. The profound sense of the permanent nature of past revelation, which speaks all through the psalm, reaches its climax here.

The "height" to which ver. 18 triumphantly proclaims that God has gone up, can only be Zion. To take it as meaning the heavenly sanctuary, as in Psalm vii. 7 it unquestionably does, is forbidden by the preceding verses. Thither the conquering God has ascended, as to His palace, leading a long procession of bound captives, and there receiving tribute from the vanquished. Assyrian slabs and Egyptian paintings illustrate these representations. The last clause has been variously construed and understood. Is "Yea, even the rebellious" to be connected with the preceding, and "among" to be supplied, so that those once rebellious are conceived of as tributary, or does the phrase begin an independent clause? The latter construction makes the remainder of the verse run more intelligibly, and obviates the need for supplying a preposition with "the rebellious." It still remains a question whether the last words of the clause refer to God's dwelling among the submissive rebels, or to their dwelling with God. If, however, it is kept in view that the context speaks of God as dwelling in His sanctuary, the latter is the more natural explanation, especially as a forcible contrast is thereby presented to the fate of the "rebellious" in ver. 6. They dwell in a burnt-up land; but, if they fling away their enmity, may be guests of God in His sanctuary. Thus the first half of the psalm closes with grand prophetic hopes that, when God has established His abode on Zion, distant nations shall bring

their tribute, rebels return to allegiance, and men be dwellers with God in His house.

In such anticipations the psalm is Messianic, inasmuch as these are only fulfilled in the dominion of Jesus. Paul's quotation of this verse in Eph. iv. 8 does not require us to maintain its directly prophetic character. Rather, the apostle, as Calvin says, "deflects" it to Christ. That ascent of the ark to Zion was a type rather than a prophecy. Conflict, conquest, triumphant ascent to a lofty home, tribute, widespread submission, and access for rebels to the royal presence—all these, which the psalmist saw as facts or hopes in their earthly form, are repeated in loftier fashion in Christ, or are only attainable through His universal reign. The apostle significantly alters "received among" into "gave to," sufficiently showing that he is not arguing from a verbal prophecy, but from a typical fact, and bringing out the two great truths, that, in the highest manifestation of the conquering God, the conquered receive gifts from the victor, and that the gifts which the ascended Christ bestows are really the trophies of His battle, in which He bound the strong man and spoiled his house. The attempt to make out that the Hebrew word has the extraordinary double-barrelled meaning of *receiving in order to give* is futile, and obscures the intentional freedom with which the apostle deals with the text. The Ascension is, in the fullest sense, the enthronement of God; and its results are the growing submission of nations and the happy dwelling of even the rebellious in His house.

The rapturous emphasis with which this psalm celebrates God's entrance into His sanctuary is most appropriate to Davidic times.

The psalm reaches its climax in God's enthronement on Zion. Its subsequent strophes set forth the results thereof. The first of these, the fifth of the psalm (vv. 19-23), suddenly drops from strains of exultation to a plaintive note, and then again as suddenly breaks out into stern rejoicing over the ruin of the foe. There is wonderful depth of insight and tenderness in laying side by side the two thoughts of God, that He sits on high as conqueror, and that He daily bears our burdens, or perhaps bears us as a shepherd might his lambs.

Truly a Divine use for Divine might! To such lowly offices of continual individualising care will the Master of many legions stoop, reaching out from amid their innumerable myriads to sustain a poor weak man stumbling under a load too great for him. Israel had been delivered by a high hand, but still was burdened. The psalmist has been recalling the deeds of old, and he finds in them grounds for calm assurance as to the present. To-day, he thinks, is as full of God as any yesterday, and our "burdens" as certain to be borne by Him, as were those of the generation that saw His Sinai tremble at His presence. To us, as to them, He is "a God of deliverances," and for us can provide ways of escape from death. The words breathe a somewhat plaintive sense of need, such as shades our brightest moments, if we bethink ourselves; but they do not oblige us to suppose that the psalm is the product of a time of oppression and dejection. That theory is contradicted by the bounding gladness of the former part, no less than by the confident anticipations of the second half. But no song sung by mortal lips is true to the singer's condition, if it lacks the minor key into which this hymn of triumph is here modulated for a moment.

It is but for a moment, and what follows is startlingly different. Israel's escape from death is secured by the destruction of the enemy, and in it the psalmist has joy. He pictures the hand that sustained him and his fellows so tenderly, shattering the heads of the rebellious. These are described as long-haired, an emblem of strength and insolence which one is almost tempted to connect with Absalom; and the same idea of determined and flaunting sin is conveyed by the expression "goes on in his guiltinesses." There will be such rebels, even though the house of God is open for them to dwell in, and there can be but one end for such. If they do not submit, they will be crushed. The psalmist is as sure of that as of God's gentleness; and his two clauses do state the alternative that every man has to face—either to let God bear his burden or to be smitten by Him.

Vv. 22, 23, give a terrible picture of the end of the rebels. The psalmist hears the voice of the Lord promising to bring some unnamed fugitives from Bashan and the depths of the sea in order that they may be slain, and that he (or Israel) may bathe his foot in their blood, and his dogs may lick it, as they did Ahab's. Who are to be brought back? Some have thought that the promise referred to Israel, but it is more natural to apply it to the flying foe. There is no reference to Bashan either as the kingdom of an ancient enemy or as envying Zion (ver. 15). But the high land of Bashan in the east and the depths of the sea to the west are taken (*cf.* Amos ix. 1-3) as representing the farthest and most inaccessible hiding-places. Wherever the enemies lurk, thence they will be dragged and slain.

The existing text is probably to be amended by the change of one letter in the verb, so as to read "shall wash" or bathe, as in Psalm lviii. 10, and the last clause to be read, "That the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the enemy." The blood runs ankle-deep, and the dogs feast on the carcasses or lick it—a dreadful picture of slaughter and fierce triumph. It is not to be softened or spiritualised or explained away.

There is, no doubt, a legitimate Christian joy in the fall of opposition to Christ's kingdom, and the purest benevolence has sometimes a right to be glad when hoary oppressions are swept away and their victims set free; but such rejoicing is not after the Christian law unless it is mingled with pity, of which the psalm has no trace.

The next strophe (vv. 24-27) is by some regarded as resuming the description of the procession, which is supposed to have been interrupted by the preceding strophe. But the joyous march now to be described is altogether separate from the majestic progress of the conquering King in vv. 17, 18. This is the consequence of that. God has gone into His sanctuary. His people have seen His solemn entrance thither, and therefore they now go up to meet Him there with song and music. Their festal procession is the second result of His enthronement, of which the deliverance and triumph described in the preceding strophe were the first. The people escaped from death flock to thank their Deliverer. Such seems to be the connection of the whole, and especially of vv. 24, 25. Instead of myriads of angels surrounding the conquering God, here are singers and flute-players and damsels beating their timbrels, like Miriam and her choir. Their shrill call in ver. 26 summons all who "spring from the fountain of

Israel"—i.e., from the eponymous patriarch—to bless God. After these musicians and singers, the psalmist sees tribe after tribe go up to the sanctuary, and points to each as it passes. His enumeration is not free from difficulties, both in regard to the epithets employed and the specification of the tribes. The meaning of the word rendered "ruler" is disputed. Its form is peculiar, and the meaning of the verb from which it is generally taken to come is rather to *subdue* or *tread down* than to *rule*. If the signification of *ruler* is accepted, a question rises as to the sense in which Benjamin is so called. Allusion to Saul's belonging to that tribe is thought of by some; but this seems improbable, whether the psalm is Davidic or later. Others think that the allusion is to the fact that, according to Joshua xviii. 16, the Temple was within Benjamite territory; but that is a far-fetched explanation. Others confine the "rule" to the procession, in which Benjamin marches at the head, and so may be called its leader; but ruling and leading are not the same. Others get a similar result by a very slight textual change, reading "in front" instead of "their ruler." Another difficulty is in the word rendered above "their shouting multitude," which can only be made to mean a company of people by a somewhat violent twist. Hupfeld (with whom Bickell and Cheyne agree) proposes an alteration which yields the former sense and is easy. It may be tentatively adopted.

A more important question is the reason for the selection of the four tribes named. The mention of Benjamin and Judah is natural; but why are Zebulun and Naphtali the only representatives of the other tribes? The defenders of a late date answer, as has been already noticed, Because in the late period when the psalm was written, Galilee and Judæa "formed the two orthodox provinces." The objection to this is that in the post-exilic period there were no distinct tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and no princes to rule.

The mention of these tribes as sharing in the procession to the sanctuary on Zion would have been impossible during the period of the northern kingdom. If, then, these two periods are excluded, what is left but the Davidic? The fact seems to be that we have here another glance at Deborah's song, in which the daring valour of these two tribes is set in contrast with the sluggish cowardice of Reuben and the other northern ones. Those who had done their part in the wars of the Lord now go up in triumph to His house. That is the reward of God's faithful soldiers.

The next strophe (vv. 28-31) is the prayer of the procession. It falls into two parts of two verses each, of which the former verse is petition, and the latter confident anticipation of the results of answered prayer. The symmetry of the whole requires the substitution in ver. 28 of "command" for "hath commanded." God's strength is poetically regarded as distinct from Himself and almost personified, as "lovingkindness" is in Psalm xlii. 8. The prayer is substantially equivalent to the following petition in ver. 28 *b*. Note how "strength" occurs four times in vv. 33-35. The prayer for its present manifestation is, in accordance with the historical retrospect of the first part, based upon God's past acts. It has been proposed to detach "From Thy Temple" from ver. 29, and to attach it to ver. 28. This gets over a difficulty, but unduly abbreviates ver. 29, and is not in harmony with the rep-

resentation in the former part, which magnifies what God has wrought, not "from the Temple," but in His progress thither. No doubt the retention of the words in ver. 29 introduces a singular expression there. How can presents be brought to God "from Thy Temple"? The only explanation is that "Temple" is used in a restricted sense for the "holy place," as distinguished from the "holy of holies," in which the ark was contained. The tribute-bearers stand in that outer sanctuary, and thence present their tokens of fealty. The city is clustered round the Temple mount, and therefore the psalm says, "Thy Temple above Jerusalem." One is tempted to read "unto" instead of "from"; for this explanation can scarcely be called quite satisfactory. But it seems the best that has been suggested. The submission of kings of unnamed lands is contemplated as the result of God's manifestation of strength for Israel. Ver. 30 resumes the tone of petition, and maintains it throughout. "The beast of the reeds," probably the crocodile, is a poetic designation for Egypt, the reference to which is claimed by both the defenders of the Davidic and of the post-exilic date as in their favour. The former say that, in David's day, Egypt was the greatest world-power known to the Hebrews; and the latter, that the mention of it points to the time when Israel lay exposed to the attacks of Seleucidæ on the one hand and of Ptolemies on the other. Why, then, should only one of the two hostile neighbours be mentioned here? "Bulls" are a standing emblem of leaders of nations, and "calves" are accordingly their subjects. The two metaphors are naturally connected, and the correction "leaders of the peoples" is unnecessary, and a prosaic intermingling of figure and fact.

Ver. 30 *c* is extremely obscure. Baethgen roundly says, "The meaning of the words can no longer be ascertained, and in all probability they are corrupt." The first word is a participle, which is variously taken as meaning "casting oneself to the ground" (i.e., in submission), and "trampling to the ground." It is also variously referred to the nations and their leaders spoken of in the previous verse, and to God. In the former case it would describe their attitude of submission in consequence of "rebuke"; in the latter, God's subjugation of them. The slightest change would make the word an imperative, thus bringing it into line with "rebuke"; but, even without this, the reference to God is apparently to be preferred. The structure of the strophe which, in the first verse of each pair, seems to put petitions and to confine its descriptions of the resulting subjugation of the enemy to the second verse in each case, favours the latter interpretation. The next words are also disputed. One rendering is, "with bars of silver"; another, "those that delight in silver." The former presupposes a very unusual word for "bars." It is necessarily adopted by those who refer the first word to the submission of the "herd of bulls." The enemies come with tribute of silver. The other rendering, which avoids the necessity of bringing in an otherwise unknown word, is necessarily preferred by the supporters of the second explanation of the preceding word. God is implored to crush "those who delight in silver," which may stand for a description of men of this world, but must be acknowledged to be rather a singular way of designating active enemies of

God and Israel. Cheyne's rendering, "That rolls itself in mire for gain of money," brings in the mercenaries of the Seleucidæ. But "rolling oneself in mire" is a strange way of saying "hiring oneself out to fight." Certainty seems unattainable, and we must be content with the general trend of the verse as supplication for an exhibition of God's strength against proud opponents. The last clause sums up the whole in the petition, "Scatter the peoples that delight in wars."

One verse then tells what the result of that will be. "Great ones" shall come from the land of the beast of the reeds, and Ethiopia shall make haste to stretch out tribute-bearing hands to God. The vision of a world subjugated and loving its subjugation is rising before the poet. That is the end of the ways of God with Israel. So deeply had this psalmist been led into comprehension of the Divine purpose; so clearly was he given to see the future, "and all the wonder that should be."

Therefore he breaks forth, in the last strophe, into invocation to all the kingdoms of the earth to sing to God. He had sung of His majesty as of old Jehovah "rode through the deserts"; and that phrase described His intervention in the field of history on behalf of Israel. Now the singer calls for praise from all the earth to Him who rides in the "most ancient heavens"; and that expression sets forth His transcendent majesty and eternal, universal sway. The psalmist had hymned the victory won when "God gave the word." Now he bids earth listen as "He gives His voice, a voice of strength," which moves and controls all creatures and events. Therefore all nations are summoned to give strength to God, who gives all fulnesses of strength to His people. The psalm closes with the utterance of the thought which has animated it throughout—that God's deeds for and in Israel are the manifestation for the world of His power, and that these will one day lead all men to bless the God of Israel, who shines out in dread majesty from the sanctuary, which is henceforth His abode for evermore.

PSALM LXIX.

- 1 Save me, O God;
For the waters have come in even to [my] soul.
- 2 I am sunk in the mud of an abyss, without standing-ground:
I am come into depths of waters, and a flood has overwhelmed me.
- 3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched,
My eyes fail whilst I wait for my God.
- 4 More than the hairs of my head are they who hate me without provocation.
Strong are my destroyers, my enemies wrongfully:
What I did not rob, then I must restore.
- 5 O God, Thou, Thou knowest my folly,
And my guiltinesses are not hidden from Thee.
- 6 Let not those who wait for Thee be put to shame through me, Lord, Jehovah of hosts:
Let not those be confounded through me who seek Thee, O God of Israel.
- 7 For Thy sake have I borne reproach;
Confusion has covered my face.
- 8 I have become a stranger to my brothers,

- And an alien to my mother's sons.
- 9 For zeal for Thine house has consumed me,
And the reproaches of those that reproach Thee have fallen upon me.
- 10 And I wept, in fasting my soul [wept];
And that became [matter of] reproaches to me.
- 11 Also I made sackcloth my clothing;
And I became to them a proverb.
- 12 They who sit at the gate talk of me,
And the songs of the quaffers of strong drink [are about me].
- 13 But as for me, my prayer is unto Thee, Jehovah, in a time of favour,
O God, in the greatness of Thy lovingkindness,
Answer me in the troth of Thy salvation.
- 14 Deliver me from [the] mire, that I sink not,
Rescue me from those who hate me, and from depths of waters.
- 15 Let not the flood of waters overwhelm me,
And let not the abyss swallow me,
And let not [the] pit close her mouth over me.
- 16 Answer me, Jehovah; for Thy lovingkindness is good:
In the multitude of Thy compassions turn toward me.
- 17 And hide not Thy face from Thy servant,
For I am in straits; answer me speedily.
- 18 Draw near to my soul, redeem it,
Because of my enemies set me free.
- 19 Thou, Thou knowest my reproach, and my shame, and my confusion.
Before Thee are all my adversaries.
- 20 Reproach has broken my heart; and I am sick unto death,
And I looked for pitying, and there was none,
And for comforters, and found none.
- 21 But they gave me gall for my food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.
- 22 Let their table become before them a snare,
And to them in their peacefulness, [let it become] a trap.
- 23 Darkened be their eyes, that they see not,
And make their loins continually to quake.
- 24 Pour out upon them Thine indignation,
And let the glow of Thy wrath overtake them.
- 25 May their encampment be desolate!
In their tents may there be no dweller!
- 26 For him whom Thou, Thou hast smitten, they persecute,
And they tell of the pain of Thy wounded ones.
- 27 Add iniquity to their iniquity,
And let them not come into Thy righteousness.
- 28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
And let them not be inscribed with the righteous.
- 29 But as for me, I am afflicted and pained,
Let Thy salvation, O God, set me on high.
- 30 I will praise the name of God in a song,
And I will magnify it with thanksgiving.
- 31 And it shall please Jehovah more than an ox,
A bullock horned and hoofed.
- 32 The afflicted see it; they shall rejoice,
Ye who seek God, [behold.] and let your heart live.
- 33 For Jehovah listens to the needy,
And His captives He does not despise.
- 34 Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas, and all that moves in them.

- 35 For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah,
And they shall dwell there, and possess it.
36 And the seed of His servants shall inherit it,
And those who love His name shall abide therein.

THE Davidic authorship of this psalm is evidently untenable, if for no other reason, yet because of the state of things presupposed in ver. 35. The supposition that Jeremiah was the author has more in its favour than in the case of many of the modern attributions of psalms to him, even if, as seems most probable, the references to sinking in deep mire and the like are metaphorical. Cheyne fixes on the period preceding Nehemiah's first journey to Jerusalem as the earliest possible date for this psalm and its kindred ones (xxii., xxxv., and xl. 13-18). Baethgen follows Olshausen in assigning the psalm to the Maccabean period. The one point which seems absolutely certain is that David was not its author.

It falls into two equal parts (vv. 1-18 and 19-36). In the former part three turns of thought or feeling may be traced: vv. 1-6 being mainly a cry for Divine help, with plaintive spreading out of the psalmist's extremity of need; vv. 7-12 basing the prayer on the fact that his sufferings flow from his religion; and vv. 13-18 being a stream of petitions for deliverance, with continuous allusion to the description of his trials in vv. 1-6. The second part (vv. 19-36) begins with renewed description of the psalmist's affliction (vv. 19-21), and thence passes to invocation of God's justice on his foes (vv. 22-28), which takes the place of the direct petitions for deliverance in the first part. The whole closes with trustful anticipation of answers to prayer, which will call forth praise from ever-widening circles,—first from the psalmist himself; then from the oppressed righteous; and, finally, from heaven, earth, and sea.

The numerous citations of this psalm in the New Testament have led many commentators to maintain its directly Messianic character. But its confessions of sin and imprecations of vengeance are equally incompatible with that view. It is Messianic as typical rather than as prophetic, exhibiting a history, whether of king, prophet, righteous man, or personified nation, in which the same principles are at work as are manifest in their supreme energy and highest form in the Prince of righteous sufferers. But the correspondence of such a detail as giving gall and vinegar, with the history of Jesus, carries us beyond the region of types, and is a witness that God's Spirit shaped the utterances of the psalmist for a purpose unknown to himself, and worked in like manner on the rude soldiers, whose clumsy mockery and clumsy kindness fulfilled ancient words. There is surely something more here than coincidence or similarity between the experience of one righteous sufferer and another. If Jesus cried "I thirst" in order to bring about the "fulfilment" of one verse of our psalm, His doing so is of a piece with some other acts of His which were distinct claims to be the Messiah of prophecy; but His wish could not influence the soldiers to fulfil the psalm.

The first note is petition and spreading out of the piteous story of the psalmist's need. The burdened heart finds some ease in describing how heavy its burden is, and the devout heart receives some foretaste of longed-for help in the act of

telling God how sorely His help is needed. He who knows all our trouble is glad to have us tell it to Him, since it is thereby lightened, and our faith in Him is thereby increased. Sins confessed are wholly cancelled, and troubles spoken to God are more than half calmed. The psalmist begins with metaphors in vv. 1, 2, and translates these into grim prose in vv. 3, 4, and then, with acknowledgment of sinfulness, cries for God's intervention in vv. 5, 6. It is flat and prosaic to take the expressions in vv. 1, 2, literally, as if they described an experience like Jeremiah's in the miry pit. Nor can the literal application be carried through; for the image of "waters coming in unto the soul" brings up an entirely different set of circumstances from that of sinking in mud in a pit. The one describes trouble as rushing in upon a man, like a deluge which has burst its banks and overwhelms him; the other paints it as yielding and tenacious, affording no firm spot to stand on, but sucking him up in its filthy, stifling slime. No water was in Jeremiah's pit. The two figures are incompatible in reality, and can only be blended in imagination. What they mean is put without metaphor in vv. 3, 4. The psalmist is "weary with calling" on God; his throat is dry with much prayer; his eyes ache and are dim with upward gazing for help which lingers. Yet he does not cease to call, and still prays with his parched throat, and keeps the weary eyes steadfastly fixed, as the psalm shows. It is no small triumph of patient faith to wait for tarrying help. Ver. 4 tells why he thus cries. He is compassed by a crowd of enemies. Two things especially characterise these—their numbers, and their gratuitous hatred. As to the former, they are described as more numerous than the hairs of the psalmist's head. The parallelism of clauses recommends the textual alteration which substitutes for the unnecessary word "my destroyers" the appropriate expression "more than my bones," which is found in some old versions. Causeless hatred is the portion of the righteous in all ages; and our Lord points to Himself as experiencing it in utmost measure (John xv. 25). inasmuch as He, the perfectly righteous One, must take into His own history all the bitterness which is infused into the cup of those who fear God and love the right, by a generation who are out of sympathy with them.

The same experience, in forms varying according to the spirit of the times, is realised still in all who have the mind of Christ in them. As long as the world is a world, it will have some contempt mingling with its constrained respect for goodness, some hostility, now expressed by light shafts of mockery and ridicule, now by heavier and more hurtful missiles, for Christ's true servants. The ancient "Woe" for those of whom "all men speak well" is in force to-day. The "hatred" is "without a cause," in so far as its cherishers have received no hurt, and its objects desire only their enemies' good; but its cause lies deep in the irreconcilable antagonism of life-principles and aims between those who follow Christ and those who do not.

The psalmist had to bear unjust charges, and to make restitution of what he had never taken. Causeless hatred justified itself by false accusations, and innocence had but to bear silently and to save life at the expense of being robbed in the name of justice.

He turns from enemies to God. But his pro-

fession of innocence assumes a touching and unusual form. He does not, as might be expected, say, "Thou knowest my guiltlessness," but, "Thou knowest my foolishness." A true heart, while conscious of innocence in regard to men, and of having done nothing to evoke their enmity, is, even in the act of searching itself, arrested by the consciousness of its many sins in God's sight, and will confess these the more penitently, because it stands upright before men, and asserts its freedom from all crime against them. In so far as men's hatred is God's instrument, it inflicts merited chastisement. That does not excuse men; but it needs to be acknowledged by the sufferer, if things are to be right between him and God. Then, after such confession, he can pray, as this psalmist does, that God's mercy may deliver him. so that others who, like him, wait on God may not be disheartened or swept from their confidence, by the spectacle of his vain hopes and unanswered cries. The psalmist has a strong consciousness of his representative character, and, as in so many other psalms, thinks that his experience is of wide significance as a witness for God. This consciousness points to something special in his position, whether we find the specialty in his office, or in the supposed personification of the nation, or in poetic consciousness heightened by the sense of being an organ of God's Spirit. In a much inferior degree, the lowliest devout man may feel the same; for there are none whose experiences of God as answering prayer may not be a light of hope to some souls sitting in the dark.

In vv. 7-12 the prayer for deliverance is urged on the ground that the singer's sufferings are the result of his devotion. Psalm xlv. 13-22 may be compared, and Jer. xv. 15 is an even closer parallel. Fasting and sackcloth are mentioned again together in Psalm xxxv. 13; and Lam. iii. 14 and Job xxx. 9 resemble ver. 12 *b*. Surrounded by a godless generation, the psalmist's earnestness of faith and concern for God's honour made him an object of dislike, a target for drunken ridicule. These broke the strong ties of kindred, and acted as separating forces more strongly than brotherhood did, as a uniting one. "Zeal for God's house" presupposes the existence of the Temple, and also either its neglect or its desecration. That sunken condition of the sanctuary distressed the psalmist more than personal calamity, and it was the departure of Israel from God that made him clothe himself in sackcloth and fast and weep. But so far had deterioration gone that his mourning and its cause supplied materials for tipsy mirth, and his name became a by-word and a butt for malicious gossip. The whole picture is that of the standing experience of the godly among the godless. The Perfect Example of devotion and communion had to pass through these waters where they ran deepest and chilliest, but all who have His Spirit have their share of the same fate.

The last division of this first part (vv. 13-18) begins by setting in strong contrast the psalmist's prayer and the drunkard's song. He is sure that his cry will be heard, and so he calls the present time "a time of favour," and appeals, as often in the Psalter, to the multitude of God's loving-kindnesses and the faithfulness of His promise of salvation. Such a pleading with God on the ground of His manifested character is heard in vv. 13, 16, thus inclosing, as it were, the prayer for deliverance in a wrapping of reminders to

God of His own name. The petitions here echo the description of peril in the former part—mire and watery depths—and add another kindred image in that of the "pit shutting her mouth" over the suppliant. He is plunged in a deep dungeon, well-shaped; and if a stone is rolled on to its opening, his last gleam of daylight will be gone, and he will be buried alive. Beautifully do the pleas from God's character and those from the petitioner's sore need alternate, the latter predominating in vv. 17, 18. His thoughts pass from his own desperate condition to God's mercy, and from God's mercy to his own condition, and he has the reward of faith, in that he finds in his straits reasons for his assurance that this is a time of favour, as well as pleas to urge with God. They make the black backing which turns his soul into a mirror, reflecting God's promises in its trust.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 19 to end) has, like the former, three main divisions. The first of these, like vv. 1-6, is mainly a renewed spreading before God of the psalmist's trouble (vv. 19-21). Rooted sorrows are not plucked up by one effort. This recrudescence of fear breaking in upon the newly won serenity of faith is true to nature. On some parts of our coasts, where a narrow outlet hinders the free run of the tide, a second high water follows the first after an hour or so; and often a similar bar to the flowing away of fears brings them back in full rush after they had begun to sink. The psalmist had appealed to God's knowledge of His "foolishness" as indorsing his protestations of innocence towards men. He now (ver. 19) appeals to His knowledge of his distresses, as indorsing his pitiful complaints. His soul is too deeply moved now to use metaphors. He speaks no more of mire and flood, but we hear the moan of a broken heart, and that wail which sounds sad across the centuries and wakes echoes in many solitary hearts. The psalmist's eyes had failed, while he looked upwards for a God whose coming seemed slow; but they had looked yet more wearily and vainly for human pity and comforters, and found none. Instead of pity He had received only aggravation of misery. Such seems to be the force of giving gall for food, and vinegar to His thirst. The precise meaning of the word rendered "gall" is uncertain, but the general idea of something bitter is sufficient. That was all that His foes would give Him when hungry; and vinegar, which would make Him more thirsty still, was all that they proffered for His thirst. Such was their sympathy and comforting. According to Matthew, the potion of "wine (or vinegar) mingled with gall" was offered to and rejected by Jesus, before being fastened to the cross. He does not expressly quote the psalm, but probably refers to it. John, on the other hand, does tell us that Jesus, "that the scripture might be accomplished, said, I thirst," and sees its fulfilment in the kindly act of moistening the parched lips. The evangelist's expression does not necessarily imply that a desire to fulfil the scripture was our Lord's motive. Crucifixion was accompanied with torturing thirst, which wrung that last complaint from Jesus. But the evangelist discerns a Divine purpose behind the utterance of Jesus' human weakness; and it is surely less difficult, for any one who believes in supernatural revelation at all, to believe that the words of the psalmist were shaped by a higher power, and the hands of the Roman soldiers

moved by another impulse than their own, than to believe that this minute correspondence of psalm and gospel is merely accidental.

But the immediately succeeding section warns us against pushing the Messianic character of the psalm too far, for these fearful imprecations cannot have any analogies in Christ's words (vv. 22-28). The form of the wish in "Let their table become a snare" is explained by remembering that the Eastern table was often a leather flap laid on the ground, which the psalmist desires may start up as a snare, and close upon the feasters as they sit round it secure. Disease, continual terror, dimmed eyes, paralysed or quaking loins, ruin falling on their homes, and desolation round their encampment, so that they have no descendants, are the least of the evils invoked. The psalmist's desires go further than all this corporeal and material disaster. He prays that iniquity may be added to their iniquity—*i.e.*, that they may be held guilty of sin after sin; and that they may have no portion in God's righteousness—*i.e.*, in the gifts which flow from His adherence to His covenant.

The climax of all these maledictions is that awful wish that the persecutors may be blotted out of the book of life or of the living. True, the high New Testament conception of that book, according to which it is the burgess-roll of the citizens of the New Jerusalem, the possessors of eternal life, does not plainly belong to it in Old Testament usage, in which it means apparently the register of those living on earth. But to blot names therefrom is not only to kill, but to exclude from the national community, and so from all the privileges of the people of God. The psalmist desires for his foes the accumulation of all the ills that flesh is heir to, the extirpation of their families and their absolute exclusion from the company of the living and the righteous. It is impossible to bring such utterances into harmony with the teachings of Jesus, and the attempt to vindicate them ignores plain facts and does violence to plain words. Better far to let them stand as a monument of the earlier stage of God's progressive revelation, and discern clearly the advance which Christian ethics has made on them.

The psalm ends with glad anticipations of deliverance and vows of thanksgiving. The psalmist is sure that God's salvation will lift him high above his enemies, and as sure that then he will be as grateful as he is now earnest in prayer, and surest of all that his thankful voice will sound sweeter in God's ear than any sacrifice would smell in His nostrils. There is no contempt of sacrifices expressed in "horned and hoofed," but simply the idea of maturity which fits the animal to be offered.

The single voice of praise will be caught up, the singer thinks, by a great chorus of those who would have been struck dumb with confusion if his prayer had not been answered (ver. 6), and who, in like manner, are gladdened by seeing his deliverance. The grace bestowed on one brings thanksgivings from many, which redound to the glory of God. The sudden transition in ver. 32 *b* to direct address to the seekers after God, as if they stood beside the solitary singer, gives vividness to the anticipation. The insertion of "behold" is warranted, and tells what revives the beholders' hearts. The seekers after God feel the pulse of a quicker life throbbing, when they see the wonders wrought through prayer. The singer's thoughts go beyond his own deliverance to that of Israel. "His captives" is most naturally un-

derstood as referring to the exiled nation. And this wider manifestation of God's restoring power will evoke praise from a wider circle, even from heaven, earth, and sea. The circumstances contemplated in vv. 33-36 are evidently those of a captivity. God's people are in bondage, the cities of Judah are in ruins, the inhabitants scattered far from their homes. The only reason for taking the closing verses as being a liturgical addition is unwillingness to admit exilic or post-exilic psalms. But these verses cannot be fairly interpreted without recognising that they presuppose that Israel is in bondage, or at least on the verge of it. The circumstances of Jeremiah's life and times coincide closely with those of the psalmist.

PSALM LXX.*

- 1 *O God*, [be pleased] to deliver me,
Jehovah, hasten to my help.
- 2 Shamed and put to the blush be the seekers after
my soul!
Turned back and dishonoured be they who de-
light in my calamity!
- 3 *Let them turn back* by reason of their shame
who say, Oho! Oho!
- 4 Joyful and glad in Thee be all who seek Thee!
And "God be magnified" may they ever say
who love Thy salvation!
- 5 But as for me, I am afflicted and needy;
O God, hasten to me:
My help and my deliverer art Thou;
Jehovah, delay not.

THIS psalm is all but identical with the last verses of Psalm xl. 13-17. Some unimportant alterations have been made, principally in the Divine names; but the principle on which they have been made is not obvious. It is scarcely correct to say, with Delitzsch, that the psalm "has been transformed, so as to become Elohistic"; for though it twice replaces the name of Jehovah with that of God (vv. 1, 4), it makes the converse change in ver. 5, last clause, by reading *Jehovah* instead of "God," as in Psalm xl.

Other changes are of little moment. The principal are in vv. 3 and 5. In the former the vehement wish that the psalmist's mockers may be *paralysed with shame* is softened down into a desire that they may be *turned back*. The two verbs are similar in sound, and the substitution may have been accidental, a slip of memory or a defect in hearing, or it may have been an artistic variation of the original. In ver. 5 a prayer that God will hasten to the psalmist's help takes the place of an expression of confidence that "*Jehovah* purposes [good]" to him, and again there is similarity of sound in the two words. This change is like the subtle alteration which a painter might make on his picture by taking out one spot of high light. The gleam of confidence is changed to a call of need, and the tone of the whole psalm is thereby made more plaintive.

Hupfeld holds that this psalm is the original, and Psalm xl. a composite; but most commentators agree in regarding this as a fragment of that psalm. The cut has not been very cleanly made; for the necessary verb "be pleased" has been left behind, and the symmetry of ver. 1 is destroyed for want of it. The awkward incompleteness of this beginning witnesses that the psalm is a fragment.

* Italics show variations from Psalm xl.

PSALM LXXI.

- 1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge,
Let me not be put to shame for ever.
- 2 In Thy righteousness deliver me and rescue
me,
Bend Thine ear and save me.
- 3 Be to me for a rock of habitation to go to
continually;
Thou hast commanded to save me,
For my rock and my fortress art Thou.
- 4 My God, rescue me from the hand of the
wicked,
From the fist of the evil-doer and the violent
man.
- 5 For Thou [art] my hope,
O Lord Jehovah, [Thou art] my trust from my
youth.
- 6 On Thee have I been stayed from the womb,
From my mother's bowels Thou hast been my
protector:
Of Thee is my praise continually.
- 7 As a wonder am I become to many,
But Thou art my refuge—a strong one.
- 8 My mouth is filled with Thy praise,
All the day with Thine honour.
- 9 Cast me not away in the time of old age,
When my strength fails, forsake me not.
- 10 For mine enemies speak concerning me,
And the watchers of my soul consult together,
- 11 Saying, God has left him.
Chase and seize him; for there is no deliverer.
- 12 O God, be not far from me,
My God, haste to my help.
- 13 Ashamed, confounded, be the adversaries of
my soul,
Covered with reproach and confusion be those
who seek my hurt.
- 14 But as for me, continually will I hope,
And add to all Thy praise.
- 15 My mouth shall recount Thy righteousness,
All the day Thy salvation,
For I know not the numbers [thereof].
- 16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord
Jehovah,
I will celebrate Thy righteousness, [even]
Thine only.
- 17 O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth,
And up till now I declare Thy wonders.
- 18 And even to old age and grey hairs,
O God, forsake me not,
Till I declare Thine arm to [the next] genera-
tion,
To all who shall come Thy power.
- 19 And Thy righteousness, O God, [reaches] to
the height.
O Thou who hast done great things,
Who is like Thee?
- 20 Thou who hast made us see straits many and
sore,
Thou wilt revive us again,
And from the abysses of the earth will bring
us up again.
- 21 Thou wilt increase my greatness,
And wilt turn to comfort me.
- 22 Also I will thank Thee with the lyre, [even]
Thy troth, my God,
I will harp unto Thee with the harp, Thou
Holy One of Israel.

- 23 My lips shall sing aloud when I harp unto
Thee,
And my soul, which Thou hast redeemed.
- 24 Also my tongue shall all the day muse on Thy
righteousness,
For shamed, for put to the blush, are they that
seek my hurt.

ECHOES of former psalms make the staple of this one, and even those parts of it which are not quotations have little individuality. The themes are familiar, and the expression of them is scarcely less so. There is no well-defined strophical structure, and little continuity of thought or feeling. Vv. 13 and 24 *b* serve as a kind of partial refrain, and may be taken as dividing the psalm into two parts, but there is little difference between the contents of the two. Delitzsch gives in his adhesion to the hypothesis that Jeremiah was the author; and there is considerable weight in the reasons assigned for that ascription of authorship. The pensive, plaintive tone; the abundant quotations, with slight alterations of the passages cited; the autobiographical hints which fit in with Jeremiah's history, are the chief of these. But they can scarcely be called conclusive. There is more to be said for the supposition that the singer is the personified nation in this case than in many others. The sudden transition to "us" in ver. 20, which the Masoretic marginal correction corrects into "me," favours, though it does not absolutely require, that view, which is also supported by the frequent allusion to "youth" and "old age." These, however, are capable of a worthy meaning, if referring to an individual. Vv. 1-3 are slightly varied from Psalm xxxi. 1-3. The character of the changes will be best appreciated by setting the two passages side by side.

PSALM XXXI.

- 1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I
take refuge; let me not be
ashamed forever:
In Thy righteousness res-
cue me.
- 2 *a* Bend Thine ear to me;
deliver me speedily.

PSALM LXXI.

- 1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I
take refuge:
Let me not be put to shame
for ever.
- 2 In Thy righteousness de-
liver me and rescue me:
Bend Thine ear and save
me.

The two verbs, which in the former psalm are in separate clauses ("deliver" and "rescue"), are here brought together. "Speedily" is omitted, and "save" is substituted for "deliver," which has been drawn into the preceding clause. Obviously no difference of meaning is intended to be conveyed, and the changes look very like the inaccuracies of memoriter quotations. The next variation is as follows:—

PSALM XXXI.

- 2 *b* Be to me for a strong
rock, for a house of defence
to save me.
- 3 For my rock and my fort-
ress art Thou.

PSALM LXXI.

- 3 Be to me for a rock of ha-
bitation to go to continually:
Thou hast commanded to
save me;
For my rock and my fort-
ress art Thou.

The difference between "a strong rock" and "rock of habitation" is but one letter. That between "for a house of defence" and "to go to continually: Thou has commanded" is extremely slight, as Baethgen has well shown. Possibly both of these variations are due to textual corruption, but more probably this psalmist intentionally altered the words of an older psalm. Most of the old versions have the existing text, but the LXX. seems to have read the Hebrew here

as in Psalm xxxi. The changes are not important, but they are significant. That thought of God as a habitation to which the soul may continually find access goes very deep into the secrets of the devout life. The variation in ver. 3 is recommended by observing the frequent recurrence of "continually" in this psalm, of which that word may almost be said to be the motto. Nor is the thought of God's command given to His multitude of unnamed servants, to save this poor man, one which we can afford to lose.

Vv. 5, 6, are a similar variation of Psalm xxii. 9, 10. "On Thee have I been stayed from the womb," says this psalmist; "On Thee was I cast from the womb," says the original passage. The variation beautifully brings out, not only reliance on God, but the Divine response to that reliance by life-long upholding. That strong arm answers leaning weakness with firm support, and whosoever relies on it is upheld by it. The word rendered above "protector" is doubtful. It is substituted for that in Psalm xxii. 9 which means "One that takes out," and some commentators would attach the same meaning to the word used here, referring it to God's goodness before and at birth. But it is better taken as equivalent to benefactor, provider, or some such designation, and as referring to God's lifelong care.

The psalmist has been a "wonder" to many spectators, either in the sense that they have gazed astonished at God's goodness, or, as accords better with the adversative character of the next clause ("But Thou art my refuge"), that his sufferings have been unexampled. Both ideas may well be combined, for the life of every man, if rightly studied, is full of miracles both of mercy and judgment. If the psalm is the voice of an individual, the natural conclusion from such words is that his life was conspicuous; but it is obvious that the national reference is appropriate here.

On this thankful retrospect of life-long help and life-long trust the psalm builds a prayer for future protection from eager enemies, who think that the charmed life is vulnerable at last.

Vv. 9-13 rise to a height of emotion above the level of the rest of the psalm. On one hypothesis, we have in them the cry of an old man, whose strength diminishes as his dangers increase. Something undisclosed in his circumstances gave colour to the greedy hopes of his enemies. Often prosperous careers are overclouded at the end, and the piteous spectacle is seen of age overtaken by tempests which its feebleness cannot resist, and which are all the worse to face because of the calms preceding them. On the national hypothesis, the psalm is the prayer of Israel at a late stage of its history, from which it looks back to the miracles of old, and then to the ring of enemies rejoicing over its apparent weakness, and then upwards to the Eternal Helper.

Vv. 12, 13, are woven out of other psalms. 12 *a* "Be not far from me," is found in xxii. 11, 19; xxxv. 22; xxxviii. 21, etc. "Haste to my help" is found in xxxviii. 22; xl. 13 (lxx. 1). For ver. 13 compare xxxv. 4, 26; xl. 14 (lxx. 2). With this, as a sort of refrain, the first part of the psalm ends.

The second part goes over substantially the same ground, but with lighter heart. The confidence of deliverance is more vivid, and it, as well as the vow of praise following thereon, bulk larger. The singer has thinned away his anxie-

ties by speaking them to God, and has by the same process solidified his faith. Aged eyes should see God, the helper, more clearly when earth begins to look grey and dim. The forward look of such finds little to stay it on this side of heaven. As there seems less and less to hope for here, there should be more and more there. Youth is the time for buoyant anticipation, according to the world's notions, but age may have far brighter lights ahead than youth had leisure to see. "I will hope always" becomes sublime from aged lips, which are so often shaped to say, "I have nothing left to hope for now."

This psalmist's words may well be a pattern for old men, who need fear no failure of buoyancy, nor any collapse of gladness, if they will fix their thoughts where this singer did his. Other subjects of thought and speech will pall and run dry; but he whose theme is God's righteousness and the salvation that flows from it will never lack materials for animating meditation and grateful praise. "I know not the numbers thereof." It is something to have fast hold of an inexhaustible subject. It will keep an old man young.

The psalmist recognises his task, which is also his joy, to declare God's wondrous works, and prays for God's help till he has discharged it. The consciousness of a vocation to speak to later generations inspires him, and assures him that he is immortal till his work is done. His anticipations have been fulfilled beyond his knowledge. His words will last as long as the world. But men with narrower spheres may be animated by the same consciousness, and they who have rightly understood the purpose of God's mercies to themselves, will, like the psalmist, recognise in their own participation in His salvation an imperative command to make it known, and an assurance that nothing shall by any means harm them till they have fulfilled their witnessing. A many-wintered saint should be a convincing witness for God.

Ver. 20, with its sudden transition to the plural, may simply show that the singer passes out from individual contemplation to the consciousness of the multitude of fellow-sufferers and fellow-participants in God's mercy. Such transition is natural; for the most private passages of a good man's communion with God are swift to bring up the thought of others like-minded and similarly blessed. "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising." Every solo swells into a chorus. Again the song returns to "my" and "me," the confidence of the single soul being reinvigorated by the thought of sharers in blessing.

So all ends with the certainty of, and the vow of praise for, deliverances already realised in faith, though not in fact. But the imitative character of the psalm is maintained even in this last triumphant vow; for ver. 24 *a* is almost identical with xxxv. 28; and *b*, as has been already pointed out, is copied from several other psalms. But imitative words are none the less sincere; and new thankfulness may be run into old moulds; without detriment to its acceptableness to God and preciousness to men.

PSALM LXXII.

1 O God, give Thy judgments to the king.
And Thy righteousness, to the king's son.

- 2 May he judge Thy people with righteousness,
And Thine afflicted with judgment!
- 3 May the mountains bring forth peace to the
people,
And the hills, through righteousness!
- 4 May he judge the afflicted of the people,
Save the children of the needy,
And crush the oppressor!
- 5 May they fear Thee as long as the sun shines,
And as long as the moon shows her face, gen-
eration after generation!
- 6 May he come down like rain upon mown
pasture,
Like showers—a heavy downpour on the earth!
- 7 May the righteous flourish in his days,
And abundance of peace, till there be no more
a moon!
- 8 May he have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth!
- 9 Before him shall the desert peoples bow;
And his enemies shall lick the dust.
- 10 The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring
tribute:
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.
- 11 And all kings shall fall down before him:
All nations shall serve him.
- 12 For he shall deliver the needy when he cries,
And the afflicted, and him who has no helper.
- 13 He shall spare the weak and needy,
And the souls of the needy shall he save.
- 14 From oppression and from violence he shall
ransom their soul;
And precious shall their blood be in his eyes.
- 15 So that he lives and gives to him of the gold
of Sheba,
And prays for him continually,
Blesses him all the day.
- 16 May there be abundance of corn in the earth on
the top of the mountains!
May its fruit rustle like Lebanon!
And may [men] spring from the city like grass
of the earth!
- 17 May his name last for ever!
May his name send forth shoots as long as the
sun shines,
And may men bless themselves in him,
May all nations pronounce him blessed!
- 18 Blessed be Jehovah, God, the God of Israel,
Who only doeth wondrous works,
- 19 And blessed be His glorious name for ever,
And let the whole earth be filled with His
glory!
Amen, and Amen.
- 20 The prayers of David the son of Jesse are
ended.

RIGHTLY or wrongly, the superscription ascribes this psalm to Solomon. Its contents have led several commentators to take the superscription in a meaning for which there is no warrant, as designating the subject, not the author. Clearly, the whole is a prayer for the king; but why should not he be both suppliant and object of supplication? Modern critics reject this as incompatible with the "phraseological evidence," and adduce the difference between the historical Solomon and the ideal of the psalm as negating reference to him. Ver. 8 is said by them to be quoted from Zech. ix. 10, though Cheyne doubts

whether there is borrowing. Ver. 17 *b* is said to be dependent on Gen. xxii. 18, xxvi. 4, which are assumed to be later than the seventh century. Ver. 12 is taken to be a reminiscence of Job. xxix. 12, and ver. 16 *b* of Job. v. 25. But these are too uncertain criteria to use as conclusive,—partly because coincidence does not necessarily imply quotation; partly because, quotation being admitted, the delicate question of priority remains, which can rarely be settled by comparison of the passages in question; and partly because, quotation and priority being admitted, the date of the original is still under discussion. The impossibility of Solomon's praying thus for himself does not seem to the present writer so completely established that the hypothesis must be abandoned, especially if the alternative is to be, as Hitzig, followed by Olshausen and Cheyne, proposes, that the king in the psalm is Ptolemy Philadelphus, to whom Psalm xlv. is fitted by the same authorities. Baethgen puts the objections which most will feel to such a theory with studied moderation when he says "that the promises given to the patriarchs in Gen. xxii. 18, xxvi. 4. should be transferred by a pious Israelite to a foreign king appears to me improbable." But another course is open—namely, to admit that the psalm gives no materials for defining its date, beyond the fact that a king of Davidic descent was reigning when it was composed. The authorship may be left uncertain, as may the name of the king for whom such far-reaching blessings were invoked; for he was but a partial embodiment of the kingly idea, and the very disproportion between the reality seen in any Jewish monarch and the lofty idealisms of the psalm compels us to regard the earthly ruler as but a shadow, and the true theme of the singer as being the Messianic King. We are not justified, however, in attempting to transfer every point of the psalmist's prayer to the Messiah. The historical occasion of the psalm is to be kept in mind. A human monarch stands in the foreground; but the aspirations expressed are so far beyond anything that he is or can be, that they are either extravagant flattery, or reach out beyond their immediate occasion to the King Messiah.

The psalm is not properly a prediction, but a prayer. There is some divergence of opinion as to the proper rendering of the principal verbs,—some, as the A. V. and R. V. (text), taking them as uniformly futures, which is manifestly wrong; some taking them as expressions of wish throughout, which is also questionable; and others recognising pure futures intermingled with petitions, which seems best. The boundaries of the two are difficult to settle, just because the petitions are so confident that they are all but predictions, and the two melt into each other in the singer's mind. The flow of thought is simple. The psalmist's prayers are broadly massed. In vv. 1-4 he prays for the foundation of the king's reign in righteousness, which will bring peace; in vv. 5-7 for its perpetuity, and in vv. 8-11 for its universality; while in vv. 12-15 the ground of both these characteristics is laid in the king's becoming the champion of the oppressed. A final prayer for the increase of his people and the perpetuity and world-wide glory of his name concludes the psalm, to which is appended in vv. 18-20 a doxology, closing the Second Book of the Psalter.

The first petitions of the psalm all ask for one thing for the king—namely, that he should give

righteous judgment. They reflect the antique conception of a king as the fountain of justice, himself making and administering law and giving decisions. Thrice in these four verses does "righteousness" occur as the foundation attribute of an ideal king. Caprice, self-interest, and tyrannous injustice were rank in the world's monarchies round the psalmist. Bitter experience and sad observation had taught him that the first condition of national prosperity was a righteous ruler. These petitions are also animated by the conception, which is as true in the modern as in the ancient world, that righteousness has its seat in the bosom of God, and that earthly judgments are righteous when they conform to and are the echo of His. "Righteousness" is the quality of mind, of which the several "judgments" are the expressions. This king sits on an ancestral throne. His people are God's people. Since, then, he is God's viceroy, the desire cannot be vain that in his heart there may be some reflection of God's righteousness, and that his decisions may accord with God's. One cannot but remember Solomon's prayer for "an understanding heart," that he might judge this people; nor forget how darkly his later reign showed against its bright beginning. A righteous king makes a peaceful people, especially in a despotic monarchy. The sure results of such a reign—which are, likewise, the psalmist's chief reason for his petitions—are set forth in the vivid metaphor of ver. 3, in which peace is regarded as the fruit which springs, by reason of the king's righteousness, from mountains and hills. This psalmist has special fondness for that figure of vegetable growth (vv. 7, 16, 17); and it is especially suitable in this connection, as peace is frequently represented in Scripture as the fruit of righteousness, both in single souls and in a nation's history. The mountains come into view here simply as being the most prominent features of the land, and not, as in ver. 16, with any reference to their barrenness, which would make abundant growth on them more wonderful, and indicative of yet greater abundance on the plains.

A special manifestation of judicial righteousness is the vindication of the oppressed and the punishment of the oppressor (ver. 4). The word rendered "judge" in ver. 4 differs from that in ver. 2, and is the same from which the name of the "Judges" in Israel is derived. Like them, this king is not only to pronounce decisions, as the word in ver. 2 means, but is to execute justice by acts of deliverance, which smite in order to rescue. Functions which policy and dignity require to be kept apart in the case of earthly rulers are united in the ideal monarch. He executes his own sentences. His acts are decisions. The psalmist has no thought of inferior officers by the king's side. One figure fills his mind and his canvas. Surely such an ideal is either destined to remain for ever a fair dream, or its fulfilment is to be recognised in the historical Person in whom God's righteousness dwelt in higher fashion than psalmists knew, who was, "first, King of righteousness, and then, after that, also King of peace," and who, by His deed, has broken every yoke, and appeared as the defender of all the needy. The poet prayed that Israel's king might perfectly discharge his office by Divine help; the Christian gives thanks that the King of men has been and done all which Israel's monarchs failed to be and do.

The perpetuity of the king's reign and of his subjects' peace is the psalmist's second aspiration (vv. 5-7). The "Thee" of ver. 5 presents a difficulty, as it is doubtful to whom it refers. Throughout the psalm the king is spoken of, and never *to*; and if it is further noticed that, in the preceding verses, God has been directly addressed, and "Thy" used thrice in regard to Him, it will appear more natural to take the reference in ver. 5 to be to Him. The fear of God would be diffused among the king's subjects, as a consequence of his rule in righteousness. Hupfeld takes the word as referring to the king, and suggests changing the text to "him" instead of "Thee"; while others, among whom are Cheyne and Baethgen, follow the track of the LXX. in adopting a reading which may be translated "May he live," or "Prolong his days." But the thought yielded by the existing text, if referred to God, is most natural and worthy. The king is, as it were, the shadow on earth of God's righteousness, and consequently becomes an organ for the manifestation thereof, in such manner as to draw men to true devotion. The psalmist's desires are for something higher than external prosperity, and his conceptions of the kingly office are very sacred. Not only peace and material well-being, but also the fear of Jehovah, are longed for by him to be diffused in Israel. And he prays that these blessings may be perpetual. The connection between the king's righteousness and the fear of God requires that that permanence should belong to both. The cause is as lasting as its effect. Through generation after generation he desires that each shall abide. He uses peculiar expressions for continual duration "with the sun"—*i.e.*, contemporaneous with that unfading splendour; "before the face of the moon"—*i.e.*, as long as she shines. But could the singer anticipate such length of dominion for any human king? Psalm xxi. has similar language in regard to the same person, and here, as there, it seems sufficiently accounted for by the consideration that, while the psalmist was speaking of an individual, he was thinking of the office rather than of the person, and that the perpetual continuance of the Davidic dynasty, not the undying life of any one representative of it, was meant. The full light of the truth that there is a king whose royalty, like his priesthood, passes to no other is not to be forced upon the psalm. It stands as a witness that devout and inspired souls longed for the establishment of a kingdom, against which revolutions and enemies and mortality were powerless. They knew not that their desires could not be fulfilled by the longest succession of dying kings, but were to be more than accomplished by One, "of whom it is witnessed that He liveth."

The psalmist turns for a moment from his prayer for the perpetuity of the king's rule, to linger upon the thought of its blessedness as set forth in the lovely image of ver. 6. Rain upon mown grass is no blessing, as every farmer knows; but what is meant is, not the grass which has already been mown, but the naked meadow from which it has been taken. It needs drenching showers, in order to sprout again and produce an aftermath. The poet's eye is caught by the contrast between the bare look of the field immediately after cutting and the rich growth that springs, as by magic, from the yellow roots after a plentiful shower. This king's gracious influences shall fall upon even what seems dead,

and charm forth hidden life that will flush the plain with greenness. The psalmist dwells on the picture, reiterating the comparison in ver. 6 *b*, and using there an uncommon word, which seems best rendered as meaning a heavy rainfall. With such affluence of quickening powers will the righteous king bless his people. The "Mirror for Magistrates," which is held up in the lovely poem in 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, has a remarkable parallel in its description of the just ruler as resembling a "morning without clouds, when the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain"; but the psalmist heightens the metaphor by the introduction of the mown meadow as stimulated to new growth. This image of the rain lingers with him and shapes his prayer in ver. 7 *a*. A righteous king will insure prosperity to the righteous, and the number of such will increase. Both these ideas seem to be contained in the figure of their flourishing, which is literally *bud* or *shoot*. And, as the people become more and more prevailingly righteous, they receive more abundant and unbroken peace. The psalmist had seen deeply into the conditions of national prosperity, as well as those of individual tranquillity, when he based these on rectitude.

With ver. 8 the singer takes a still loftier flight, and prays for the universality of the king's dominion. In that verse the form of the verb is that which expresses desire, but in ver. 9 and following verses the verbs may be rendered as simple futures. Confident prayers insensibly melt into assurances of their own fulfilment. As the psalmist pours out his petitions, they glide into prophecies; for they are desires fashioned upon promises, and bear, in their very earnestness, the pledge of their realisation. As to the details of the form which the expectation of universal dominion here takes, it need only be noted that we have to do with a poet, not with a geographer. We are not to treat the expressions as if they were instructions to a boundary commission, and to be laid down upon a map. "The sea" is probably the Mediterranean; but what the other sea which makes the opposite boundary may be is hard to say. Commentators have thought of the Persian Gulf, or of an imaginary ocean encircling the flat earth, according to ancient ideas. But more probably the expression is as indeterminate as the parallel one, "the ends of the earth." In the first clause of the verse the psalmist starts from the Mediterranean, the western boundary, and his anticipations travel away into the unknown eastern regions; while, in the second clause, he begins with the Euphrates, which was the eastern boundary of the dominion promised to Israel, and, coming westward, he passes out in thought to the dim regions beyond. The very impossibility of defining the boundaries declares the boundlessness of the kingdom. The poet's eyes have looked east and west, and in ver. 9 he turns to the south, and sees the desert tribes, unconquered as they have hitherto been, grovelling before the king, and his enemies in abject submission at his feet. The word rendered "desert peoples" is that used in Psalm lxxiv. 14 for wild beasts inhabiting the desert, but here it can only mean *wilderness tribes*. There seems no need to alter the text, as has been proposed, and to read "adversaries." In ver. 10 the psalmist again looks westward, across the mysterious ocean of which he, like all his nation, knew so little. The great city of Tarshish lay for him at the farthest bounds of

the world; and between him and it, or perhaps still farther out in the waste unknown, were islands from which rich and strange things sometimes reached Judæa. These shall bring their wealth in token of fealty. Again he looks southward to Sheba in Arabia, and Seba far south below Egypt, and foresees their submission. His knowledge of distant lands is exhausted, and therefore he ceases enumeration, and falls back on comprehensiveness. How little he knew, and how much he believed! His conceptions of the sweep of that "all" were childish; his faith that, however many these unknown kings and nations were, God's anointed was their king was either extravagant exaggeration, or it was nurtured in him by God, and meant to be fulfilled when a world, wide beyond his dreams and needy beyond his imagination, should own the sway of a King, endowed with God's righteousness and communicative of God's peace, in a manner and measure beyond his desires.

The triumphant swell of these anticipations passes with wonderful pathos into gentler music, as if the softer tones of flutes should follow trumpet blasts. How tenderly and profoundly the psalm bases the universality of the dominion on the pitying care and delivering power of the King! The whole secret of sway over men lies in that "For," which ushers in the gracious picture of the beneficent and tender-hearted Monarch. The world is so full of sorrow, and men are so miserable and needy, that he who can stanch their wounds, solace their griefs, and shelter their lives will win their hearts and be crowned their king. Thrones based on force are as if set on an iceberg which melts away. There is no solid foundation for rule except helpfulness. In the world and for a little while "they that exercise authority are called benefactors"; but in the long-run the terms of the sentence are inverted, and they that are rightly called benefactors exercise authority. The more earthly rulers approximate to this ideal portrait, the more "broad-based upon their people's will" and love will their thrones stand. If Israel's kings had adhered to it, their throne would have endured. But their failures point to Him in whom the principle declared by the psalmist receives its most tender illustration. The universal dominion of Jesus Christ is based upon the fact that He "tasted death for every man." In the Divine purpose, He has won the right to rule men because He has died for them. In historical realisation, He wins men's submission because He has given Himself for them. Therefore does He command with absolute authority; therefore do we obey with entire submission. His sway not only reaches out over all the earth, inasmuch as the power of His cross extends to all men, but it lays hold of the inmost will and makes submission a delight.

The king is represented in ver. 14 as taking on himself the office of Goel, or Kinsman-Redeemer, and ransoming his subjects' lives from "deceit and violence." That "their blood is precious in his eyes" is another way of saying that they are too dear to him to be suffered to perish. This king's treasure is the life of his subjects. Therefore he will put forth his power to preserve them and deliver them. The result of such tender care and delivering love is set forth in ver. 15, but in obscure language. The ambiguity arises from the absence of expressed subjects for the four verbs in the verse. Who is he who "lives"? Is the

same person the giver of the gold of Sheba, and to whom is it given? Who prays, and for whom? And who blesses, and whom does he bless? The plain way of understanding the verse is to suppose that the person spoken of in all the clauses is the same; and then the question comes whether he is the king or the ransomed man. Difficulties arise in carrying out either reference through all the clauses; and hence attempts have been made to vary the subject of the verbs. Delitzsch, for instance, supposes that it is the ransomed man who "lives," the king who gives to the ransomed man gold, and the man who prays for and blesses the king. But such an arbitrary shuttling about of the reference of "he" and "him" is impossible. Other attempts of a similar kind need not be noticed here. The only satisfactory course is to take one person as spoken of by all the verbs. But then the question comes, Who is he? There is much to be said in favour of either hypothesis as answering that question. The phrase which is rendered above "So that he lives," is so like the common invocation "May the king live," that it strongly favours taking the whole verse as a continuance of the petitions for the monarch. But if so, the verb in the second clause (*he shall give*) must be taken impersonally, as equivalent to "one will give" or "there shall be given," and those in the remaining clauses must be similarly dealt with, or the text altered so as to make them plurals, reading, "They shall pray for him (the king), . . . and shall bless him." On the whole, it is best to suppose that the ransomed man is the subject throughout, and that the verse describes his glad tribute, and continual thankfulness. Ransomed from death, he brings offerings to his deliverer. It seems singular that he should be conceived of both as "needy" and as owning "gold" which he can offer; but in the literal application the incongruity is not sufficient to prevent the adoption of this view of the clause; and in the higher application of the words to Christ and His subjects, which we conceive to be warranted, the incongruity becomes fine and deep truth; for the poorest soul, delivered by Him, can bring tribute, which He esteems as precious beyond all earthly treasure. Nor need the remaining clauses militate against the view that the ransomed man is the subject in them. The psalm had a historical basis, and all its points cannot be introduced into the Messianic interpretation. This one of praying for the king cannot be; notwithstanding the attempts of some commentators to find a meaning for it in Christian prayers for the spread of Christ's kingdom. That explanation does violence to the language, mistakes the nature of Messianic prophecy, and brings discredit on the view that the psalm has a Messianic character.

The last part of the psalm (vv. 16, 17) recurs to petitions for the growth of the nation and the perpetual flourishing of the king's name. The fertility of the land and the increase of its people are the psalmist's desires, which are also certainties, as expressed in ver. 16. He sees in imagination the whole land waving with abundant harvests, which reach even to the tops of the mountains, and rustle in the summer air, with a sound like the cedars of Lebanon, when they move their layers of greenness to the breeze. The word rendered above "abundance" is doubtful; but there does not seem to be in the psalmist's mind the contrast which he is often supposed to be ex-

pressing, beautiful and true as it is, between the small beginnings and the magnificent end of the kingdom on earth. The mountains are here thought of as lofty and barren. If waving harvests clothe their gaunt sides, how will the vales laugh in plentiful crops! As the earth yields her increase, so the people of the king shall be multiplied, and from all his cities they shall spring forth abundant as grass. That figure would bear much expansion; for what could more beautifully set forth rapidity of growth, close-knit community, multiplication of units, and absorption of these in a lovely whole, than the picture of a meadow clothed with its grassy carpet? Such hopes had only partial fulfilment in Israel. Nor have they had adequate fulfilment up till now. But they lie on the horizon of the future, and they shall one day be reached. Much that is dim is treasured in them. There may be a renovated world, from which the curse of barrenness has been banished. There shall be a swift increase of the subjects of the King, until the earlier hope of the psalm is fulfilled, and all nations shall serve him.

But bright as are the poet's visions concerning the kingdom, his last gaze is fastened on its king, and he prays that his name may last for ever, and may send forth shoots as long as the sun shines in the sky. He probably meant no more than a prayer for the continual duration of the dynasty, and his conception of the name as sending forth shoots was probably that of its being perpetuated in descendants. But, as has been already noticed, the perpetuity, which he conceived of as belonging to a family and an office, really belongs to the One King, Jesus Christ, whose Name is above every name, and will blossom anew in fresh revelations of its infinite contents, not only while the sun shines, but when its fires are cold and its light quenched. The psalmist's last desire is that the ancient promise to the fathers may be fulfilled in the King, their descendant, in whom men shall bless themselves. So full of blessedness may He seem to all men, that they shall take Him for the very type of felicity, and desire to be even as He is! In men's relation to Christ the phrase assumes a deeper meaning still: and though that is not intended by the psalmist, and is not the exposition of his words, it still is true that in Christ all blessings for humanity are stored, and that therefore if men are to be truly blessed they must plunge themselves into Him, and in Him find all that they need for blessedness and nobility of life and character. If He is our supreme type of whatsoever things are fair and of good report, and if we have bowed ourselves to Him because He has delivered us from death, then we share in His life, and all His blessings are parted among us.

PSALM LXXIII.

- 1 Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart;
- 2 But I—within a little of turning aside were
my feet,
All but slipping were my steps.
- 3 For I was envious of the foolish,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- 4 For they have no bonds [dragging them] to
death,
And their body is lusty.

- 5 In the trouble belonging to frail mortals they
have no part,
And [in common] with men they are not
smitten.
- 6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
Violence covers them as a robe.
- 7 Out of fat their eye flashes;
The imaginations of their heart overflow.
- 8 They mock and speak wickedly of oppression,
[As] from on high they speak.
- 9 They set in the heavens their mouth,
And their tongue stalks on the earth.
- 10 Therefore he turns his people thither,
And waters of abundance are drunk up by
them.
- 11 And they say, How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?
- 12 Behold! these are wicked,
And, prosperous for ever, they have increased
their wealth.
- 13 Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart,
And in innocency have washed my hands.
- 14 Yet have I been smitten all the day,
And my correction [came] every morning.
- 15 If I had said, I will speak thus,
Behold, I should have been unfaithful to the
generation of Thy children.
- 16 When I gave thought in order to understand
this,
It was too difficult in my eyes—
- 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God,
And gave heed to their end.
- 18 Surely in slippery places Thou dost set them;
Thou castest them down to ruins.
- 19 How are they become a desolation in a mo-
ment,
Are ended, consumed with terrors!
- 20 Like a dream on awaking,
So, Lord, on [Thy] arousing, Thou wilt de-
spise their shadowy form.
- 21 For my heart was growing bitter,
And I was pricked [in] my reins.
- 22 And I, I was brutish and ignorant.
A [very] beast was I before Thee.
- 23 And yet I, I am continually with Thee;
Thou hast grasped [me] by my right hand.
- 24 In Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me,
And afterwards to glory wilt "take" me.
- 25 Whom have I in heaven?
And, possessing Thee, I have no delight on
earth.
- 26 [Though] my flesh and my heart fail,
The rock of my heart and my portion is God
for ever.
- 27 For, behold, they that are far from Thee shall
perish;
Thou hast destroyed every one that goes whor-
ing from Thee.
- 28 But I, I—to draw near to God is good to me;
I have made in the Lord Jehovah my refuge,
That I may recount all Thy works.

to closer communion with God, in which he learned, not only the evanescence of the external well-being which had so perplexed him, but the eternity of the true blessedness belonging to the godly. His solution of the problem is in part that of the two psalms just mentioned, but it surpasses them in its clear recognition that the portion of the righteous, which makes their lot supremely blessed, is no mere earthly prosperity, but God Himself, and in its pointing to "glory" which comes afterwards, as one element in the solution of the problem.

The psalm falls into two divisions, in the first of which (vv. 1-14) the psalmist tells of his doubts, and, in the second (vv. 15-28), of his victory over them. The body of the psalm is divided into groups of four verses, and it has an introduction and conclusion of two verses each.

The introduction (vv. 1, 2) asserts, with an accent of assurance, the conviction which the psalmist had all but lost, and therefore had the more truly won. The initial word "Surely" is an indication of his past struggle, when the truth that God was good to Israel had seemed so questionable. "This I have learned by doubts; this I now hold as most sure; this I proclaim, impugn it who list, and seem to contradict it what may." The decisiveness of the psalmist's conviction does not lead him to exaggeration. He does not commit himself to the thesis that outward prosperity attends Israel. That God is good to those who truly bear that name is certain; but how He shows His goodness, and who these are, the psalmist has, by his struggles, learned to conceive of in a more spiritual fashion than before. That goodness may be plainly seen in sorrows, and it is only sealed to those who are what the name of Israel imports—"pure in heart." That such are blessed in possessing God, and that neither are any other blessed, nor is there any other blessedness, are the lessons which the singer has brought with him from the darkness, and by which the ancient faith of the well-being of the righteous is set on surer foundations than before.

The avowal of conquered doubts follows on this clear note of certitude. There is a tinge of shame in the emphatic "I" of ver. 2, and in the broken construction and the change of subject to "my feet" and "my steps." The psalmist looks back to that dreary time, and sees more clearly than he did, while he was caught in the toils of perplexity and doubt, how narrow had been his escape from casting away his confidence. He shudders as he remembers it; but he can do so now from the vantage-ground of tried and regained faith. How eloquently the order of thought in these two verses speaks of the complete triumph over doubt!

In the first quatrain of verses, the prosperity of the godless, which had been the psalmist's stumbling-block, is described. Two things are specified—physical health, and exemption from calamity. The former is the theme of ver. 4. Its first clause is doubtful. The word rendered "bands" only occurs here and in Isa. lviii. 6. It literally means bands, but may pass into the figurative signification of pains, and is sometimes by some taken in that meaning here, and the whole clause as asserting that the wicked have painless and peaceful deaths. But such a declaration is impossible in the face of vv. 18, 19, which assert the very opposite, and would be out of place at this point of the psalm, which is here occupied with

THE perennial problem of reconciling God's moral government with observed facts is grappled with in this psalm, as in Psalms xxxvii. and xlix. It tells how the prosperity of the godless, in apparent flat contradiction of Divine promises, had all but swept the psalmist from his faith, and how he was led, through doubt and struggle,

the lives, not the deaths, of the ungodly. Hupfeld translates "They are without pains even until their deaths"; but that rendering puts an unusual sense on the preposition "to," which is not "till." A very plausible conjecture alters the division of words, splitting the one which means "to their death" (*l'motham*) into two (*lamo tam*), of which the former is attached to the preceding words ("there are no pains *to them*" = "they have no pains"), and the latter to the following clause ("sound and well nourished is," etc.). This suggestion is adopted by Ewald and most modern commentators, and has much in its favour. If the existing text is retained, the rendering above seems best. It describes the prosperous worldling as free from troubles or diseases, which would be like chains on a captive, by which he is dragged to execution. It thus gives a parallel to the next clause, which describes their bodies (lit., belly) as stalwart. Ver. 5 carries on the description, and paints the wicked's exemption from trouble. The first clause is literally, "In the trouble of man they are not." The word for man here is that which connotes frailty and mortality, while in the next clause it is the generic term "Adam." Thus the prosperous worldlings appeared to the psalmist in his times of scepticism, as possessing charmed lives, which were free from all the ills that came from frailty and mortality, and, as like superior beings, lifted above the universal lot. But what did their exemption do for them? Its effects might have taught the doubter that the prosperity at which his faith staggered was no blessing, for it only inflated its recipients with pride, and urged them on to high-handed acts. Very graphically does ver. 6 paint them as having the former for their necklace, and the latter for their robe. A proud man carries a stiff neck and a high head. Hence the picture in ver. 6 of "pride" as wreathed about their necks as a chain or necklace. High-handed violence is their garment, according to the familiar metaphor by which a man's characteristics are likened to his dress, the garb of his soul. The double meaning of "habit," and the connection between "custom" and "costume," suggests the same figure. As the clothing wraps the body and is visible to the world, so insolent violence, masterfulness enforced by material weapons and contemptuous of others' rights, characterised these men, who had never learned gentleness in the school of suffering. Tricked out with a necklace of pride and a robe of violence, they strutted among men, and thought themselves far above the herd, and secure from the touch of trouble.

The next group of verses (vv. 7-10) further describes the unfeeling insolence begotten of unbroken prosperity, and the crowd of hangers-on, admirers, and imitators attendant on the successful wicked. "Out of fat their eye flashes" gives a graphic picture of the fierce glare of insolent eyes, set in well-fed faces. But graphic as it is, it scarcely fits the context so well as does a proposed amended reading, which by a very small change in the word rendered "their eye" yields the meaning "their iniquity," and takes "fat" as equivalent to a fat, that is, an obstinate, self-confident, or unfeeling heart. "From an unfeeling heart their iniquity comes forth" makes a perfect parallel with the second clause of the verse rightly rendered, "the imaginations of their heart overflow"; and both clauses paint the arrogant tempers and bearing of the worldlings.

Ver. 8 deals with the manifestation of these in speech. Well-to-do wickedness delights in making suffering goodness a butt for its coarse jeers. It does not need much wit to do that. Clumsy jests are easy, and poverty is fair game for vulgar wealth's ridicule. But there is a dash of ferocity in such laughter, and such jests pass quickly into earnest, and wicked oppression. "As from on high they speak,"—fancying themselves set on a pedestal above the common masses. The LXX., followed by many moderns, attaches "oppression" to the second clause, which makes the verse more symmetrical; but the existing division of clauses yields an appropriate sense.

The description of arrogant speech is carried on in ver. 9, which has been variously understood, as referring in *a* to blasphemy against God ("they set against the heavens their mouth"), and in *b* to slander against men; or, as in *a*, continuing the thought of ver. 8 *b*, and designating their words as spoken as if from heaven itself, and in *b* ascribing to their words sovereign power among men. But it is better to regard "heaven" and "earth" as the ordinary designation of the whole visible frame of things, and to take the verse as describing the self-sufficiency which gives its opinions and lays down the law about everything, and on the other hand, the currency and influence which are accorded by the popular voice to the dicta of prosperous worldlings.

That thought prepares the way for the enigmatic verse which follows. There are several obscure points in it. First, the verb in the Hebrew text means *turns* (transitive), which the Hebrew margin corrects into *returns* (intransitive). With the former reading, "his people," is the object of the verb, and the implied subject is the prosperous wicked man, the change to the singular "he" from the plural "they" of the preceding clauses being not unusual in Hebrew. With the latter reading, "his people" is the subject. The next question is to whom the "people" are conceived as belonging. It is, at first sight, natural to think of the frequent Scripture expression, and to take the "his" as referring to God, and the phrase to mean the true Israel. But the meaning seems rather to be the mob of parasites and hangers-on, who servilely follow the successful sinner, in hope of some crumbs from his table. "Thither" means "to himself," and the whole describes how such a one as the man whose portrait has just been drawn is sure to attract a retinue of dependants, who say as he says, and would fain be what he is. The last clause describes the share of these parasites in their patron's prosperity. "Waters of abundance"—i.e., abundant waters—may be an emblem of the pernicious principles of the wicked, which their followers swallow greedily; but it is more probably a figure for fulness of material good, which rewards the humiliation of servile adherents to the prosperous worldling.

The next group (vv. 11-14) begins with an utterance of unbelief or doubt, but it is difficult to reach certainty as to the speakers. It is very natural to refer the "they" to the last-mentioned persons—namely, the people who have been led to attach themselves to the prosperous sinners, and who, by the example of these, are led to question the reality of God's acquaintance with and moral government of human affairs. The question is, as often, in reality a denial. But "they" may have a more general sense, equivalent to our own colloquial use of it for an indefinite multi-

tude. "They say"—that is, "the common opinion and rumour is." So here, the meaning may be, that the sight of such flushed and flourishing wickedness diffuses widespread and deep-going doubts of God's knowledge, and makes many infidels.

Ewald, Delitzsch, and others take all the verses of this group as spoken by the followers of the ungodly; and, unquestionably, that view avoids the difficulty of allotting the parts to different unnamed interlocutors. But it raises difficulties of another kind—as, for instance, those of supposing that these adulators should roundly call their patrons wicked, and that an apostate should profess that he has cleansed his heart. The same objections do not hold against the view that these four verses are the utterance, not of the wicked rich man or his coterie of admirers, but of the wider number whose faith has been shaken. There is nothing in the verses which would be unnatural on such lips.

Ver. 11 would then be a question anxiously raised by faith that was beginning to reel; ver. 12 would be a statement of the anomalous fact which staggered it; and vv. 13, 14, the complaint of the afflicted godly. The psalmist's repudiation of a share in such incipient scepticism would begin with ver. 15. There is much in favour of this view of the speakers, but against it is the psalmist's acknowledgment, in ver. 2, that his own confidence in God's moral government had been shaken, of which there is no further trace in the psalm, unless vv. 13, 14, express the conclusion which he had been tempted to draw, and which, as he proceeds to say, he had fought down. If these two verses are ascribed to him, ver. 12 is best regarded as a summary of the whole preceding part, and only ver. 11 as the utterance either of the prosperous sinner and his adherents (in which case it is a question which means denial), or as that of troubled faith (in which case it is a question that would fain be an affirmation, but has been forced unwillingly to regard the very pillars of the universe as trembling).

Vv. 15-18 tell how the psalmist strove with and finally conquered his doubts, and saw enough of the great arc of the Divine dealings, to be sure that the anomaly, which had exercised his faith, was capable of complete reconciliation with the righteousness of Providence. It is instructive to note that he silenced his doubts, out of regard to "the generation of Thy children"—that is, to the true Israel, the pure in heart. He was tempted to speak as others did not fear to speak, impugning God's justice and proclaiming the uselessness of purity; but he locked his lips, lest his words should prove him untrue to the consideration which he owed to meek and simple hearts, who knew nothing of the speculative difficulties torturing him. He does not say that his speaking would have been sin against God. It would not have been so, if, in speaking, he had longed for confirmation of his wavering faith. But whatever the motive of his words, they might have shaken some lowly believers. Therefore he resolved on silence. Like all wise and devout men, he swallowed his own smoke, and let the process of doubting go on to its end of certainty, one way or another, before he spoke. This psalm, in which he tells how he overcame them, is his first acknowledgment that he had had these temptations to cast away his confidence. Fermentation should be done in the dark. When the process is fin-

ished, and the product is clear, it is fit to be produced and drank. Certitudes are meant to be uttered; doubts are meant to be struggled with. The psalmist has set an example which many men need to ponder to-day. It is easy, and it is also cruel, to raise questions which the proposer is not ready to answer.

Silent brooding over his problem did not bring light, as ver. 16 tells us. The more he thought over it, the more insoluble did it seem to him. There are chambers which the key of thinking will not open. Unwelcome as the lesson is, we have to learn that every lock will not yield to even prolonged and strenuous investigation. The lamp of the Understanding throws its beams far, but there are depths of darkness too deep and dark for them; and they are wisest who know its limits and do not try to use it in regions where it is useless.

But faith finds a path where speculation discerns none. The psalmist "went into the sanctuary (literally sanctuaries) of God," and there light streamed in on him, in which he saw light. Not mere entrance into the place of worship, but closer approach to the God who dwelt there, cleared away the mists. Communion with God solves many problems which thinking leaves unresolved. The eye which has gazed on God is purged for much vision besides. The disproportion between the deserts and fortunes of good and bad men assumes an altogether different aspect when contemplated in the light of present communion with Him, which brings a blessedness that makes earthly prosperity seem dross, and earthly burdens seem feathers. Such communion, in its seclusion from worldly agitations, enables a man to take calmer, saner views of life, and in its enduring blessedness reveals more clearly the transiency of the creatural good which deceives men with the figment of its permanence. The lesson which the psalmist learned in the solemn stillness of the sanctuary was the end of ungodly prosperity. That changes the aspect of the envied position of the prosperous sinner, for his very prosperity is seen to contribute to his downfall, as well as to make that downfall more tragic by contrast. His sure footing, exempt as he seemed from the troubles and ills that flesh is heir to, was really on a treacherous slope, like smooth sheets of rock on a mountain-side. To stand on them is to slide down to hideous ruin.

The theme of the end of the prosperous sinners is continued in the next group (vv. 19-22). In ver. 19 the psalmist seems as if standing an amazed spectator of the crash, which tumbles into chaos the solid-seeming fabric of their insolent prosperity. An exclamation breaks from his lips as he looks. And then destruction is foretold for all such, under the solemn and magnificent image of ver. 20. God has seemed to sleep, letting evil run its course; but He "rouses Himself"—that is, comes forth in judicial acts—and as a dreamer remembers his dream, which seemed so real, and smiles at its imaginary terrors or joys, so He will "despise" them, as no more solid nor lasting than phantasms of the night. The end contemplated by the psalmist is not necessarily death, but any sudden overthrow, of which there are many in the experience of the godless. Life is full of such awakings of God, both in regard to individuals and nations, which, if a man duly regards, he will find the problem of the psalm less insoluble than at first

It appears. But if there are lives which, being without goodness, are also without chastisement, Death comes at last to such as God's awaking, and a very awful dissipating of earthly prosperity into a shadowy nothing.

The psalmist has no revelation here of future retribution. His vindication of God's justice is not based on that, but simply on the transiency of worldly prosperity, and on its dangerous character. It is "a slippery place," and it is sure to come to an end. It is obvious that there are many other considerations which have to be taken into account, in order to a complete solution of the problem of the psalm. But the psalmist's solution goes far to lighten the painful perplexity of it; and if we add his succeeding thoughts as to the elements of true blessedness, we have solution enough for peaceful acquiescence, if not for entire understanding. The psalmist's way of finding an answer is even more valuable than the answer which he found. They who dwell in the secret place of the Most High can look on the riddle of this painful world with equanimity, and be content to leave it half unsolved.

Vv. 21, 22, are generally taken as one sentence, and translated as by Delitzsch, "if my heart should grow bitter . . . I should be brutish," etc.; or as by Hupfeld, "When my heart grew bitter . . . then I was as a beast," etc.; but they are better regarded as the psalmist's penitent explanation of his struggle. "Unbelieving thoughts had fermented in his mind, and a pang of passionate discontent had pierced his inmost being. But the higher self blames the lower self for such folly" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). His recognition that his doubts had their source, not in defect in God's providence, but in his own ignorance and hasty irritation, which took offence without cause, prepares him for the sweet, clear note of purely spiritual aspiration and fruition which follows in the next strophe.

He had all but lost his hold of God; but though his feet had almost gone astray, his hand had been grasped by God, and that strong hold had kept him from utterly falling. The pledge of continual communion with God is not our own vacillating, wayward hearts, but God's gentle, strong clasp, which will not let us go. Thus conscious of constant fellowship, and feeling thrillingly God's touch in his inmost spirit, the psalmist rises to a height of joyous assurance, far above doubts and perplexities caused by the unequal distribution of earth's trivial good. For him, all life will be illumined by God's counsel, which will guide him as a shepherd leads his sheep, and which he will obey as a sheep follows his shepherd. How small the delights of the prosperous men seem now! And can there be an end to that sweet alliance, such as smites earthly good? There are blessings which bear in themselves assurance of their own undyingness; and this psalmist, who had nothing to say of the future retribution falling on the sinner whose delights were confined to earth, feels that death cannot put a period to a union so blessed and spiritual as was his with God. To him, "afterwards" was irradiated with light from present blessedness; and a solemnly joyful conviction springs in his soul, which he casts into words that glance at the story of Enoch's translation, from which "take" is quoted (*cf.* Psalm xlix. 16). Whether we translate "with glory" or "to glory," there can be no question that the psalmist is looking beyond life on earth to dwell-

ing with God in glory. We have in this utterance, the expression of the conviction, inseparable from any true, deep communion with God, that such communion can never be at the mercy of Death. The real proof of a life beyond the grave is the resurrection of Jesus; and the pledge of it is present enjoyment of fellowship with God.

Such thoughts lift the psalmist to a height from which earth's troubles show small, and as they diminish, the perplexity arising from their distribution diminishes in proportion. They fade away altogether, when he feels how rich he is in possessing God. Surely the very summit of devotional rapture is reached in the immortal words which follow! Heaven without God were a waste to this man. With God, he needs not nor desires anything on earth. If the impossible should be actual, and heart as well as flesh should fail, his naked self would be clothed and rich, steadfast and secure, as long as he had God; and he is so closely knit to God, that he knows that he will not lose Him though he dies, but have Him for his very own for ever. What care need he have how earth's vain goods come and go? Whatever outward calamities or poverty may be his lot, there is no riddle in that Divine government which thus enriches the devout heart; and the richest ungodly man is poor, because he shuts himself out from the one all-sufficient and enduring wealth.

A final pair of verses, answering to the introductory pair, gathers up the double truth, which the psalmist has learned to grasp more firmly by occasion of his doubts. To be absent from God is to perish. Distance from Him is separation from life. Drawing near to Him is the only good; and the psalmist has deliberately chosen it as *his* good, let worldly prosperity come or go as it list, or, rather, as God shall choose. By the effort of his own volition he has made God his refuge, and, safe in Him, he can bear the sorrows of the godly, and look unenvying on the fleeting prosperity of sinners, while, with insight drawn from communion, he can recount with faith and praise all God's works, and find in none of them a stumbling-block, nor fail to find in any of them material for a song of thankfulness.

PSALM LXXIV.

- 1 Why O God, hast Thou cast us off for ever?
[Why] smokes Thine anger against the flock of Thy pasture?
- 2 Remember Thy congregation [which] Thou didst acquire of old,
Didst redeem [to be] the tribe of Thine inheritance,
Mount Zion, on which Thou hast dwelt.
- 3 Lift up Thy steps to the everlasting ruins,
The enemy has inarred everything in the sanctuary.
- 4 Thine adversaries roared in the midst of the place where Thou dost meet [us],
They set up their signs as signs.
- 5 They seem like one who heaves on high Axes against a thicket of trees.
- 6 And now—its carved work altogether
With hatchet and hammers they break down
- 7 They have set on fire Thy sanctuary,
[Rasing it] to the ground, they have profaned the dwelling-place of Thy name.

- 8 They have said in their heart, Let us crush them altogether.
They have burned all meeting-places of God in the land.
- 9 Our signs we see not,
There is no prophet any more,
And there is no one who knows how long.
- 10 How long, O God, shall the adversary reproach?
Shall the enemy despise Thy name for ever?
- 11 Why dost Thou draw back Thy hand, even Thy right hand?
From the midst of Thy bosom [pluck it and] consume [them].
- 12 Yet God is my king from of old,
Working salvations in the midst of the earth.
- 13 Thou, Thou didst divide the sea by Thy strength,
Didst break the heads of monsters on the waters.
- 14 Thou, Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan,
That Thou mightest give him [to be] meat for a people—the desert beasts.
- 15 Thou, Thou didst cleave [a way for] fountain and torrent;
Thou, Thou didst dry up perennial streams.
- 16 Thine is day. Thine also is night;
Thou, Thou didst establish light and sun.
- 17 Thou, Thou didst set all the bounds of the earth;
Summer and winter, Thou, Thou didst form them.
- 18 Remember this—the enemy reviles Jehovah,
And a foolish people despises Thy name.
- 19 Give not up to the company of greed Thy turtle dove,
The company of Thine afflicted forget not for ever.
- 20 Look upon the covenant,
For the dark places of the land are full of habitations of violence.
- 21 Let not the oppressed turn back ashamed,
Let the afflicted and needy praise Thy name.
- 22 Rise, O God, plead Thine own cause,
Remember Thy reproach from the foolish all the day.
- 23 Forget not the voice of Thine adversaries,
The tumult of them which rise against Thee goes up continually.

Two periods only correspond to the circumstances described in this psalm and its companion (lxxix.)—namely, the Chaldean invasion and sack of Jerusalem, and the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes. The general situation outlined in the psalm fits either of these; but, of its details, some are more applicable to the former and others to the later period. The later date is strongly supported by such complaints as those of the cessation of prophecy (ver. 9), the flaunting of the invaders' signs in the sanctuary (ver. 4), and the destruction by fire of all the "meeting-places of God in the land," (ver. 8). On the other hand, the earlier date better fits other features of the psalm—since Antiochus did not destroy or burn, but simply profaned the Temple, though he did, indeed, set fire to the gates and porch, but to these only. It would appear that, on either hypothesis, something must be allowed for poetical colouring. Calvin, whom Cheyne follows in this,

accounts for the introduction of the burning of the Temple into a psalm referring to the desolation wrought by Antiochus, by the supposition that the psalmist speaks in the name of the "faithful, who, looking on the horrid devastation of the Temple, and being warned by so sad a sight, carried back their thoughts to that conflagration by which it had been destroyed by the Chaldeans, and wove the two calamities together into one." It is less difficult to pare down the statement as to the burning of the Temple so as to suit the later date, than that as to the silence of prophecy and the other characteristics mentioned, so as to fit the earlier. The question is still further complicated by the similarities between the two psalms and Jeremiah (compare ver. 4 with Lam. ii. 7, and ver. 9 with Lam. ii. 9). The prophet's well-known fondness for quotations gives probability, other things being equal, to the supposition that he is quoting the psalm, which would, in that case, be older than Lamentations. But this inference scarcely holds good, if there are other grounds on which the later date of the psalm is established. It would be very natural in a singer of the Maccabean period to go back to the prophet whose sad strains had risen at another black hour. On the whole, the balance is in favour of the later date.

The psalm begins with a complaining cry to God (vv. 1-3), which passes into a piteous detail of the nation's misery (vv. 4-9), whence it rises into petition (vv. 10, 11), stays trembling faith by gazing upon His past deeds of help and the wonders of His creative power (vv. 12-17), and closes with beseeching God to vindicate the honour of His own name by the deliverance of his people (vv. 18-23).

The main emphasis of the prayer in vv. 1-3 lies on the pleas which it presents, drawn from Israel's relation to God. The characteristic Asaphic name "Thy flock" stands in ver. 1, and appeals to the Shepherd, both on the ground of His tenderness and of His honour as involved in the security of the sheep. A similar appeal lies in the two words "acquire" and "redeem," in both of which the deliverance from Egypt is referred to,—the former expression suggesting the price at which the acquisition was made, as well as the obligations of ownership; and the latter, the office of the Goel, the Kinsman-Redeemer, on whom devolved the duty of obtaining satisfaction for blood. The double designations of Israel as "Thy congregation" and as "the tribe of Thine inheritance" probably point to the religious and civil aspects of the national life. The strongest plea is put last—namely, God's dwelling on Zion. For all these reasons, the psalmist asks and expects Him to come with swift footsteps to the desolations, which have endured so long that the impatience of despair blends with the cry for help, and calls them "everlasting," even while it prays that they may be built up again. The fact that the enemy of God and of His flock has marred everything in the sanctuary is enough, the psalmist thinks, to move God to action.

The same thought, that the nation's calamities are really dishonouring to God, and therefore worthy of His intervention, colours the whole of the description of these in vv. 4-9. The invaders are "Thine adversaries." It is "in the place where Thou didst meet us" that their bestial noises, like those of lions over their prey, echo. It is "Thy sanctuary" which they have set on

fire, "the dwelling-place of *Thy* name" which they have profaned. It is "*Thy* meeting-places" which they have burned throughout the land. Only at the end of the sad catalogue is the misery of the people touched on, and that, not so much as inflicted by human foes, as by the withdrawal of God's Spirit. This is, in fact, the dominant thought of the whole psalm. It says very little about the sufferings resulting from the success of the enemy, but constantly recurs to the insult to God, and the reproach adhering to His name therefrom. The essence of it all is in the concluding prayer, "Plead *Thine own* cause" (ver. 22).

The vivid description of devastation in these verses presents some difficulties in detail, which call for brief treatment. The "signs" in ver. 4 *b* may be taken as military, such as banners or the like; but it is more in accordance with the usage of the word to suppose them to be religious emblems, or possibly idols, such as Antiochus thrust upon the Jews. In vv. 5 and 6 a change of tense represents the action described in them, as if in progress at the moment before the singer's eyes. "They seem" is literally "He is known" (or *makes himself known*), which may refer to the invaders, the change from plural to singular being frequent in Hebrew; or it may be taken impersonally, = "It seems." In either case it introduces a comparison between the hacking and hewing by the spoilers in the Temple, and the work of a woodman swinging on high his axe in the forest. "And now" seems to indicate the next step in the scene, which the psalmist picturesquely conceives as passing before his horror-stricken sight. The end of that ill-omened activity is that at last it succeeds in shattering the carved work, which, in the absence of statues, was the chief artistic glory of the Temple. All is hewed down, as if it were no more than so much growing timber. With ver. 7 the tenses change to the calmer tone of historical narration. The plundered Temple is set on fire—a point which, as has been noticed above, is completely applicable only to the Chaldean invasion. Similarly, the next clause, "they have profaned the dwelling-place of *Thy* name to the ground," does not apply in literality to the action of Antiochus, who did indeed desecrate, but did not destroy, the Temple. The expression is a pregnant one, and calls for some such supplement as is given above, which, however, dilutes its vigour while it elucidates its meaning. In ver. 8 the word "let us crush them" has been erroneously taken as a noun, and rendered "their brood," a verb like "we will root out" being supplied. So the LXX. and some of the old versions, followed by Hitzig and Baethgen. But, as Delitzsch well asks,—Why are only the children to be rooted out? and why should the object of the action be expressed, and not rather the action, of which the object would be self-evident? The "meeting-places of God in the land" cannot be old sanctuaries, nor the high places, which were Israel's sin; for no psalmist could have adduced the destruction of these as a reason for God's intervention. They can only be the synagogues. The expression is a strong argument for the later date of the psalm. Equally strong is the lament in ver. 9 over the removal of the "signs"—*i.e.*, as in ver. 4, the emblems of religion, or the sacrifices and festivals, suppressed by Antiochus, which were the tokens of the covenant between God and Israel. The silence of prophecy cannot be alleged of the Chaldean pe-

riod without some straining of facts and of the words here; nor is it true that then there was universal ignorance of the duration of the calamity, for Jeremiah had foretold it.

Vv. 10 and 11 are the kernel of the psalm, the rest of which is folded round them symmetrically. Starting from this centre and working outwards, we note that it is preceded by six verses dilating on the profanations of the name of God, and followed by six setting forth the glories of that name in the past. The connection of these two portions of the psalm is obvious. They are, as it were, the inner shell round the kernel. The outer shell is the prayer in three verses which begins the psalm, and that in six verses which closes it. Ver. 10 takes up the despairing "How long" from the end of the preceding portion, and turns it into a question to God. It is best to ask Him, when ignorance pains us. But the interrogation does not so much beg for enlightenment as to the duration of the calamity as for its abbreviation. It breathes not precisely impatience, but longing that a state of things so dishonouring to God should end. That aspect, and not personal suffering, is prominent in the verse. It is "*Thy* name" which is insulted by the adversaries' actions, and laid open to their contempt, as the name of a Deity powerless to protect His worshippers. Their action "reproaches," and His inaction lets them "despise," His name. The psalmist cannot endure that this condition should drag on indefinitely, as if "for ever," and his prayer-question "How long?" is next exchanged for another similar blending of petition and inquiry, "*Why* dost Thou draw back *Thy* hand?" Both are immediately translated into that petition which they both really mean. "From the midst of *Thy* bosom consume," is a pregnant phrase, like that in ver. 7 *b*, and has to be completed as above, though, possibly, the verb stands absolutely as equivalent to "make an end"—*i.e.*, of such a state of things.

The psalmist's petition is next grounded on the revelation of God's name in Israel's past, and in creative acts of power. These at once encourage him to expect that God will pluck His hand out from the folds of His robe, where it lies inactive, and appeal to God to be what He has been of old, and to rescue the name which He has thus magnified from insult. There is singular solemnity in the emphatic reiteration of "*Thou*" in these verses. The Hebrew does not usually express the pronominal nominative to a verb, unless special attention is to be called to it; but in these verses it does so uniformly, with one exception, and the sevenfold repetition of the word brings forcibly into view the Divine personality and former deeds which pledge God to act now. Remembrance of past wonders made present misery more bitter, but it also fanned into a flame the spark of confidence that the future would be like the past. One characteristic of the Asaph psalms is wistful retrospect, which is sometimes the basis of rebuke, and sometimes of hope, and sometimes of deepened sorrow, but is here in part appeal to God and in part consolation. The familiar instances of His working drawn from the Exodus history appear in the psalm. First comes the dividing of the Red Sea, which is regarded chiefly as occasioning the destruction of the Egyptians, who are symbolised by the "sea-monsters" and by "leviathan" (the crocodile). Their fate is an omen of what the psalmist hopes may befall the oppressors

of his own day. There is great poetic force in the representation that the strong hand, which by a stroke parted the waters, crushed by the same blow the heads of the foul creatures who "floated many a rood" on them. And what an end for the pomp of Pharaoh and his host, to provide a meal for jackals and the other beasts of the desert, who tear the corpses strewing the barren shore! The meaning is completely misapprehended when "the people inhabiting the wilderness" is taken to be wild desert tribes. The expression refers to animals, and its use as designating them has parallels (as Prov. xxx. 25, 26).

In ver. 15 another pregnant expression occurs, which is best filled out as above, the reference being to cleaving the rock for the flow of water, with which is contrasted in *b* the drying up of the Jordan. Thus the whole of the Exodus period is covered. It is noteworthy that the psalmist adduces only wonders wrought on waters, being possibly guided in his selection by the familiar poetic use of floods and seas as emblems of hostile power and unbridled insolence. From the wonders of history he passes to those of creation, and chiefly of that might by which times alternate and each constituent of the Kosmos has its appointed limits. Day and night, summer and winter, recur by God's continual operation. Is there to be no dawning for Israel's night of weeping, and no summer making glad the winter of its discontent? "Thou didst set all the bounds of the earth,"—wilt Thou not bid back this surging ocean which has transgressed its limits and filled the breadth of Thy land? All the lights in the sky, and chiefly the greatest of them, Thou didst establish,—surely Thou wilt end this eclipse in which Thy people grope.

Thus the psalmist lifts himself to the height of confident though humble prayer, with which the psalm closes, recurring to the opening tones. Its centre is, as we have seen, a double remonstrance—"How long?" and "Why?" The encircling circumference is earnest supplication, of which the keynote is "Remember" (vv. 2 and 18).

The gist of this closing prayer is the same appeal to God to defend His own honour, which we have found in the former verses. It is put in various forms here. Twice (vv. 18 and 22) God is besought to remember the reproach and contumely heaped on His name, and apparently warranted by His inaction. The claim of Israel for deliverance is based in ver. 19 upon its being "*Thy* turtle dove," which therefore cannot be abandoned without sullyng Thy fame. The psalmist spreads the "covenant" before God, as reminding Him of His obligations under it. He asks that such deeds may be done as will give occasion to the afflicted and needy to "praise Thy name," which is being besmirched by their calamities. Finally, in wonderfully bold words, he calls on God to take up what is, after all, "His own" quarrel, and, if the cry of the afflicted does not move Him, to listen to the loud voices of those who blaspheme Him all the day. Reverent earnestness of supplication sometimes sounds like irreverence; but, "when the heart's deeps boil in earnest," God understands the meaning of what sounds strange, and recognises the profound trust in His faithfulness and love which underlies bold words.

The precise rendering of ver. 19 is very doubtful. The word rendered above by "company" may mean *life* or a *living creature*, or, collectively, a *company* of such. It has been taken in all these

meanings here, and sometimes in one of them in the first clause, and in another in the second, as most recently by Baethgen, who renders "Abandon not to *the beast*" in *a*, and "*The life of thine afflicted*" in *b*. But it must have the same meaning in both clauses, and the form of the word shows that it must be construed in both with a following "of." If so, the rendering adopted above is best, though it involves taking the word rendered "greed" (lit., soul) in a somewhat doubtful sense. This rendering is adopted in the R.V. (margin), and is, on the whole, the least difficult, and yields a probable sense. Delitzsch recognises the necessity for giving the ambiguous word the same meaning in both clauses, and takes that meaning to be "creature," which suits well enough in *a*, but gives a very harsh meaning to *b*. "Forget not Thy poor animals for ever" is surely an impossible rendering. Other attempts have been made to turn the difficulty by textual alteration. Hupfeld would transpose two words in *a* and so gets "Give not up to rage the life of Thy dove." Cheyne corrects the difficult word into "to the sword," and Graetz follows Dyserinck in preferring "to death," or Krochmal, who reads "to destruction." If the existing text is retained, probably the rendering adopted above is best.

PSALM LXXV.

- 1 We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks;
And [that] Thy name is near, Thy wondrous works declare.
- 2 "When I seize the set time,
I, I judge [in] equity.
- 3 Dissolved [in fear] are earth and its inhabitants:
I, I set firm its pillars. Selah.
- 4 I say to the fools, Be not foolish:
And to the wicked, Lift not up the horn:
- 5 Lift not up your horn on high;
Speak not with stiff neck."
- 6 For not from east, nor from west,
And not from the wilderness is lifting up.
- 7 For God is judge:
This one He abases, and that one He lifts up.
- 8 For a cup is in the hands of Jehovah,
And it foams with wine; it is full of mixture,
And He pours out from it:
Yea, its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth
gulf down and drink.
- 9 And as for me, I will declare [it] for ever,
I will harp to the God of Jacob.
- 10 And all the horns of the wicked will I cut off:
Exalted shall be the horns of the righteous.

THIS psalm deals with the general thought of God's judgment in history, especially on heathen nations. It has no clear marks of connection with any particular instance of that judgment. The prevalent opinion has been that it refers, like the next psalm, to the destruction of Sennacherib's army. There are in it slight resemblances to Psalm xlv., and to Isaiah's prophecies regarding that event, which support the conjecture. Cheyne seems to waver, as on page 148 of "*Orig. of Psalt.*" he speaks of "the two Maccabean psalms, lxxiv. and lxxv.," and on page 166 concludes that

they "may be Maccabean, . . . but we cannot claim for this view the highest degree of probability, especially as neither psalm refers to any warlike deeds of Israelites. It is safer, I think, to . . . assign them at the earliest to one of the happier parts of the Persian age." It is apparently still safer to refrain from assigning them to any precise period.

The kernel of the psalm is a majestic Divine utterance, proclaiming God's judgment as at hand. The limits of that Divine word are doubtful, but it is best taken as occupying two pairs of verses (2-5). It is preceded by one verse of praise, and followed by three (6-8) of warning spoken by the psalmist, and by two (9, 10) in which he again praises God the Judge, and stands forth as an instrument of His judicial acts.

In ver. 1, which is as a prelude to the great Voice from heaven, we hear the nation giving thanks beforehand for the judgment which is about to fall. The second part of the verse is doubtful. It may be taken thus: "And Thy name is near; they (*i.e.*, men) declare Thy wondrous works." So Delitzsch, who comments: The Church "welcomes the future acts of God with fervent thanks, and all they that belong to it declare beforehand God's wondrous works." Several modern scholars, among whom are Grätz, Baethgen, and Cheyne, adopt a textual alteration which gives the reading, "They who call upon Thy name declare," etc. But the rendering of the A. V., which is also that of Hupfeld and Perowne, gives a good meaning. All God's deeds in history proclaim that He is ever at hand to help. His name is His character as revealed by His self-manifestation; and this is the glad thanks-evoking lesson, taught by all the past and by the judicial act of which the psalm is the precursor—that He is near to deliver His people. As Deut. iv. 7 has it, "What nation is there that hath God so near unto them?"

The Divine voice breaks in with majestic abruptness, as in Psalm xlv. 10. It proclaims impending judgment, which will restore society, dissolving in dread or moral corruption, and will abase insolent wickedness, which is therefore exhorted to submission. In ver. 2 two great principles are declared—one in regard to the time and the other in regard to the animating spirit of God's judgment. Literally, the first words of the verse run, "When I lay hold of the appointed time." The thought is that He has His own appointed time at which His power will flash forth into act, and that till that moment arrives evil is permitted to run its course, and insolent men to play their "fantastic tricks" before an apparently indifferent or unobserving God. His servants are tempted to think that He delays too long; His enemies, that He will never break His silence. But the slow hand traverses the dial in time, and at last the hour strikes and the crash comes punctually at the moment. The purposes of delay are presented in Scripture as twofold: on the one hand, "that the long-suffering of God may lead to repentance"; and on the other, that evil may work itself out and show its true character. To learn the lesson that, "when the set time is come," judgment will fall, would save the oppressed from impatience and despondency and the oppressor from dreams of impunity. It is a law fruitful for the interpretation of the world's history. The other fundamental truth in this verse is that the principle of God's judgment is equity,

rigid adherence to justice, so that every act of man's shall receive accurately "its just recompense of reward." The "I" of ver. 2 *b* is emphatic. It brings to view the lofty personality of the Judge, and asserts the operation of a Divine hand in human affairs, while it also lays the basis for the assurance that, the judgment being His, and He being what He is, it must be "according to truth."

Such a "set time" has arrived, as ver. 3 proceeds to declare. Oppression and corruption have gone so far that "the earth and its inhabitants" are as if "dissolved." All things are rushing to ruin. The psalmist does not distinguish between the physical and the moral here. His figure is employed in reference to both orders, which he regards as indissolubly connected. Possibly he is echoing Psalm xlv. 6, "The earth melted," though there the "melting" is an expression for dread occasioned by God's voice, and here rather refers to the results of "the proud man's wrong." At such a supreme moment, when the solid framework of society and of the world itself seems to be on the point of dissolution, the mighty Divine Personality intervenes; that strong hand is thrust forth to grasp the tottering pillars and stay their fall; or, in plain words, God Himself then intervenes to re-establish the moral order of society, and thus to save the sufferers. (Comp. Hannah's song in 1 Sam. ii. 8.) That intervention has necessarily two aspects, being on the one hand restorative, and on the other punitive. Therefore in vv. 4 and 5 follow Divine warnings to the "fools" and "wicked," whose insolent boasting and tyranny have provoked it. The word rendered "fools" seems to include the idea of boastfulness as well as folly in the Biblical sense of that word, which points to moral rather than to merely intellectual aberration. "Lifting up the horn" is a symbol of arrogance. According to the accents, the word rendered "stiff" is not to be taken as attached to "neck," but as the object of the verb "speak," the resulting translation being, "Speak not arrogance with a [stretched out] neck"; and thus Delitzsch would render. But it is more natural to take the word in its usual construction as an epithet of "neck," expressive of superciliously holding a high head. Cheyne follows Baethgen in altering the text so as to read "rock" for "neck"—a slight change which is supported by the LXX. rendering ("Speak not unrighteousness against God")—and renders "nor speak arrogantly of the rock." Like the other advocates of a Maccabean date, he finds here a reference to the mad blasphemies of Antiochus Epiphanes; but the words would suit Rabshakeh's railings quite as well.

The exact point where the Divine oracle passes into the psalmist's own words is doubtful. Ver. 7 is evidently his; and that verse is so closely connected with ver. 6 that it is best to make the break at the end of ver. 5, and to suppose that what follows is the singer's application of the truths which he has heard. Two renderings of ver. 6 *b* are possible, which, though very different in English, turn on the minute difference in the Hebrew of one vowel sign. The same letters spell the Hebrew word meaning *mountains* and that meaning *lifting up*. With one punctuation of the preceding word "wilderness," we must translate "from the wilderness of mountains"; with another, the two words are less closely connected,

and we must render, "from the wilderness is lifting up." If the former rendering is adopted, the verse is incomplete, and some phrase like "help comes" must be supplied, as Delitzsch suggests. But "lifting up" occurs so often in this psalm, that it is more natural to take the word in that meaning here, especially as the next verse ends with it, in a different tense, and thus makes a sort of rhyme with this verse. "The wilderness of mountains," too, is a singular designation, either for the Sinaitic peninsula or for Egypt, or for the wilderness of Judah, which have all been suggested as intended here. "The wilderness" stands for the south, and thus three cardinal points are named. Why is the north omitted? If "lifting up" means deliverance, the omission may be due to the fact that Assyria (from which the danger came, if we adopt the usual view of the occasion of the psalm) lay to the north. But the meaning in the rest of the psalm is not *deliverance*, and the psalmist is addressing the "foolish boasters" here; and that consideration takes away the force of such an explanation of the omission. Probably no significance attaches to it. The general idea is simply that "lifting up" does not come from any quarter of earth, but, as the next verse goes on to say, solely from God. How absurd, then, is the self-sufficient loftiness of godless men! How vain to look along the low levels of earth, when all true elevation and dignity come from God! The very purpose of His judicial energy is to abase the lofty and raise the low. His hand lifts up, and there is no secure or lasting elevation but that which He effects. His hand casts down, and that which attracts His lightnings is "the haughtiness of man." The outburst of His judgment works like a volcanic eruption, which flings up elevations in valleys and shatters lofty peaks. The features of the country are changed after it, and the world looks new. The metaphor of ver. 8, in which judgment is represented as a cup of foaming wine, which God puts to the lips of the nations, receives great expansion in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah, and recurs in the Apocalypse. There is a grim contrast between the images of festivity and hospitality called up by the picture of a host presenting the wine cup to his guests, and the stern compulsion which makes the "wicked" gulp down the nauseous draught held by God to their reluctant lips. The utmost extremity of punitive inflictions, unflinchingly inflicted, is suggested by the terrible imagery. And the judgment is to be world-wide; for "all the wicked of the earth" are to drink, and that to the dregs.

And how does the prospect affect the psalmist? It moves him, first, to solemn praise—not only because God has proved Himself by these terrible things in righteousness to be the God of His people, but also because He has thereby manifested His own character as righteous and hating evil. It is no selfish nor cruel joy which stirs in devout hearts, when God comes forth in history and smites oppressing insolence. It is but a spurious benevolence which affects to recoil from the conception of a God who judges and, when needful, smites. This psalmist not only praised, but in his degree vowed to imitate.

The last verse is best understood as his declaration of his own purpose, though some commentators have proposed to transfer it to the earlier part of the psalm, regarding it as part of the Divine oracle. But it is in its right place

where it stands. God's servants are His instruments in carrying out His judgments; and there is a very real sense in which all of them should seek to fight against dominant evil and to cripple the power of tyrannous godlessness.

PSALM LXXVI.

- 1 Known in Judah is God,
In Israel is His name great.
- 2 And in Salem was His tent [pitched],
And His dwelling in Zion.
- 3 There He shivered the lightnings of the bow,
Shield and sword and battle. Selah.
- 4 Effulgent art Thou [and] glorious
From the mountains of prey [everlasting mountains?].
- 5 Spoiled are the stout of heart, they slumber
[into] their sleep.
And none of the men of might have found their hands.
- 6 At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob,
Both chariot and horse are sunk in deep sleep.
- 7 Thou! dread art Thou.
And who can stand before Thee, in the time
of Thine anger?
- 8 From heaven didst Thou make judgment
heard,
Earth feared and was stilled.
- 9 At the rising of God for judgment
To save all the afflicted of the earth. Selah.
- 10 For the wrath of man shall praise Thee,
[With] the residue of wraths Thou girdest
Thyself.
- 11 Vow and pay to Jehovah your God,
Let all around Him bring presents to the Ter-
rible One.
- 12 He cuts down the [lofty] spirit of princes,
A dread to the kings of the earth.

IN contents and tone this psalm is connected with Psalms xli. and xlviii. No known event corresponds so closely with its allusions as the destruction of Sennacherib's army, to which the LXX. in its superscription refers it. The singer is absorbed in the one tremendous judgment which had delivered the dwelling-place of Jehovah. His song has but one theme—God's forth-flashing of judgment on Zion's foes. One note of thankfulness sounds at the close, but till then all is awe. The psalm is divided into four strophes, of three verses each. The former two describe the act; the latter two deal with its results, in an awed world and thankful praise.

The emphatic words in the first strophe are those which designate the scene of the Divine act. The glow of humble pride, of wonder and thankfulness, is perceptible in the fourfold reiteration—"in Judah, in Israel, in Salem, in Zion"; all which names are gathered up in the eloquent "There" of ver. 3. The true point of view from which to regard God's acts is that they are His Self-revelation. The reason why Israel is the object of the acts which manifest His name is that there He has chosen to dwell. And, since He dwells there, the special act of judgment which the psalm celebrates was there performed. "The lightnings of the bow" picturesquely designate arrows, from their swift flight and deadly impact. (Compare Psalm xli. 9.)

The second strophe (vv. 4-6) comes closer to the fact celebrated, and describes, with magnificent sweep, brevity, and vividness, the death sleep of the enemy. But, before it shows the silent corpses, it lifts one exclamation of reverence to the God who has thus manifested His power. The word rendered "Effulgent" is doubtful, and by a slight transposition of letters becomes, as in ver. 7 which begins the next strophe, "dread." In ver. 4 *b* the rendering "more excellent than," etc., yields a comparison which can scarcely be called worthy. It is little to say of God that He is more glorious than the enemies' "mountains of prey," though Delitzsch tries to recommend this rendering by supposing that God is represented as towering above "the Lebanon of the hostile army of peoples." The Hebrew idiom expresses comparison by the preposition *from* appended to the adjective in its simple form, and it is best here to take the construction as indicating point of departure rather than comparison. God comes forth as "glorious," from the lofty heights where He sits supreme. But "mountains of prey" is a singular phrase, which can only be explained by the supposition that God is conceived of as a Conqueror, who has laid up his spoils in His inaccessible store-house on high. But the LXX. translates "*everlasting mountains*," which fits the context well, and implies a text, which might easily be misinterpreted as meaning "prey," which misinterpretation may afterwards have crept into the body of the text. If this alteration is not adopted, the meaning will be as just stated.

Ver. 5 gives some support to the existing text, by its representation of the stout-hearted foe as "spoiled." They are robbed of their might, their weapons, and their life. How graphically the psalmist sets before the eyes of his readers the process of destruction from its beginning! He shows us the warriors falling asleep in the drowsiness of death. How feeble their "might" now! One vain struggle, as in the throes of death, and the hands which shot the "lightnings of the bow" against Zion are stiff for evermore. One word from the sovereign lips of the God of Jacob, and all the noise of the camp is hushed, and we look out upon a field of the dead, lying in awful stillness, dreamlessly sleeping their long slumber.

The third strophe passes from description of the destruction of the enemy to paint its widespread results in the manifestation to a hushed world of God's judgment. In it anger and love are wondrously blended; and while no creature can bear the terrible blaze of His face, nor endure the weight of His onset "in the time of His anger," the most awful manifestations thereof have a side of tenderness and an inner purpose of blessing. The core of judgment is mercy. It is worthy of God to smite the oppressor and to save the "afflicted," who not only suffer, but trust. When He makes His judgments reverberate from on high, earth should keep an awed stillness, as nature does when thunder peals. When some gigantic and hoary iniquity crashes to its fall, there is a moment of awed silence after the hideous tumult.

The last strophe is mainly a summons to praise God for His manifestation of delivering judgment. Ver. 10 is obscure. The first clause is intelligible enough. Since God magnifies His name by His treatment of opposing men, who set themselves against Him, their very foaming fury sub-

serves His praise. That is a familiar thought with all the Scripture writers who meditate on God's dealings. But the second clause is hard. Whose "wraths" are spoken of in it? God's or man's? The change from the singular ("wrath of man") to plural ("wraths") in *b* makes it all but certain that God's fulness of "wrath" is meant here. It is set over against the finite and puny "wrath" of men, as an ocean might be contrasted with a shallow pond. If so, God's girding Himself with the residue of His own wrath will mean that, after every such forth-putting of it as the psalm has been hymning, there still remains an unexhausted store ready to flame out if need arise. It is a stern and terrible thought of God, but it is solemnly true. His lovingkindness outmeasures man's, and so does His judicial judgment. All Divine attributes partake of Infinitude, and the stores of His punitive anger are not less deep than those of His gentle goodness.

Therefore men are summoned to vow and pay their vows; and while Israel is called to worship, the nations around, who have seen that field of the dead, are called to do homage and bring tribute to Him who, as it so solemnly shows, can cut off the breath of the highest, or can cut down their pride, as a grape-gatherer does the ripe cluster (for such is the allusion in the word "cuts down"). The last clause of the psalm, which stands somewhat disconnected from the preceding, gathers up the lessons of the tremendous event which inspired it, when it sets Him forth as to be feared by the kings of the earth.

PSALM LXXVII.

- 1 [I would lift] my voice to God and cry;
[I would lift] my voice to God, that He may give ear to me.
- 2 In the day of my straits I sought the Lord:
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted.
- 3 [When] I remember God, I must sigh;
[When] I muse, my spirit is covered [with gloom]. Selah.
- 4 Thou hast held open the guards of my eyes:
I am buffeted, and cannot speak.
- 5 I considered the days of old,
The years of ancient times.
- 6 I would remember my song in the night:
In my heart I would muse,—and my spirit made anxious search.
- 7 Will the Lord cast off for ever?
And will He continue no more to be favourable?
- 8 Is His lovingkindness ended for ever?
Has His promise failed for all generations?
- 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Or has He in anger drawn in His compassions? Selah.
- 10 Then I said, It is my sickness;
[But I will remember] the years of the right hand of the Most High.
- 11 I will celebrate the deeds of Jah;
For I will remember Thy wonders of old.
- 12 And I will meditate on all Thy work,
And will muse on Thy doings.

- 13 O God, in holiness is Thy way :
Who is a great God like God?
- 14 Thou, Thou art the God who doest wonders :
Thou hast made known among the peoples Thy strength.
- 15 Thou hast redeemed with Thine arm Thy people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.
- 16 The waters saw Thee, O God ;
The waters saw Thee, they writhed in pangs :
Yea, the abysses trembled.
- 17 The clouds were poured out [in] water ;
The skies gave [forth] a voice :
Yea, Thine arrows went to and fro.
- 18 The voice of Thy thunder was in [Thy] chariot wheel ;
Lightnings illumined the world :
The earth trembled and shook.
- 19 In the sea was Thy way,
And Thy paths in great waters,
And Thy footprints were not known.
- 20 Thou leadest Thy people like sheep,
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

THE occasion of the profound sadness of the first part of this psalm may be inferred from the thoughts which brighten it into hope in the second. These were the memories of past national deliverance. It is natural to suppose that present national disasters were the causes of the sorrow which enveloped the psalmist's spirit and suggested questions of despair, only saved from being blasphemous because they were so wistful. But it by no means follows that the singer is simply the personified nation. The piercing tone of individual grief is too clear, especially in the introductory verses, to allow of that hypothesis. Rather, the psalmist has taken into his heart the troubles of his people. Public calamity has become personal pain. What dark epoch has left its marks in this psalm remains uncertain. If Delitzsch's contention that Habakkuk iii. is in part drawn from it were indubitably established, the attribution of the psalm to the times of Josiah would be plausible; but there is, at least, room for doubt whether there has been borrowing, and if so, which is original and which echo. The calamities of the Exile in their severity and duration would give reasonable ground for the psalmist's doubts whether God had not cast off His people for ever. No brief or partial eclipse of His favour would supply adequate occasion for these.

The psalm falls into two parts, in the former of which (vv. 1-9) deepest gloom wraps the singer's spirit, while in the latter (vv. 10-20) the clouds break. Each of these parts fall into three strophes, usually of three verses; but in the concluding strophe, consisting of five, Selah stands at the end of the first and third, and is not present at the end of the second, because it is more closely connected with the third than with the first. In like manner the first strophe of the second part (vv. 10-12) has no Selah, but the second has (vv. 13-15); the closing strophe (vv. 16-20) being thus parted off.

The psalmist's agitation colours his language, which fluctuates in the first six verses between expressions of resolve or desire (vv. 1, 3, 6) and simple statement of fact (vv. 2, 4, 5). He has prayed long and earnestly, and nothing has been laid in answer on his outstretched palm. Therefore his cry has died down into a sigh. He fain

would lift his voice to God, but dark thoughts make him dumb for supplication, and eloquent only in self-pitying monologue. A man must have waded through like depths to understand this pathetic bewilderment of spirit. They who glide smoothly over a sunlit surface of sea little know the terrors of sinking with choked lungs, into the abyss. A little experience will go further than much learning in penetrating the meaning of these moanings of lamed faith. They begin with an elliptical phrase, which, in its fragmentary character, reveals the psalmist's discomposure. "My voice to God" evidently needs some such completion as is supplied above; and the form of the following verb ("cry") suggests that the supplied one should express wish or effort. The repetition of the phrase in *1 b* strengthens the impression of agitation. The last words of that clause may be a petition, "give ear," but are probably better taken as above. The psalmist would fain cry to God, that he may be heard. He has cried, as he goes on to tell in calmer mood in ver. 2, and has apparently not been heard. He describes his unintermitted supplications by a strong metaphor. The word rendered "stretched out" is literally *poured out* as water, and is applied to weeping eyes (Lam. iii. 49). The Targum substitutes eye for hand here, but that is commentary, not translation. The clause which we render "without ceasing" is literally "and grew not stiff." That word, too, is used of tears, and derivatives from it are found in the passage just referred to in Lamentations ("intermission"), and in Lam. ii. 18 ("rest"). It carries on the metaphor of a stream, the flow of which is unchecked. The application of this metaphor to the hand is harsh, but the meaning is plain—that all night long the psalmist extended his hand in the attitude of prayer, as if open to receive God's gift. His voice "rose like a fountain night and day"; but brought no comfort to his soul; and he bewails himself in the words which tell of Jacob's despair when he heard that Joseph was dead. So rooted and inconsolable does he think his sorrows. The thought of God has changed its nature, as if the sun were to become a source of darkness. When he looks up, he can only sigh; when he looks within, his spirit is clothed or veiled—i.e., wrapped in melancholy.

In the next strophe of three verses (vv. 4-6) the psalmist plunges yet deeper into gloom, and unfolds more clearly its occasion. Sorrow, like a beast of prey, devours at night; and every sad heart knows how eyelids, however wearied, refuse to close upon as wearied eyes, which gaze wide opened into the blackness and see dreadful things there. This man felt as if God's finger was pushing up his lids and forcing him to stare out into the night. Buffeted, as if laid on an anvil and battered with the shocks of doom, he cannot speak; he can only moan, as he is doing. Prayer seems to be impossible. But to say, "I cannot pray: would that I could!" is surely prayer, which will reach its destination, though the sender knows it not. The psalmist had found no ease in remembering God. He finds as little in remembering a brighter past. That he should have turned to history in seeking for consolation implies that his affliction was national in its sweep, however intensely personal in its pressure. This retrospective meditation on the great deeds of old is characteristic of the Asaph psalms. It ministers in them to many moods, as memory always does.

In this psalm we have it feeding two directly opposite emotions. It may be the nurse of bitter Despair or of bright-eyed Hope. When the thought of God occasions but sighs, the remembrance of His acts can only make the present more doleful. The heavy spirit finds reasons for heaviness in God's past and in its own. The psalmist in his sleepless vigils remembers other wakeful times, when his song filled the night with music and "awoke the dawn." Ver. 6 is parallel with ver. 3. The three key-words, *remember, muse, spirit*, recur. There, musing ended in wrapping the spirit in deeper gloom. Here, it stings that spirit to activity in questionings, which the next strophe flings out in vehement number and startling plainness. It is better to be pricked to even such interrogations by affliction than to be made torpid by it. All depends on the temper in which they are asked. If that is right, answers which will scatter gloom are not far off.

The comparison of present national evils with former happiness naturally suggests such questions. Obviously, the casting off spoken of in ver. 7 is that of the nation, and hence its mention confirms the view that the psalmist is suffering under public calamities. All the questions mean substantially one thing—has God changed? They are not, as some questions are, the strongest mode of asserting their negative; nor are they, like others, a more than half assertion of their affirmative; but they are what they purport to be—the anxious interrogations of an afflicted man, who would fain be sure that God is the same as ever, but is staggered by the dismal contrast of Now and Then. He faces with trembling the terrible possibilities, and, however his language may seem to regard failure of resources or fickleness of purpose or limitations in long-suffering as conceivable in God, his doubts are better put into plain speech than lying diffused and darkening, like poisonous mists, in his heart. A thought, be it good or bad, can be dealt with when it is made articulate. Formulating vague conceptions is like cutting a channel in a bog for the water to run. One gets it together in manageable shape, and the soil is drained. So the end of the despondent half of the psalm is marked by the bringing to distinct speech of the suspicions which floated in the singer's mind and made him miserable. The *Selah* bids us dwell on the questions, so as to realise their gravity and prepare ourselves for their answer.

The second part begins in ver. 10 with an obscure and much-commented-on verse, of which two explanations are possible, depending mainly on the meanings of the two words "sickness" and "years." The former word may mean "my wounding" or "my sickness." The latter is by many commentators taken to be an infinitive verb, with the signification *to be changed*, and, by others to be a plural noun meaning "*years*," as in ver. 6. Neglecting some minor differences, we may say that those who understand the word to mean *being changed* explain the whole thus: "This is my wound (misery, sorrow), that the right hand of the Most High has changed." So the old versions, and Hupfeld, Perowne, and Baethgen. But the use of the word in ver. 6 for "years" creates a strong presumption that its sense is the same here. As to the other word, its force is best seen by reference to a closely parallel passage in Jer. x. 19—"I said, Truly this is my grief (margin, *sickness*), and I must bear it";

where the word for *grief*, though not the same as in the psalm, is cognate. The most probable meaning, then, for the expression here is, "This my affliction is sent from God, and I must bear it with resignation." Then follows an elevating thought expressed in its simplest form like an exclamation, "*the years*," etc.,—i. e., "I will remember (comp. ver. 6) the time when the right hand of Jehovah had the pre-eminence" (Cheyne. *in loc.*). Delitzsch leaves the ellipsis unfilled, and takes the whole to mean that the psalmist says to himself that the affliction allotted will only last for the time which the mighty hand of God has determined. The rendering adopted above avoids the awkwardness of using the same word in two different senses in the same context, yields an appropriate meaning, especially in view of the continual references to remembering, and begins the new strophe with a new note of hopefulness, whereas the other renderings prolong the minor key of the first part into the second. It is therefore to be preferred. The revolution in feeling is abrupt. All is sunny and bright in the last half. What makes the change? The recognition of two great truths: first, that the calamity is laid on Israel, and on the psalmist as a member of the nation, by God, and has not come because of that impossible change in Him which the bitter questions had suggested; and, second, the unchangeable eternity of God's delivering power. That second truth comes to him as with a flash, and the broken words of ver 10 *b* hail the sudden rising of the new star.

The remainder of the psalm holds fast by that thought of the great deeds of God in the past. It is a signal example of how the same facts remembered may depress or gladden, according to the point of view from which they are regarded. We can elect whether memory shall nourish despondency or gladness. Yet the alternative is not altogether a matter of choice; for the only people to whom "remembering happier things" need not be "a sorrow's crown of sorrow" are those who see God in the past, and so are sure that every joy that was and is not shall yet again be, in more thrilling and lasting form. If He shines out on us from the east that we have left behind, His brightness will paint the western sky towards which we travel. Beneath confidence in the perpetuity of past blessings lies confidence in the eternity of God. The "years of the right hand of the Most High" answer all questions as to His change of purpose or of disposition, and supply the only firm foundation for calm assurance of the future. Memory supplies the colours with which Hope paints her truest pictures. "That which hath been is that which shall be" may be the utterance of the *blasé* man of the world, or of the devout man who trusts in the living God, and therefore knows that

"There shall never be one lost good!
What was shall live as before."

The strophe in vv. 13-15 fixes on the one great redeeming act of the Exodus as the pledge of future deeds of a like kind, as need requires. The language is deeply tinged with reminiscences of Exod. xv. "In holiness" (not "in the sanctuary"), the question "Who is so great a God?" the epithet "Who doest wonders," all come from Exod. xv. 11. "[Thine] arm" in the psalm recalls "By the greatness of Thine arm" in Exodus

(ver. 16), and the psalmist's "redeemed Thy people" reproduces "the people which Thou hast redeemed" (Exod. xv. 13). The separate mention of "sons of Joseph" can scarcely be accounted for if the psalm is prior to the division of the kingdoms. But the purpose of the designation is doubtful. It may express the psalmist's protest against the division as a breach of ancient national unity or his longings for reunion.

The final strophe differs from the others in structure. It contains five verses instead of three, and the verses are (with the exception of the last) composed of three clauses each instead of two. Some commentators have supposed that vv. 16-19 are an addition to the original psalm, and think that they do not cohere well with the preceding. This view denies that there is any allusion in the closing verses to the passage of the Red Sea, and takes the whole as simply a description of a theophany, like that in Psalm xviii. But surely the writhing of the waters as if in pangs at the sight of God is such an allusion. Ver. 19, too, is best understood as referring to the path through the sea, whose waters returned and covered God's footprints from human eyes. Unless there is such a reference in vv. 16-19, the connection with the preceding and with ver. 20 is no doubt loose. But that is not so much a reason for denying the right of these verses to a place in the psalm as for recognising the reference. Why should a mere description of a theophany, which had nothing to do with the psalmist's theme, have been tacked on to it? No doubt, the thunders, lightnings, and storm so grandly described here are unmentioned in Exodus; and, quite possibly, may be simply poetic heightening of the scene, intended to suggest how majestic was the intervention which freed Israel. Some commentators, indeed, have claimed the picture as giving additional facts concerning the passage of the Red Sea. Dean Stanley, for example, has worked these points into his vivid description; but that carries literalism too far.

The picture in the psalm is most striking. The continuous short clauses crash and flash like the thunders and lightnings. That energetic metaphor of the waters writhing as if panic-struck is more violent than Western taste approves, but its emotional vigour as a rendering of the fact is unmistakable. "Thine arrows went to and fro" is a very imperfect transcript of the Hebrew, which suggests the swift zigzag of the fierce flashes. In ver. 18 the last word offers some difficulty. It literally means *a wheel*, and is apparently best rendered as above, the thunder being poetically conceived of as the sound of the rolling wheels of God's chariot. There are several coincidences between vv. 16-19 of the psalm and Hab. iii. 10-15: namely, the expression "writhed in pain," applied in Habakkuk to the mountains; the word rendered "overflowing" (A.V.) or "tempest" (R.V.) in Hab v. 10, cognate with the verb in ver. 17 of the psalm, and there rendered "poured out"; the designation of lightnings as God's arrows. Delitzsch strongly maintains the priority of the psalm; Hupfeld as strongly that of the prophet.

The last verse returns to the two-clause structure of the earlier part. It comes in lovely contrast with the majestic and terrible picture preceding, like the wonderful setting forth of the purpose of the other theophany in Psalm xviii., which was for no higher end than to draw one poor man from the mighty waters. All this pomp of Divine appearance, with lightnings, thunders,

a heaving earth, a shrinking sea, had for its end the leading the people of God to their land, as a shepherd does his flock. The image is again an echo of Exod. xv. 13. The thing intended is not merely the passage of the Red Sea but the whole process of guidance begun there amid the darkness. Such a close is too abrupt to please some commentators. But what more was needful or possible to be said, in a retrospect of God's past acts, for the solace of a dark present? It was more than enough to scatter fears and flash radiance into the gloom which had wrapped the psalmist. He need search no further. He has found what he sought; and so he hushes his song, and gazes in silence on the all-sufficient answer which memory has brought to all his questions and doubts. Nothing could more completely express the living, ever-present worth of the ancient deeds of God than the "abruptness" with which this psalm ceases rather than ends.

PSALM LXXVIII.

- 1 Give ear, my people, to my law,
Bow your ear to the sayings of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter riddles from the ancient days,
- 3 What we have heard and known
And our fathers have told us,
- 4 We will not hide from their sons,
Recounting to the generation to come the
praises of Jehovah,
And His might and the wonders that He has
done.
- 5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
To make known to their children;
- 6 In order that the generation to come might
know,
The children who should be born,
[Who] should rise up and tell to their children.
- 7 That they might place their confidence in God,
And not forget the deeds of God,
But keep His commandments;
- 8 And not be as their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not make its heart steady,
And whose spirit was not faithful towards
God.
- 9 The children of Ephraim, bearing [and] draw-
ing bows,
Turned back in the day of onset.
- 10 They kept not the covenant of God,
And in His law they refused to walk,
- 11 And they forgot His doings,
And the wonders which He had showed them.
- 12 Before their fathers He did marvels,
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
- 13 He cleft the sea and let them pass through,
And He reared up the waters like a heap of
corn,
- 14 And He guided them in a cloud by day
And all night in a fiery light.
- 15 He cleft rocks in the wilderness,
And gave them drink abundantly, as [from]
ocean depths.
- 16 And He brought forth streams from the cliff,
And made waters to flow down like rivers.

- 17 But they went on to sin yet more against Him,
To rebel against the Most High in the desert.
- 18 And they tempted God in their heart,
In asking meat after their desire.
- 19 And they spoke against God, they said,
"Is God able to spread a table in the wilderness?"
- 20 Behold, He struck a rock, and waters gushed forth,
And torrents flowed out.
Is He able to give bread also?
Or will He prepare flesh for His people?"
- 21 Jehovah heard and was wroth,
And a fire was kindled in Jacob.
And wrath also went up against Israel.
- 22 For they did not believe in God,
And trusted not in His salvation.
- 23 And He commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,
- 24 And rained upon them manna to eat,
And gave them the corn of heaven.
- 25 Men did eat the bread of the Mighty Ones;
He sent them sustenance to the full.
- 26 He made the east wind go forth in the heavens,
And guided the south wind by His power;
- 27 And He rained flesh upon them like dust,
And winged fowls like the sand of the seas,
- 28 And let it fall in the midst of their camp,
Round about their habitations.
- 29 So they ate and were surfeited,
And their desires He brought to them.
- 30 They were not estranged from their desires
Their food was yet in their mouths.
- 31 And the wrath of God rose against them,
And slew the fattest of them,
And struck down the young men of Israel.
- 32 For all this they sinned yet more,
And believed not in His wonders.
- 33 So He made their days to vanish like a breath,
And their years in suddenness.
- 34 When He slew them, then they inquired after Him,
And returned and sought God earnestly.
- 35 And they remembered that God was their rock,
And God Most High their redeemer.
- 36 And they flattered Him with their mouth,
And with their tongue they lied to Him,
- 37 And their heart was not steadfast with Him,
And they were not faithful to His covenant.
- 38 But He is compassionate, covers iniquity, and destroys not;
Yea, many a time He takes back His anger,
And rouses not all His wrath.
- 39 So He remembered that they were [but] flesh,
A wind that goes and comes not again.
- 40 How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness,
Did they grieve Him in the desert!
- 41 Yea, again and again they tempted God,
And the Holy One of Israel they vexed.
- 42 They remembered not His hand,
The day when He set them free from the adversary.
- 43 When He set forth His signs in Egypt,
And His wonders in the field of Zoan.
- 44 And He turned to blood their Nile streams,
And their streams they could not drink.
- 45 He sent amongst them flies that devoured them,
And frogs that destroyed them.
- 46 And He gave their increase to the caterpillar,
And their toil to the locust.
- 47 He killed their vines with hail,
And their sycamores with frost. [?]
- 48 And He gave their cattle up to the hail,
And their flocks to the lightnings.
- 49 He sent against them the heat of His anger,
Wrath and indignation and trouble,
A mission of angels of evil.
- 50 He levelled a path for His anger,
He spared not their souls from death,
But delivered over their life to the pestilence.
- 51 And He smote all the first-born of Egypt,
The firstlings of [their] strength in the tents of Ham.
- 52 And He made His people go forth like sheep,
And guided them like a flock in the desert.
- 53 And He led them safely, that they did not fear,
And the sea covered their enemies.
- 54 And He brought them to His holy border,
This mountain, which His right hand had won.
- 55 And He drove out the nations before them,
And allotted them by line as an inheritance,
And made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.
- 56 But they tempted and provoked God Most High,
And His testimonies they did not keep.
- 57 And they turned back and were faithless like their fathers,
They were turned aside like a deceitful bow;
- 58 And they provoked Him to anger with their high places,
And with their graven images they moved Him to jealousy.
- 59 God heard and was wroth,
And loathed Israel exceedingly.
- 60 So that He rejected the habitation of Shiloh,
The tent [which] He had pitched among men.
- 61 And He gave His strength to captivity,
And His beauty into the hand of the adversary.
- 62 And He delivered His people to the sword,
And against His inheritance He was wroth.
- 63 Their young men the fire devoured
And their maidens were not praised in the marriage-song.
- 64 Their priests fell by the sword,
And their widows made no lamentation.
- 65 Then the Lord awoke as one that had slept,
Like a warrior shouting because of wine.
- 66 And He beat His adversaries back,
He put on them a perpetual reproach.
- 67 And He loathed the tent of Joseph,
And the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose.
- 68 But He chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which He loved.
- 69 And He built His sanctuary like [heavenly] heights,
Like the earth which He has founded for ever.
- 70 And He chose David His servant,
And took him from the sheepfolds;
- 71 From following the ewes that give suck, He brought him
To feed Jacob His people.
And Israel His inheritance.
- 72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart,
And with the skilfulness of his hands he guided them.

THIS psalm is closely related to Psalms cv.-cvii. Like them, it treats the history of Israel, and especially the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, for purposes of edification, rebuke, and encouragement. The past is held up as a mirror to the present generation. It has been one long succession of miracles of mercy met by equally continuous ingratitude, which has ever been punished by national calamities. The psalm departs singularly from chronological order. It arranges its contents in two principal masses, each introduced by the same formula (vv. 12, 43) referring to "wonders in Egypt and the field of Zoan." But the first mass has nothing to do with Egypt, but begins with the passage of the Red Sea, and is wholly occupied with the wilderness. The second group of wonders begins in ver. 44 with the plagues of Egypt, touches lightly on the wilderness history, and then passes to the early history of Israel when settled in the land, and finishes with the establishment of David on the throne. It is difficult to account for this singular *bouleversement* of the history. But the conjecture may be hazarded that its reason lies in the better illustration of continual interlacing of mercy and unthankfulness afforded by the events in the wilderness, than by the plagues of Egypt. That interlacing is the main point on which the psalmist wishes to lay stress, and therefore he begins with the most striking example of it. The use of the formula in ver. 12 looks as if his original intention had been to follow the order of time. Another peculiarity is the prominence given to Ephraim, both in ver. 9 as a type of faithlessness, and in ver. 67 as rejected in favour of Judah. These references naturally point to the date of the psalm as being subsequent to the separation of the kingdoms; but whether it is meant as rebuke to the northern kingdom, or as warning to Judah from the fate of Ephraim, is not clear. Nor are there materials for closer determination of date. The tone of the closing reference to David implies that his accession belongs to somewhat remote times.

There are no regular strophes, but a tendency to run into paragraphs of four verses, with occasional irregularities.

Vv. 1-4 declare the singer's didactic purpose. He deeply feels the solidarity of the nation through all generations—how fathers and children are knit by mystic ties, and by possession of an eternal treasure, the mighty deeds of God, of which they are bound to pass on the record from age to age. The history of ancient days is "a parable" and a "riddle" or "dark saying," as containing examples of great principles, and lessons which need reflection to discern and draw out. From that point of view, the psalmist will sum up the past. He is not a chronicler, but a religious teacher. His purpose is edification, rebuke, encouragement, the deepening of godly fear and obedience. In a word, he means to give the spirit of the nation's history.

Vv. 5-8 base this purpose on God's declared will that the knowledge of His deeds for Israel might be handed down from fathers to sons. The obligations of parents for the religious training of their children, the true bond of family unity, the ancient order of things when oral tradition was the principal means of preserving national history, the peculiarity of this nation's annals, as celebrating no heroes and recording only the deeds of God by men, the contrast between the changing bearers of the story and the undying

deeds which they had to tell, are all expressed in these verses, so pathetic in their gaze upon the linked series of short-lived men, so stern in their final declaration that Divine commandment and mercy had been in vain, and that, instead of a tradition of goodness, there had been a transmission of stubbornness and departure from God, repeating itself with tragic uniformity. The devout poet, who knows what God meant family life to be and to do, sadly recognises the grim contrast presented by its reality. But yet he will make one more attempt to break the flow of evil from father to son. Perhaps his contemporaries will listen and shake themselves clear of this entail of disobedience.

The reference to Ephraim in vv. 9-11 is not to be taken as alluding to any cowardly retreat from actual battle. Ver. 9 seems to be a purely figurative way of expressing what is put without a metaphor in the two following verses. Ephraim's revolt from God's covenant was like the conduct of soldiers, well armed and refusing to charge the foe. The better their weapons, the greater the cowardice and ignominy of the recreants. So the faithlessness of Ephraim was made darker in criminality by its knowledge of God and experience of His mercy. These should have knit the tribe to Him. A general truth of wide application is implied—that the measure of capacity is the measure of obligation. Guilt increases with endowment, if the latter is misused. A poor soldier, with no weapon but a sling or a stick, might sooner be excused for flight than a fully armed archer. The mention of Ephraim as prominent in faithlessness may be an allusion to the separation of the kingdoms. That allusion has been denied on the ground that it is the wilderness history which is here before the psalmist's mind. But the historical retrospect does not begin till ver. 12, and this introduction may well deal with an event later than those detailed in the following verses. Whether the revolt of the Ten Tribes is here in view or not, the psalmist sees that the wayward and powerful tribe of Ephraim had been a centre of religious disaffection, and there is no reason why his view should not be believed, or should be supposed to be due to mere prejudiced hostility.

The historical details begin with ver. 12, but, as has been noticed above, the psalmist seems to change his intention of first narrating the wonders in Egypt, and passes on to dilate on the wilderness history. "The field of Zoan" is the territory of the famous Egyptian city of Tzan, and seems equivalent to the Land of Goshen. The wonders enumerated are the familiar ones of the passage of the Red Sea, the guidance by the pillar of cloud and fire, and the miraculous supply of water from the rock. In vv. 15, 16, the poet brings together the two instances of such supply, which were separated from each other by the forty years of wandering, the first having occurred at Horeb in the first year, and the second at Kadesh in the last year. The two words "rocks," in ver. 15, and "cliff," in ver. 16, are taken from the two narratives of these miracles, in Exod. xvii. and Numb. xx.

The group of four verses (13-16) sets forth God's mighty deeds; the next quartet of verses (17-20) tells of Israel's requital. It is significant of the thoughts which filled the singer's heart, that he begins the latter group with declaring that, notwithstanding such tokens of God's care, the people "went on to sin yet more," though he

had specified no previous acts of sin. He combines widely separated instances of their murmurings, as he had combined distant instances of God's miraculous supply of water. The complaints which preceded the fall of the manna and the first supply of quails (Exod. xvi.), and those which led to the second giving of these (Numb. xi.) are thrown together, as one in kind. The speech put into the mouths of the murmurers in vv. 19, 20, is a poetic casting into bitter blasphemous words of the half-conscious thoughts of the faithless, sensuous crowd. They are represented as almost upbraiding God with His miracle, as quite unmoved to trust by it, and as thinking that it has exhausted His power. When they were half dead with thirst, they thought much of the water, but now they depreciate that past wonder as a comparatively small thing. So, to the churlish heart, which cherishes eager desires after some unattained earthly good, past blessings diminish as they recede, and leave neither thankfulness nor trust. There is a dash of intense bitterness and ironical making light of their relation to God in their question, "Can He provide flesh for *His people?*" Much good that name has done us, starving here! The root of all this blasphemous talk was sensuous desire; and because the people yielded to it, they "tempted God"—that is, they "unbelievingly and defiantly demanded, instead of trustfully waiting and praying" (Delitzsch). To ask food for their desires was sin; to ask it for their need would have been faith.

In ver. 21 the allusion is to the "fire of the Lord," which, according to Numb. xi. 3, burnt in the camp, just before the second giving of quails. It comes in here out of chronological order, for the sending of manna follows it; but the psalmist's didactic purpose renders him indifferent to chronology. The manna is called "corn of heaven" and "bread of the Mighty Ones"—*i. e.*, angels, as the LXX. renders the word. Both designations point to its heavenly origin, without its being necessary to suppose that the poet thought of angels as really eating it. The description of the fall of the quails (vv. 26-29) is touched with imaginative beauty. The word rendered above "made to go forth" is originally applied to the breaking up of an encampment, and that rendered "guided" to a shepherd's leading of his flock. Both words are found in the Pentateuch, the former in reference to the wind that brought the quails (Numb. xi. 31), the latter in reference to that which brought the plague of locusts (Exod. x. 13). So the winds are conceived of as God's servants, issuing from their tents at His command, and guided by Him as a shepherd leads his sheep. "He let it fall in the midst of their camp" graphically describes the dropping down of the wearied, storm-beaten birds.

Vv. 30-33 paint the swift punishment of the people's unbelief, in language almost identical with Numb. xi. 33. The psalmist twice stigmatises their sin as "lust," and uses the word which enters into the tragical name given to the scene of the sin and the punishment—*Kibroth-Hattaavah* (the graves of Lust). In vv. 32, 33, the faint-hearted despondency after the return of the spies, and the punishment of it by the sentence of death on all that generation, seem to be alluded to.

The next group of four verses describes the people's superficial and transient repentance, "When He slew them they sought Him"—*i. e.*,

when the fiery serpents were sent among them. But such seeking after God, which is properly not seeking Him at all, but only seeking to escape from evil, neither goes deep nor lasts long. Thus the end of it was only lip reverence proved to be false by life, and soon ended. "Their heart was not steadfast." The pressure being removed, they returned to their habitual position, as all such penitents do.

From the midst of this sad narrative of faithlessness, springs up, like a fountain in a weary land, or a flower among half-cooled lava blocks, the lovely description of God's forbearance in vv. 38, 39. It must not be read as if it merely carried on the narrative, and was in continuation of the preceding clauses. The psalmist does not say "He *was* full of compassion," though that would be much, in the circumstances; but he is declaring God's eternal character. His compassions are unfailing. It is always His wont to cover sin and to spare. Therefore He exercised these gracious forbearances towards those obstinate transgressors. He was true to His own compassion in remembering their mortality and feebleness. What a melancholy sound, as of wind blowing among forgotten graves, has that summing up of human life as "a wind that goes and comes not again"!

With ver. 40 the second portion of the psalm may be regarded as beginning. The first group of historical details dealt first with God's mercies, and passed on to man's requital. The second starts with man's ingratitude, which it paints in the darkest colours, as provoking Him, grieving Him, tempting Him, and vexing Him. The psalmist is not afraid to represent God as affected with such emotions by reason of men's indifference and unbelief. His language is not to be waved aside as anthropomorphic and antiquated. No doubt, we come nearer to the unattainable truth, when we conceive of God as grieved by men's sins and delighting in their trust, than when we think of Him as an impassive Infinitude, serenely indifferent to tortured or sinful hearts. For is not His name of names Love?

The psalmist traces Israel's sin to forgetfulness of God's mercy, and thus glides into a swift summing up of the plagues of Egypt, regarded as conducing to Israel's deliverance. They are not arranged chronologically, though the list begins with the first. Then follow three of those in which animals were the destroyers: namely, the fourth, that of flies; the second, that of frogs; and the eighth, that of locusts. Then comes the seventh, that of hail; and, according to some commentators, the fifth, that of the murrain, in ver. 49, followed by the tenth in ver. 51. But the grand, sombre imagery of ver. 49 is too majestic for such application. It rather sums up the whole series of plagues, likening them to an embassy (*lit.*, a sending) of angels of evil. They are a grim company to come forth from His presence—Wrath, Indignation, and Trouble. The same power which sent them out on their errand prepared a way before them; and the crowning judgment, which, in the psalmist's view was also the crowning mercy, was the death of the first-born.

The next quartet of verses (vv. 52-55) passes lightly over the wilderness history and the settlement in the land, and hastens on to a renewed narration of repeated rebellion, which occupies the next group (vv. 56-59). These verses cover the period from the entrance on Canaan to the fall of the sanctuary of Shiloh, during which there was

a continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. That is the special sin here charged against the Israel of the time of the Judges. The figure of a "deceitful bow," in ver. 57, well describes the people as failing to fulfil the purpose of their choice by God. As such a weapon does not shoot true, and makes the arrow fly wide, however well aimed and strongly drawn, so Israel foiled all Divine attempts, and failed to carry God's message to the world, or to fulfil His will in themselves. Hence the next verses tell, with intense energy and pathos, the sad story of Israel's humiliation under the Philistines. The language is extraordinarily strong in its description of God's loathing and rejection of the nation and sanctuary and is instinct with sorrow blended with stern recognition of His righteousness in judgment. What a tragic picture the psalmist draws! Shiloh, the dwelling-place of God, empty for evermore; the "Glory"—that is, the Ark—in the enemy's hands; everywhere stiffening corpses; a pall of silence over the land; no brides and no joyous bridal chaunts; the very priests massacred, unlamented by their widows, who had wept so many tears already that the fountain of them was dried up, and even sorrowing love was dumb with horror and despair!

The two last groups of verses paint God's great mercy in delivering the nation from such misery. The daring figure of His awakening as from sleep and dashing upon Israel's foes, who are also His, with a shout like that of a hero stimulated by wine, is more accordant with Eastern fervour than with our colder imagination; but it wonderfully expresses the sudden transition from a period, during which God seemed passive and careless of His people's wretchedness, to one in which His power flashed forth triumphant for their defence. The prose fact is the long series of victories over the Philistines and other oppressors, which culminated in the restoration of the Ark, the selection of Zion as its abode, which involved the rejection of Shiloh and consequently of Ephraim (in whose territory Shiloh was), and the accession of David. The Davidic kingdom is, in the psalmist's view, the final form of Israel's national existence; and the sanctuary, like the kingdom, is perpetual as the lofty heavens or the firm earth. Nor were his visions vain, for that kingdom subsists and will subsist for ever, and the true sanctuary, the dwelling-place of God among men, is still more closely intertwined with the kingdom and its King than the psalmist knew. The perpetual duration of both is, in truth, the greatest of God's mercies, outshining all earlier deliverances; and they who truly have become the subjects of the Christ, the King of Israel and of the world, and who dwell with God in His house, by dwelling with Jesus, will not rebel against Him any more, nor ever forget His wonders, but faithfully tell them to the generations to come.

PSALM LXXIX.

- 1 O God, [the] heathen have come into Thine inheritance,
They have profaned Thy holy Temple.
They have made Jerusalem heaps of stones.
- 2 They have given the corpses of Thy servants
[as] meat to the fowls of the heavens,
The flesh of Thy favoured Ones to the beasts
of the earth.

- 3 They have poured out their blood like water
round Jerusalem,
And there was none to bury [them].
- 4 We have become a reproach to our neighbours,
A scoff and a scorn to those round us.
- 5 How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou be angry for ever?
[How long] shall Thy jealousy burn like fire?
- 6 Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen who
know Thee not,
And upon [the] kingdoms which call not upon
Thy name.
- 7 For they have eaten up Jacob,
And his pasture have they laid waste.
- 8 Remember not against us the iniquities of
those before us,
Speedily let Thy compassions [come to] meet
us,
For we are brought very low.
- 9 Help us, O God, for the sake of the glory of
Thy name,
And deliver us, and cover over our sins for the
sake of Thy name.
- 10 Why should the heathen say, Where is their
God?
Let there be known among the heathen before
our eyes
The revenging of the blood of Thy servants
which is poured out.
- 11 Let there come before Thee the groaning of
the captive,
According to the greatness of Thine arm pre-
serve the sons of death.
- 12 And return to our neighbours sevenfold into
their bosom
Their reproach [with] which they have re-
proached Thee, O Lord.
- 13 And we, we the people and the flock of Thy
pasture,
Will thank Thee for ever;
To generation after generation will we recount
Thy praise

THE same national agony which was the theme of Psalm lxxiv. forced the sad strains of this psalm from the singer's heart. There, the profanation of the Temple, and here, the destruction of the city, are the more prominent. There, the dishonour to God; here, the distresses of His people, are set forth. Consequently, confession of sin is more appropriate here, and prayers for pardon blend with those for deliverance. But the tone of both psalms is the same, and there are similarities of expression which favour, though they do not demand, the hypothesis that the author is the same. Such similarities are the "how long" (lxxiv. 10 and lxxix. 5); the desecration of the Temple (lxxiv. 3, 7, and lxxix. 1) the giving over to wild beasts (lxxiv. 19, and lxxix. 2); the reproach of God (lxxiv. 10, 18, 22, and lxxix. 12). The comparison of Israel to a flock is found in both psalms, but in others of the Asaph group also.

The same remarks which were made as to the date of the former psalm apply in this case. Two arguments have, however, been urged against the Maccabean date. The first is that drawn from the occurrence of vv. 6, 7, in Jer. x. 25. It is contended that Jeremiah is in the habit of borrowing from earlier writers, that the verse immediately preceding that in question is quoted from Psalm

vi. 1, and that the connection of the passage in the psalm is closer than in the prophet, and, therefore, that the words are presumably *in situ* here, as also that the verbal alterations are such as to suggest that the prophet rather than the psalmist is the adapter. But, on the other hand, Hupfeld maintains that the connection in Jeremiah is the closer. Not much weight can be attached to that point, for neither prophet nor poet can be tied down to cool concatenation of sentences. Delitzsch claims the verbal alterations as indubitable proofs of the priority of the prophet, and maintains that "the borrower betrays himself" by changing the prophet's words into less accurate and elegant ones, and by omissions which impair "the soaring fulness of Jeremiah's expressions." The critics who hold that the psalm refers to the Chaldean invasion, and that Jeremiah has borrowed from it, have to face a formidable difficulty. The psalm must have been written after the catastrophe: the prophecy preceded it. How then can the prophet be quoting the psalm? The question has not been satisfactorily answered, nor is it likely to be.

A second argument against the Maccabean date is based upon the quotation of ver. 3 in 1 Macc. vii. 16, which it introduces by the usual formula of quotation from Scripture. It is urged that a composition so recent as the psalm would be, if of Maccabean date, would not be likely to be thus referred to. But this argument confuses the date of occurrence recorded in 1 Maccabees with the date of the record; and there is no improbability in the writer of the book quoting as Scripture a psalm which had sprung from the midst of the tragedy which he narrates.

The strophical division is not perfectly clear, but it is probably best to recognise three strophes of four verses each, with an appended verse of conclusion. The first spreads before God His people's miseries. The second and third are prayer for deliverance and confession of sin; but they differ, in that the former strophe dwells mainly upon the wished-for destruction of the enemy, and the latter upon the rescue of Israel, while a subordinate diversity is that ancestral sins are confessed in the one, and those of the present generation in the other. Ver. 13 stands out of the strophe scheme as a kind of epilogue.

The first strophe vividly describes the ghastly sights that wrung the psalmist's heart, and will, as he trusts, move God's to pity and help. The same thought as was expressed in Psalm lxxiv. underlies the emphatic repetition of "Thy" in this strophe—namely, the implication of God's fair name in His people's disasters. "*Thine inheritance*" is invaded, and "*Thy holy Temple*" defiled by the "heathen." The corpses of "*Thy servants*" lie unburied, torn by vultures' beaks and jackals' claws. The blood of "*Thy favoured Ones*" saturates the ground. It was not easy to hold fast by the reality of God's special relation to a nation thus apparently deserted, but the psalmist's faith stood even such a strain, and is not dashed by a trace of doubt. Such times are the test and triumph of trust. If genuine, it will show brightest against the blackest background. The word in ver. 1 rendered "heathen" is usually translated "nations," but here evidently connotes idolatry (ver. 6). Their worship of strange gods, rather than their alien nationality, makes their invasion of God's inheritance a tragic anomaly. The psalmist remembers the prophecy of

Micah (iii. 12) that Jerusalem should become heaps, and sadly repeats it as fulfilled at last. As already noticed, ver. 3 is quoted in 1 Macc. vii. 16, 17, and ver. 4 is found in Psalm xlv. 13, which is by many commentators referred to the Maccabean period.

The second strophe passes to direct petition, which, as it were, gives voice to the stiffened corpses strewing the streets, and the righteous blood crying from the ground. The psalmist goes straight to the cause of calamity—the anger of God—and, in the close of the strophe confesses the sins which had kindled it. Beneath the play of politics and the madness of Antiochus, he discerned God's hand at work. He reiterates the fundamental lesson, which prophets were never weary of teaching, that national disasters are caused by the anger of God, which is excited by national sins. That conviction is the first element in his petitions. A second is the twin conviction that the "heathen" are used by God as His instrument of chastisement, but that, when they have done their work, they are called to account for the human passion—cruelty, lust of conquest, and the like—which impelled them to it. Even as they poured out the blood of God's people, they have God's wrath poured out on them, because "they have eaten up Jacob."

The same double point of view is frequently taken by the prophets: for example, in Isaiah's magnificent prophecy against "the Assyrian" (x. 5 *seq.*), where the conqueror is first addressed as "the rod of Mine anger," and then his "punishment" is foretold, because, while executing God's purpose, he had been unconscious of his mission, and had been gratifying his ambition. These two convictions go very deep into "the philosophy of history." Though modified in their application to modern states and politics, they are true in substance still. The Goths who swept down on Rome, the Arabs who crushed a corrupt Christianity, the French who stormed across Europe, were God's scavengers, gathered vulture-like round carrion, but they were each responsible for their cruelty, and were punished "for the fruit of their stout hearts."

The closing verse of the strophe (ver. 8) is intimately connected with the next, which we take as beginning the third strophe; but this connection does not set aside the strophical division, though it somewhat obscures it. The distinction between the similar petitions of vv. 8, 9, is sufficient to warrant our recognition of that division, even whilst acknowledging that the two parts coalesce more closely than usual. The psalmist knows that the heathen have been hurled against Israel because God is angry; and he knows that God's anger is no arbitrarily kindled flame, but one lit and fed by Israel's sins. He knows, too, that there is a fatal entail by which the iniquities of the fathers are visited on the children. Therefore, he asks first that these ancestral sins may not be "remembered," nor their consequences discharged on the children's heads. "The evil that men do lives after them," and history affords abundant instances of the accumulated consequences of ancestors' crimes lighting on descendants that had abandoned the ancient evil, and were possibly doing their best to redress it. Guilt is not transmitted, but results of wrong are; and it is one of the tragedies of history that "one soweth and another reapeth" the bitter fruit. Upon one generation may, and often does, come

the blood of all the righteous men that many generations have slain (Matt. xxiii. 35).

The last strophe (vv. 9-12) continues the strain begun in ver. 8, but with significant deepening into confession of the sins of the existing generation. The psalmist knows that the present disaster is no case of the fathers having eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge, but that he and his contemporaries had repeated the fathers' transgressions. The ground of his plea for cleansing and deliverance is the glory of God's name, which he emphatically puts at the end of both clauses of ver. 9. He repeats the same thought in another form in the question of ver. 10, "Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?" If Israel, sinful though it is, and therefore meriting chastisement, is destroyed, there will be a blot on God's name, and the "heathen" will take it as proof, not that Israel's God was just, but that He was too feeble or too far off to hear prayers or to send succours. It is bold faith which blends acknowledgment of sins with such a conviction of the inextricable intertwining of God's glory and the sinners' deliverance. Lowly confession is wonderfully wedded to confidence that seems almost too lofty. But the confidence is in its inmost core as lowly as the confession, for it disclaims all right to God's help, and clasps His name as its only but sufficient plea.

The final strophe dwells more on the sufferings of the survivors than the earlier parts of the psalm do, and in this respect contrasts with Psalm lxxiv., which is all but entirely silent as to these. Not only does the spilt blood of dead confessors cry for vengeance since they died for their faith, as "Thy servants," but the groans and sighs of the living who are captives, and "sons of death"—i.e., doomed to die, if unrescued by God—appeal to Him. The expressions "the groaning of the captive" and "the sons of death" occur in Psalm cii. 20, from which, if this is a composition of Maccabean date they are here quoted. The strophe ends with recurring to the central thought of both this and the companion psalm—the reproach on God from His servants' calamities—and prays that the enemies' taunts may be paid back into their bosoms sevenfold—i. e., in fullest measure.

The epilogue in ver. 13 has the image of a flock, so frequent in the Asaph psalms, suggesting tender thoughts of the shepherd's care and of his obligations. Deliverance will evoke praise, and, instead of the sad succession of sin and suffering from generation to generation, the solidarity of the nation will be more happily expressed by ringing songs, transmitted from father to son, and gathering volume as they flow from age to age.

PSALM LXXX.

- 1 Shepherd of Israel, give ear.
Thou who leddest Joseph like a flock,
Thou that sittest [throned upon] the cherubim,
shine forth.
- 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh
stir up Thy strength,
And come for salvation for us.
- 3 O God, restore us.
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be
saved.
- 4 Jehovah, God [of] Hosts,
How long wilt Thou be angry against the
prayer of Thy people?

- 5 Thou hast made them eat tears [as] bread,
And hast given them to drink [of] tears in
large measure.
- 6 Thou makest us a strife to our neighbours,
And our enemies mock to their hearts' content.
- 7 God [of] Hosts, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be
saved.
- 8 A vine out of Egypt didst Thou transplant,
Thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.
- 9 Thou didst clear a place before it,
And it threw out its roots and filled the land.
- 10 The mountains were covered with its shadow,
And its branches [were like] the cedars of
God.
- 11 It spread its boughs [even] unto the sea,
And to the River its shoots.
- 12 Why hast Thou broken down its fences,
So that all who pass on the way pluck from it?
- 13 The boar of the wood roots it up,
And the beasts of the field feed on it.
- 14 God [of] Hosts, turn, we beseech Thee,
Look from heaven and see,
And visit this vine.
- 15 And protect what Thy right hand has planted,
And the son whom Thou madest strong for
Thyself.
- 16 Burned with fire is it—cut down;
At the rebuke of Thy countenance they perish.
- 17 Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right
hand,
Upon the son of man [whom] Thou madest
strong for Thyself.
- 18 And we will not go back from Thee;
Revive us, and we will invoke Thy name.
- 19 Jehovah, God [of] Hosts, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be
saved.

THIS psalm is a monument of some time of great national calamity; but its allusions do not enable us to reach certainty as to what that calamity was. Two striking features of it have been used as clues to its occasion—namely, the designation of the nation as "Joseph," and the mention of the three tribes in ver. 2. Calvin, Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, and others are led thereby to regard it as a prayer by an inhabitant of Judah for the captive children of the northern kingdom; while others, as Cheyne, consider that only the Persian period explains the usage in question. The name of "Joseph" is applied to the whole nation in other Asaph psalms (lxxvii. 15; lxxxii. 5). It is tempting to suppose, with Hupfeld, that this nomenclature indicates that the ancient antagonism of the kingdoms has passed away with the captivity of the Ten Tribes, and that the psalmist, a singer in Judah, looks wistfully to the ideal unity, yearns to see breaches healed, and the old associations of happier days, when "Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh" encamped side by side in the desert, and marched one after the other, renewed in a restored Israel. If this explanation of the mention of the tribes is adopted, the psalm falls in some period after the destruction of the northern kingdom, but prior to that of Judah. The prayer in the refrain "turn us" might, indeed, mean "bring us back from exile," but may as accurately be regarded as asking for restored prosperity—an explanation which accords better with the rest of the psalm. We take the whole, then, as a prayer for the nation, con-

ceived of in its original, long-broken unity. It looks back to the Divine purpose as expressed in ancient deeds of deliverance, and prays that it may be fulfilled, notwithstanding apparent thwarting. Closer definition of date is unattainable.

The triple refrain in vv. 3, 7, 19, divides the psalm into three unequal parts. The last of these is disproportionately long, and may be further broken up into three parts, of which the first (vv. 8-11) describes the luxuriant growth of Israel under the parable of a vine, the second (vv. 12-14) brings to view the bitter contrast of present ruin, and, with an imperfect echo of the refrain, melts into the petitioning tone of the third (vv. 15-19), which is all prayer.

In the first strophe "Shepherd of Israel" reminds us of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh in which he invoked "the God who shepherded me all my life long" to "bless the lads," and of the title in Gen. xlix. 24, "the shepherd, the stone of Israel." The comparison of the nation to a flock is characteristic of the Asaph psalms, and here refers to the guidance of the people at the Exodus. Delitzsch regards the notions of the earthly and heavenly sanctuary as being blended in the designation of God as sitting throned on the cherubim, but it is better to take the reference as being to His dwelling in the Temple. The word rendered "shine forth" occurs in Psalm l. 2, where it expresses His coming from "Zion," and so it does here. The same metaphor underlies the subsequent petition in ver. 3. In both God is thought of as light, and the manifestation of His delivering help is likened to the blazing out of the sun from behind a cloud.

In reference to the mention of the tribes in ver. 2, we need only add to what has been already said, that the petitions of ver. 1, which look back to the wilderness marches, when the Ark led the van, naturally suggested the mention of the three tribes who were together reckoned as "the camp of Ephraim," and who, in the removal of the encampment, "set forth third"—that is, immediately in the rear of the tabernacle. The order of march explains not only the collocation here, but the use of the word "Before." Joseph and Benjamin were children of the same mother, and the schism which parted their descendants is, to the psalmist's faith, as transient as unnatural. Once again shall the old unity be seen, when the brothers' sons shall again dwell and fight side by side, and God shall again go forth before them for victory.

The prayer of the refrain, "turn us," is not to be taken as for restoration from exile, which is negated by the whole tone of the psalm, nor as for spiritual quickening, but simply asks for the return of the glories of ancient days. The petition that God would let His face shine upon the nation alludes to the priestly benediction (Numb. vi. 25), thus again carrying us back to the wilderness. Such a flashing forth is all that is needed to change blackest night into day. To be "saved" means here to be rescued from the assaults of hostile nations. The poet was sure that Israel's sole defence was God, and that one gleam of His face would shrivel up the strongest foes, like unclean, slimy creatures which writhe and die in sunshine. The same conviction is valid in a higher sphere. Whatever elevation of meaning is given to "saved," the condition of it is always this—the manifestation of God's face. That brings light into all dark hearts. To behold that light, and to walk in it, and to be transformed by beholding, as

they are who lovingly and steadfastly gaze, is salvation.

A piteous tale of suffering is wailed forth in the second strophe. The peculiar accumulation of the Divine names in vv. 4, 19, is found also in Psalms lix. 5 and lxxxiv. 8. It is grammatically anomalous, as the word for God (Elohim) does not undergo the modification which would show that the next word is to be connected with it by "of." Hence, some have regarded "Ts'bhaoth" (hosts) as being almost equivalent to a proper name of God, which it afterwards undoubtedly became; while others have explained the construction by supposing the phrase to be elliptical, requiring after "God" the supplement "God of." This accumulation of Divine names is by some taken as a sign of late date. Is it not a mark of the psalmist's intensity rather than of his period? In accordance with the Elohist character of the Asaph psalms, the common expression "Jehovah of Hosts" is expanded; but the hypothesis that the expansion was the work of a redactor is unnecessary. It may quite as well have been that of the author.

The urgent question "How long?" is not petulant impatience, but hope deferred, and, though sick at heart, still cleaving to God and remonstrating for long-protracted calamities. The bold imagery of ver. 4 *b* cannot well be reproduced in translation. The rendering "wilt Thou be angry?" is but a feeble reproduction of the vigorous original, which runs "wilt Thou smoke?" Other psalms (*e.g.*, lxxiv. 1) speak of God's anger as smoking but here the figure is applied to God Himself. What a contrast it presents to the petition in the refrain! That "light" of Israel has become "as a flaming fire." A terrible possibility of darkening and consuming wrath lies in the Divine nature, and the very emblem of light suggests it. It is questionable whether the following words should be rendered "against the prayer of Thy people," or "while Thy people are praying" (Delitzsch). The former meaning is in accordance with the Hebrew, with other Scripture passages, and with the tone of the psalm, and is to be preferred, as more forcibly putting the anomaly of an unanswering God. Ver. 5 presents the national sorrows under familiar figures. The people's food and drink were tears. The words of *a* may either be rendered "bread of tears"—*i. e.* eaten with, or rather consisting of, tears; or, as above, "tears [as] bread." The word rendered "in large measure" means "the third part"—"of some larger measure." It is found only in Isa. xl. 12. "The third part of an ephah is a puny measure for the dust of the earth [but] it is a large measure for tears" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). Ver. 6 adds one more touch to the picture—gleeful neighbours cynically rejoicing to their hearts' content (*lit.*, for themselves) over Israel's calamities. Thus, in three verses, the psalmist points to an angry God, a weeping nation, and mocking foes, a trilogy of woe. On all he bases an urgent repetition of the refrain which is made more imploring by the expanded name under which God is invoked to help. Instead of the simple "God," as in ver. 3, he now says "God of Hosts." As sense of need increases, a true suppliant goes deeper into God's revealed character.

From ver. 8 onwards the parable of the vine as representing Israel fills the singer's mind. As has been already noticed this part of the psalm may be regarded as one long strophe, the parts of

which follow in orderly sequence, and are held closely together, as shown by the recurrence of the refrain at the close only. Three stages are discernible in it—a picture of what has been, the contrast of what is now, and a prayer for speedy help. The emblem of the vine, which has received so great development in the prophets, and has been hallowed for ever by our Lord's use of it, seems to have been suggested to the psalmist by the history of Joseph, to which he has already alluded. For, in Jacob's blessing (Gen. xlix. 22 *seqq.*), Joseph is likened to a fruitful bough. Other Old Testament writers have drawn out the manifold felicities of the emblem as applied to Israel. But these need not concern us here, where the point is rather God's husbandry and the vine's growth, both of which are in startling contrast with a doleful present. The figure is carried out with much beauty in detail. The Exodus was the vine's transplanting: the destruction of the Canaanites was the grubbing up of weeds to clear the ground for it; the numerical increase of the people was its making roots and spreading far. In ver. 10 *b* the rendering may be either that adopted above, or "And the cedars of God [were covered with] its branches." The latter preserves the parallelism of clauses and the unity of representation in vv. 10, 11, which will then deal throughout with the spreading growth of the vine. But the cedars would not have been called "of God,"—which implies their great size,—unless their dimensions had been in point, which would not be the case if they were only thought of as espaliers for the vine. And the image of its running over the great trees of Lebanon is unnatural. The rendering as above is to be preferred even though it somewhat mars the unity of the picture. The extent of ground covered by the vine is described, in ver. 11, as stretching from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (Deut. xi. 24; 1 Kings iv. 24). Such had been the glories of the past; and they had all been the work of God's hand.

In ver. 12 the miserable contrast of present desolation is spread before God, with the bold and yet submissive question "Why?" The vineyard wall is thrown down, and the vine lies exposed to every vagrant passenger, and to every destructive creature. Swine from the woods burrow at its roots, and "whatever moves on the plain" (Psalm l. 11, the only other place where the expression occurs) feeds on it. The parallelism forbids the supposition that any particular enemy is meant by the wild boar. Hupfeld would transpose ver. 16 so as to stand after ver. 13, which he thinks improves the connection, and brings the last part of the psalm into symmetrical form, in three equal parts, containing four verses each. Cheyne would put vv. 14, 15, before vv. 12, 13, and thereby secures more coherence and sequence. But accuracy in these matters is not to be looked for in such highly emotional poetry, and perhaps a sympathetic ear may catch in the broken words a truer ring than in the more orderly arrangement of them by critics.

Ver. 14 sounds like an imperfect echo of the refrain significantly modified, so as to beseech that God would "turn" Himself even as He had been implored to "turn" His people. The purpose of His turning is that He may "look and see" the condition of the desolated vineyard, and thence be moved to interfere for its restoration. The verse may be regarded as closing one of the imperfectly developed strophes of this last part; but it belongs

in substance to the following petitions, though in form it is more closely connected with the preceding verses. The picture of Israel's misery passes insensibly into prayer, and the burden of that prayer is, first, that God would behold the sad facts, as the preliminary to His acting in view of them.

The last part (vv. 15-19) is prayer for God's help, into which forces itself one verse (16), recurring to the miseries of the nation. It bursts in like an outcrop of lava, revealing underground disturbance and fires. Surely that interruption is more pathetic and natural than is the result obtained by the suggested transpositions. The meaning of the word in ver. 15 rendered above "protect" is doubtful, and many commentators would translate it as a noun, and regard it as meaning "plant," or, as the A.V., "vineyard." The verse would then depend on the preceding verb in ver. 14, "visit." But this construction is opposed by the copula (*and*) preceding, and it is best to render "protect," with a slight change in the vocalisation. There may be an allusion to Jacob's blessing in ver. 15 *b*, for in it (Gen. xlix. 22) Joseph is called a "fruitful bough"—lit., "son." If so, the figure of the vine is retained in ver. 15 *b* as well as in *a*.

The apparent interruption of the petitions by ver. 16 is accounted for by the sharp pang that shot into the psalmist's heart; when he recalled, in his immediately preceding words, the past Divine acts, which seemed so contradicted now. But the bitterness, though it surges up, is overcome, and his petitions return to their former strain in ver. 17, which pathetically takes up, as it were, the broken thread, by repeating "right hand" from ver. 15 *a*, and "whom Thou madest strong for Thyself" from ver. 15 *b*. Israel, not an individual, is the "man of Thy right hand," in which designation, coupled with "son," there may be an allusion to the name of Benjamin (ver. 2), the "son of the right hand." Human weakness and Divine strength clothing it are indicated in that designation for Israel "the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself." The inmost purpose of God's gifts is that their recipients may be "the secretaries of His praise." Israel's sacred calling, its own weakness, and the strength of the God who endows it are all set forth, not now as lessons to it, but as pleas with Him, whose gifts are without repentance, and whose purposes cannot be foiled by man's unworthiness or opposition.

The psalm closes with a vow of grateful adhesion to God as the result of His renewed mercy. They who have learned how bitter a thing it is to turn away from God, and how blessed when He turns again to them, and turns back their miseries and their sins, have good reason for not again departing from Him. But if they are wise to remember their own weakness, they will not only humbly vow future faithfulness, but earnestly implore continual help; since only the constant communication of a Divine quickening will open their lips to call upon God's name.

The refrain in its most expanded form closes the psalm. Growing intensity of desire and of realisation of the pleas and pledges hived in the name are expressed by its successive forms.—God; God of Hosts; Jehovah, God of Hosts. The faith that grasps all that is contained in that full-toned name already feels the light of God's face

shining upon it, and is sure that its prayer for salvation is not in vain.

PSALM LXXXI.

- 1 Shout for joy to God our strength,
Shout aloud to the God of Jacob.
- 2 Lift up the song, and sound the timbrel,
The pleasant lyre with the harp.
- 3 Blow the trumpet on the new moon,
On the full moon, for the day of our feast.
- 4 For this is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5 For a testimony in Joseph He appointed it,
When He went forth over the land of Egypt.
—A language which I know not I hear.
- 6 I removed his shoulder from the burden,
His hands were freed from the basket.
- 7 In straits thou didst call and I delivered thee,
I answered thee in the secret place of thunder,
I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.
- 8 Hear, My people, and I will witness to thee:
O Israel, would that thou wouldst hearken to Me!
- 9 There shall be no strange god in thee,
And thou shalt not bow down to an alien god.
- 10 I, I am Jehovah thy God,
Who brought thee up from the land of Egypt.
Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it.
- 11 But My people hearkened not to My voice,
And Israel did not yield to Me.
- 12 Then I let them go in the stubbornness of their heart,
That they might walk in their own counsels.
- 13 Would that My people would hearken to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
- 14 Easily would I humble their enemies,
And against their adversaries turn My hand.
- 15 The haters of Jehovah would come feigning to Him,
But their time should endure for ever.
- 16 And He would feed thee with the fat of wheat,
And with honey from the rock would I satisfy thee.

THE psalmist summons priests and people to a solemn festival, commemorative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and sets forth the lessons which that deliverance teaches, the learning of which is the true way of keeping the feast. There has been much discussion as to which feast is in the psalmist's mind. That of Tabernacles has been widely accepted as intended, chiefly on the ground that the first day of the month in which it occurred was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets, as the beginning of the civil year. This practice is supposed to account for the language of ver. 3, which seems to imply trumpet-blowing both at new and full moon. But, on other grounds, the Passover is more likely to be intended, as the psalm deals with the manifestations of Divine power attending the beginning of the Exodus, which followed the first Passover, as well as with those during the desert sojourn, which alone were commemorated by the feast of Tabernacles. True, we have no independent knowledge of any trumpet-blowing on the first day of the Passover month (Nisan); but Delitzsch and others suggest that from this psalm it may be inferred "that the commencement of each month, and more especially the commence-

ment of the month (Nisan), which was at the same time the commencement of the ecclesiastical year, was signalled by the blowing of horns." On the whole, the Passover is most probably the feast in question.

Olshausen, followed by Cheyne, regards the psalm as made up of two fragments (vv. 1-5 *a*, and 5 *c*-16). But surely the exhortations and promises of the latter portion are most relevant to the summons to the festival contained in the former part, and there could be no more natural way of preparing for the right commemoration of the deliverance than to draw out its lessons of obedience and to warn against departure from the delivering God. Definiteness as to date is unattainable. The presupposed existence of the full Temple ceremonial shows that the psalm was not written in exile, nor at a time of religious persecution. Its warning against idolatry would be needless in a post-exilic psalm, as no tendency thereto existed after the return from captivity. But beyond such general indications we cannot go. The theory that the psalm is composed of two fragments exaggerates the difference between the two parts into which it falls. These are the summons to the feast (vv. 1-5), and the lessons of the feast (vv. 6-16).

Delitzsch suggests that the summons in ver. 1 is addressed to the whole congregation; that in ver. 2 to the Levites, the appointed singers and musicians; and that in ver. 3 to the priests who are intrusted with blowing the Shophar, or horn (Josh. vi. 4, and 2 Chron. xx. 28). One can almost hear the tumult of joyful sounds, in which the roar of the multitude, the high-pitched notes of singers, the deeper clash of timbrels, the twanging of stringed instruments, and the hoarse blare of rams' horns, mingle in concordant discord, grateful to Eastern ears, however unmusical to ours. The religion of Israel allowed and required exuberant joy. It sternly rejected painting and sculpture, but abundantly employed music, the most ethereal of the arts, which stirs emotions and longings too delicate and deep for speech. Whatever differences in form have necessarily attended the progress from the worship of the Temple to that of the Church, the free play of joyful emotion should mark the latter even more than the former. Decorum is good, but not if purchased by the loss of ringing gladness. The psalmist's summons has a meaning still.

The reason for it is given in vv. 4, 5 *a*. It—*i.e.*, the feast (not the musical accompaniments)—is appointed by God. The psalmist employs designations for it, which are usually applied to "the word of the Lord": statute, ordinance, testimony, being all found in Psalms xix., cxix., with that meaning. A triple designation of the people corresponds with these triple names for the feast. *Israel*, *Jacob*, and *Joseph* are synonyms, the use of the last of these having probably the same force here as in the preceding psalm—namely, to express the singer's longing for the restoration of the shattered unity of the nation. The summons to the feast is based, not only on Divine appointment, but also on Divine purpose in that appointment. It was "a testimony," a rite commemorative of a historical fact, and therefore an evidence of it to future times. There is no better proof of such a fact than a celebration of it, which originates contemporaneously and continues through generations. The feast in question was thus simultaneous with the event commemorated,

as ver. 5 *b* tells. It was God, not Israel, as is often erroneously supposed, who "went forth." For the following preposition is not "from," which might refer to the national departure, but "over" or "against," which cannot have such a reference, since Israel did not, in any sense, go "over" or "against" the land. God's triumphant forth-putting of power over the whole land, especially in the death of the first-born, on the night of the Passover, is meant to be remembered for ever, and is at once the fact commemorated by the feast, and a reason for obeying His appointment of it.

So far the thoughts and language are limpid, but ver. 5 *c* interrupts their clear flow. Who is the speaker thus suddenly introduced? What is the "language" (lit., lip) which he "knew not"? The explanation implied by the A.V. and R.V., that the collective Israel speaks, and that the reference is, as in Psalm cxiv. 1, to the "strange language" of the Egyptians, is given by most of the older authorities, and by Ewald and Hengstenberg, but has against it the necessity for the supplement "where," and the difficulty of referring the "I" to the nation. The more usual explanation in modern times is that the speaker is the psalmist, and that the language which he hears is the voice of God, the substance of which follows in the remainder of the psalm. As in Job iv. 16 Eliphaz could not discern the appearance of the mysterious form that stood before his eyes, and thus its supernatural character is suggested, so the psalmist hears an utterance of a hitherto unknown kind, which he thus implies to have been Divine. God Himself speaks, to impress the lessons of the past, and to excite the thoughts and feelings which would rightly celebrate the feast. The glad noises of song, harp, and trumpet are hushed; the psalmist is silent, to hear that dread Voice, and then with lowly lips he repeats so much of the majestic syllables as he could translate into words which it was possible for a man to utter. The inner coherence of the two parts of the psalm is, on this explanation, so obvious, that there is no need nor room for the hypothesis of two fragments having been fused into one.

The Divine Voice begins with recapitulating the facts which the feast was intended to commemorate—namely, the act of emancipation from Egyptian bondage (ver. 6), and the miracles of the wilderness sojourn (ver. 7). The compulsory labour, from which God delivered the people, is described by two terms, of which the former (burden) is borrowed from Exodus, where it frequently occurs (Exod. i. 11, v. 4, vi. 6), and the latter (basket) is by some supposed to mean the wicker-work implement for carrying, which the monuments show was in use in Egypt (so LXX., etc.), and by others to mean an earthen vessel, as "an example of the work in clay in which the Israelites were engaged" (Hupfeld). The years of desert wandering are summed up, in ver. 7, as one long continuance of benefits from God. Whenever they cried to Him in their trouble, He delivered them. He spoke to them "from the secret place of thunder" ("My thunder-covert," Cheyne). That expression is generally taken to refer to the pillar of cloud, but seems more naturally to be regarded as alluding to the thick darkness, in which God was shrouded on Sinai, when He spoke His law amid thunderings and lightnings. "The proving at the waters of

Meribah" is, according to the connection and in harmony with Exod. xvii. 6, to be regarded as a benefit. "It was meant to serve the purpose of binding Israel still more closely to its God" (Baethgen). It is usually assumed that, in this reference to "the waters of Meribah," the two similar incidents of the miraculous supply of water—one of which occurred near the beginning of the forty years in the desert, at "Massah and Meribah" (Exod. xvii. 7), and the other at "the waters of Meribah," near Kadesh, in the fortieth year—have been blended, or, as Cheyne says, "confused." But there is no need to suppose that there is any confusion, for the words of the psalm will apply to the latter miracle as well as to the former, and, if the former clause refers to the manifestations at Sinai, the selection of an incident at nearly the end of the wilderness period is natural. The whole stretch of forty years is thereby declared to have been marked by continuous Divine care. The Exodus was begun, continued, and ended amid tokens of His watchful love. The Selah bids the listener meditate on that prolonged revelation.

That retrospect next becomes the foundation of a Divine exhortation to the people, which is to be regarded as spoken originally to Israel in the wilderness, as ver. 11 shows. Perowne well designates these verses (8-10) "a discourse within a discourse." They put into words the meaning of the wilderness experience, and sum up the laws spoken on Sinai, which they in part repeat. The purpose of God's lavish benefits was to bind Israel to Himself. "Hear, My people," reminds us of Deut. v. 1, vi. 4. "I will bear witness to thee" here means rather solemn warning to, than testifying against, the person addressed. With infinite pathos, the tone of the Divine Speaker changes from that of authority to pleading and the utterance of a yearning wish, like a sigh. "Would that thou wouldest hearken!" God desires nothing so earnestly as that; but His Divine desire is tragically and mysteriously foiled. The awful human power of resisting His voice and of making His efforts vain, the still more awful fact of the exercise of that power, were clear before the psalmist, whose daring anthropopathy teaches a deep lesson, and warns us against supposing that men have to do with an impassive Deity. That wonderful utterance of Divine wish is almost a parenthesis. It gives a moment's glimpse into the heart of God, and then the tone of command is resumed. "In ver. 9 the keynote of the revelation of the law from Sinai is given: the fundamental command which opens the Decalogue demanded fidelity towards Jehovah, and forbade idolatry, as the sin of sins" (Delitzsch). The reason for exclusive devotion to God is based in ver. 10, as in Exod. xx. 2, the fundamental passage, on His act of deliverance, not on His sole Divinity. A theoretic Monotheism would be cold; the consciousness of benefits received from One Hand alone is the only key that will unlock a heart's exclusive devotion and lay it at His feet. And just as the commandment to worship God alone is founded on His unaided delivering might and love, so it is followed by the promise that such exclusive adhesion to Him will secure the fulfilment of the boldest wishes, and the satisfying of the most clamant or hungry desires. "Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it." It is folly to go to strange gods for the supply of needs, when God is able to give all that every man

can wish. We may be well content to cleave to Him alone, since He alone is more than enough for each and for all. Why should *they* waste time and strength in seeking for supplies from many, who can find all they need in One? They who put Him to the proof, and find Him enough, will have, in their experience of His sufficiency, a charm to protect them from all vagrant desire to "go further and fare worse." The best defence against temptations to stray from God is the possession by experience, of His rich gifts that meet all desires. That **great** saying teaches, too, that God's bestowals are practically measured by men's capacity and desire. The ultimate limit of them is His own limitless grace; but the working limit in each individual is the individual's receptivity, of which his expectancy and desire are determining factors.

In vv. 11, 12, the Divine Voice laments the failure of benefits and commandments and promises to win Israel to God. There is a world of baffled tenderness and almost wondering rebuke in the designation of the rebels as "My people." It would have been no cause of astonishment if other nations had not listened; but that the tribes bound by so many kindnesses should have been deaf is a sad marvel. Who should listen to "My voice" if "My people" do not? The penalty of not yielding to God is to be left unyielding. The worst punishment of sin is the prolongation and consequent intensifying of the sin. A heart that wilfully closes itself against God's pleadings brings on itself the nemesis, that it becomes incapable of opening, as a self-torturing Hindoo fakir may clench his fist so long, that at last his muscles lose their power, and it remains shut for his lifetime. The issue of such "stubbornness" is walking in their own counsels, the practical life being regulated entirely by self-originated and God-forgetting dictates of prudence or inclination. He who will not have the Divine Guide has to grope his way as well as he can. There is no worse fate for a man than to be allowed to do as he chooses. "The ditch," sooner or later, receives the man who lets his active powers, which are in themselves blind, be led by his understanding, which he has himself blinded by forbidding it to look to the One Light of Life.

In ver. 13 the Divine Voice turns to address the joyous crowd of festal worshippers, exhorting them to that obedience which is the true keeping of the feast, and holding forth bright promises of the temporal blessings which, in accordance with the fundamental conditions of Israel's prosperity, should follow thereon. The sad picture of ancient rebellion just drawn influences the language in this verse, in which "My people," "hearken," and "walk" recur. The antithesis to walking in one's own counsels is walking in God's ways, suppressing native stubbornness, and becoming docile to His guidance. The highest blessedness of man is to have a will submissive to God's will, and to carry out that submission in all details of life. Self-engineered paths are always hard, and, if pursued to the end, lead into the dark. The listening heart will not lack guidance, and obedient feet will find God's way the way of peace which steadily climbs to unfading light.

The blessings attached in the psalm to such conformity with God's will are of an external kind, as was to be expected at the Old Testament stage of revelation. They are mainly two—victory and abundance. But the precise application of ver.

15 *b* is doubtful. Whose "time" is to "endure for ever"? There is much to be said in favour of the translation "that so their time might endure for ever," as Cheyne renders, and for understanding it, as he does, as referring to the enemies who yield themselves to God, in order that they "might be a never-exhausted people." But to bring in the purpose of the enemies' submission is somewhat irrelevant, and the clause is probably best taken to promise length of days to Israel. In ver. 16 the sudden change of persons in *a* is singular, and, according to the existing vocalisation, there is an equally sudden change of tenses, which induces Delitzsch and others to take the verse as recurring to historical retrospect. The change to the third person is probably occasioned, as Hupfeld suggests, by the preceding naming of Jehovah, or may have been due to an error. Such sudden changes are more admissible in Hebrew than with us, and are very easily accounted for, when God is represented as speaking. The momentary emergence of the psalmist's personality would lead him to say "He," and the renewed sense of being but the echo of the Divine Voice would lead to the recurrence to the "I," in which God speaks directly. The words are best taken as in line with the other hypothetical promises in the preceding verses. The whole verse looks back to Deut. xxxii. 13, 14. "Honey from the rock" is not a natural product; but, as Hupfeld says, the parallel "oil out of the flinty rock," which follows in Deuteronomy, shows that "we are here, not on the ground of the actual, but of the ideal," and that the expression is a hyperbole for incomparable abundance. Those who hearken to God's voice will have all desires satisfied and needs supplied. They will find furtherance in hindrances, fertility in barrenness; rocks will drop honey and stones will become bread.

PSALM LXXXII.

- 1 God stands in the congregation of God,
In the midst of the gods He judges.
- 2 How long will ye judge injustice,
And accept the persons of wicked men? Selah.
- 3 Right the weak and the orphan,
Vindicate the afflicted and the poor.
- 4 Rescue the weak and needy,
From the hand of the wicked deliver [them].
- 5 They know not, they understand not,
In darkness they walk to and fro,
All the foundations of the earth totter.
- 6 I myself have said, Ye are gods,
And sons of the Most High are ye all.
- 7 Surely like men shall ye die,
And like one of the princes shall ye fall.
- 8 Arise, O God, judge the earth.
For Thou, Thou shalt inherit all the nations.

In Psalm 1. God is represented as gathering His people together to be judged; in this psalm He has gathered them together for His judgment on judges. The former psalm begins at an earlier point of the great Cause than this one does. In it, unnamed messengers go forth to summons the nation: in this, the first verse shows us the assembled congregation, the accused, and the Divine Judge standing in "the midst" in statuesque

immobility. An awe-inspiring pause intervenes, and then the silence is broken by a mighty voice of reproof and admonition (vv. 2-4). The speaker may be the psalmist, but the grand image of God as judging loses much of its solemnity and appropriateness, unless these stern rebukes and the following verses till the end of ver. 7 are regarded as His voice of judgment. Ver. 5 follows these rebukes with "an indignant aside from the Judge" (Cheyne), evoked by obstinate deafness to His words; and vv. 6, 7 pronounce the fatal sentence on the accused, who are condemned by their own refusal to hearken to Divine remonstrances. Then, in ver. 8, after a pause like that which preceded God's voice, the psalmist, who has been a silent spectator, prays that what he has heard in the inward ear, and seen with the inward eye, may be done before the nations of the world, since it all belongs to Him by right.

The scene pictured in ver. 1 has been variously interpreted. "The congregation of God" is most naturally understood according to the parallel in Psalm l., and the familiar phrase "the congregation of Israel" as being the assembled nation. Its interpretation and that of the "gods" who are judged hang together. If the assembly is the nation, the persons at the bar can scarcely be other than those who have exercised injustice on the nation. If, on the other hand, the "gods" are ideal or real angelic beings, the assembly will necessarily be a heavenly one. The use of the expressions "the congregation of Jehovah" (Numb. xxvii. 17, xxxi. 16; Josh. xxii. 16, 17) and "Thy congregation" (Psalm lxxiv. 2) makes the former interpretation the more natural, and therefore exercises some influence in determining the meaning of the other disputed word. The interpretation of "gods" as angels is maintained by Hupfeld; and Bleek, followed by Cheyne, goes the full length of regarding them as patron angels of the nations. But, as Baethgen says, "that angels should be punished with death is a thought which lies utterly beyond the Old Testament sphere of representation," and the incongruity can hardly be reckoned to be removed by Cheyne's remark, that, since angels are in other places represented as punished, "it is only a step further" to say that they are punished with death. If, however, these "gods" are earthly rulers, the question still remains whether they are Jewish or foreign judges? The latter opinion is adopted chiefly on the ground of the reference in ver. 8 to a world-embracing judicial act, which, however, by no means compels its acceptance, since it is entirely in accordance with the manner of psalmists to recognise in partial acts of Divine retribution the operation in miniature of the same Divine power, which will one day set right all wrongs. and, on occasion of the smaller manifestation of Divine righteousness, to pray for a universal judgment. There would be little propriety in summoning the national assembly to behold judgments wrought on foreign rulers, unless these alien oppressors were afflicting Israel, of which there is no sure indications in the psalm. The various expressions for the afflicted in vv. 3, 4, are taken, by the supporters of the view that the judges are foreigners, to mean the whole nation as it groaned under their oppression, but there is nothing to show that they do not rather refer to the helpless in Israel.

Our Lord's reference to ver. 6 in John x. 34-38 is, by the present writer, accepted as authorita-

tively settling both the meaning and the ground of the remarkable name of "gods" for human judges. It does not need that we should settle the mystery of His emptying Himself, or trace the limits of His human knowledge, in order to be sure that He spoke truth with authority, when He spoke on such a subject as His own Divine nature, and the analogies and contrasts between it and the highest human authorities. His whole argument is worthless, unless the "gods" in the psalm are men. He tells us why that august title is applied to them—namely, because to them "the word of God came." They were recipients of a Divine word, constituting them in their office; and, in so far as they discharged its duties, their decrees were God's word ministered by them. That is especially true in a theocratic state such as Israel, where the rulers are, in a direct way, God's vicegerents, clothed by Him with delegated authority, which they exercise under His control. But it is also true about all who are set in similar positions elsewhere. The office is sacred, whatever its holders are.

The contents of the psalm need little remark. In vv. 2-4 God speaks in stern upbraiding and command. The abrupt pealing forth of the Divine Voice, without any statement of who speaks, is extremely dramatic and impressive. The judgment hall is filled with a hushed crowd. No herald is needed to proclaim silence. Strained expectation sits on every ear. Then the silence is broken. These authoritative accents can come but from one speaker. The crimes rebuked are those to which rulers, in such a state of society as was in Israel, are especially prone, and such as must have been well-nigh universal at the time of the psalmist. They were no imaginary evils against which these sharp arrows were launched. These princes were like those gibbeted for ever in Isa. i.—loving gifts and following after rewards, murderers rather than judges, and fitter to be "rulers of Sodom" than of God's city. They had prostituted their office by injustice, had favoured the rich and neglected the poor, had been deaf to the cry of the helpless, had steeled their hearts against the miseries of the afflicted, and left them to perish in the gripe of the wicked. Such is the indictment. Does it sound applicable to angels?

For a moment the Divine Voice pauses. Will its tones reach any consciences? No. There is no sign of contrition among the judges, who are thus solemnly being judged. Therefore God speaks again, as if wondering, grieved, and indignant "at the blindness of their hearts," as His Son was when His words met the same reception from the same class. Ver. 5 might almost be called a Divine lament over human impenitence, ere the Voice swells into the fatal sentence. One remembers Christ's tears, as He looked across the valley to the city glittering in the morning sun. His tears did not hinder His pronouncing its doom; nor did His pronouncing its doom hinder His tears. These judges were without knowledge. They walked in darkness, because they walked in selfishness, and never thought of God's judgment. Their gait was insolent, as the form of the word "walk to and fro" implies. And, since they who were set to be God's representatives on earth, and to show some gleam of His justice and compassion, were ministers of injustice and vicegerents of evil, fostering what they should have crushed, and crushing whom they should have fostered, the foundations

of society were shaken, and, unless these were swept away, it would be dissolved into chaos. Therefore the sentence must fall, as it does in vv. 6, 7. The grant of dignity is withdrawn. They are stripped of their honours, as a soldier of his uniform before he is driven from his corps. The judge's robe, which they have smirched, is plucked off their shoulders, and they stand as common men.

PSALM LXXXIII.

- 1 O God, let there be no rest to Thee,
Be not dumb, and keep not still, O God.
- 2 For, behold, Thy enemies make a tumult,
And they who hate Thee lift up the head.
- 3 Against Thy people they make a crafty plot,
And consult together against Thy hidden ones.
- 4 They say, Come, and let us cut them off from
[being] a nation.
And let the name of Israel be remembered no
more.
- 5 For they consult together with one heart,
Against Thee they make a league:
- 6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagarenes,
- 7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the dwellers in Tyre;
- 8 Asshur also has joined himself to them,
They have become an arm to the children of
Lot. Selah.
- 9 Do Thou to them as [to] Midian,
As [to] Sisera, [to] Jabin at the brook Kishon,
- 10 [Who] were destroyed at Endor,
[Who] became manure for the land.
- 11 Make them, their nobles, like Oreb and like
Zeeb,
And like Zebah and like Zalmunnah all their
princes,
- 12 Who say, Let us take for a possession to our-
selves
The habitations of God.
- 13 My God, make them like a whirl of dust,
Like stubble before the wind,
- 14 Like fire [that] burns [the] forest,
And like flame [that] scorches [the] moun-
tains,
- 15 So pursue them with Thy storm,
And with Thy tempest strike them with panic.
- 16 Fill their face with dishonour,
That they may seek Thy name, Jehovah.
- 17 Let them be ashamed and panic-struck for ever,
And let them be abashed and perish;
- 18 And let them know that Thou, [even] Thy
name, Jehovah, alone.
Art Most High over all the earth.

Thus psalm is a cry for help against a world in arms. The failure of all attempts to point to a period when all the allies here represented as confederate against Israel were or could have been united in assailing it, inclines one to suppose that the enumeration of enemies is not history, but poetic idealisation. The psalm would then be, not the memorial of a fact, but the expression of the standing relation between Israel and the outlying heathendom. The singer masses together ancient and modern foes of diverse nationalities and mutual animosities, and pictures them as burying their enmities and bridging their

separations, and all animated by one fell hatred to the Dove of God, which sits innocent and helpless in the midst of them. There are weighty objections to this view; but no other is free from difficulties even more considerable. There are two theories which divide the suffrages of commentators. The usual assignment of date is to the league against Jehoshaphat recorded in 2 Chron. xx. But it is hard to find that comparatively small local confederacy of three peoples in the wide-reaching alliance described in the psalm. Chronicles enumerates the members of the league as being "the children of Moab and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites," which last unmeaning designation should be read, as in the LXX., "the Me'unim," and adds to these Edom (2 Chron. xx. 2, corrected text). Even if the contention of the advocates of this date for the psalm is admitted, and "the Me'unim" are taken to include the Arab tribes, whom the psalmist calls Ishmaelites and Hagar- enes, there remains the fact that he names also Philistia, Amalek, Tyre, and Asshur, none of whom is concerned in the alliance against Jehoshaphat. It was, in fact, confined to eastern and southeastern nations, with whom distant western tribes could have no common interest. Nor is the other view of the circumstances underlying the psalm free from difficulty. It advocates a Maccabean date. In 1 Macc. v. it is recorded that the nations round about were enraged at the restoration of the altar and dedication of the Temple after its pollution by Antiochus Epiphanes, and were ready to break out in hostility. Cheyne points to the occurrence in Maccabees of six of the ten names mentioned in the psalm. But of the four not mentioned, two are Amalek and Asshur, both of which had been blotted out of the roll of nations long before the Maccabees' era. "The mention of Amalek," says Cheyne, "is half-Haggadic, half-antiquarian." But what should Haggadic or antiquarian elements do in such a list? Asshur is explained on this hypothesis as meaning Syria, which is very doubtful, and, even if admitted, leaves unsolved the difficulty that the subordinate place occupied by the nation in question would not correspond to the importance of Syria in the time of the Maccabees. Of the two theories, the second is the more probable, but neither is satisfactory: and the view already stated, that the psalm does not refer to any actual alliance, seems to the present writer the most probable. The world is up in arms against God's people; and what weapon has Israel? Nothing but prayer.

The psalm naturally falls into two parts, separated by Selah, of which the first (vv. 1-8) describes Israel's extremity, and the second (vv. 9-18) is its supplication.

The psalmist begins with earnest invocation of God's help, beseeching Him to break His apparent inactivity and silence. "Let there be no rest to Thee" is like Isa. lxii. 6. God seems passive. It needs but His Voice to break the dreary silence, and the foes will be scattered. And there is strong reason for His intervention, for they are *His* enemies, who riot and roar like the hoarse chafing of an angry sea, for so the word rendered "make a tumult" implies (Psalm xlv. 3). It is "Thy people" who are the object of their crafty conspiracy, and it is implied that these are thus hated because they *are* God's people. Israel's prerogative, which evokes the heathen's rage, is the

ground of Israel's confidence and the plea urged to God by it. Are we not Thy "hidden ones"? And shall a hostile world be able to pluck us from our safe hiding-place in the hollow of Thy hand? The idea of preciousness, as well as that of protection, is included in the word. Men store their treasures in secret places; God hides His treasures in the "secret of His face," the "glorious privacy of light" inaccessible. How vain are the plotters' whisperings against such a people!

The conspiracy has for its aim nothing short of blotting out the national existence and the very name of Israel. It is therefore high-handed opposition to God's counsel, and the confederacy is against *Him*. The true antagonists are, not Israel and the world, but God and the world. Calmness, courage, and confidence spring in the heart with such thoughts. They who can feel that they are hid in God may look out, as from a safe islet on the wildest seas, and fear nothing. And all who will may hide in Him.

The enumeration of the confederates in vv. 6-8 groups together peoples who probably were never really united for any common end. Hatred is a very potent cement, and the most discordant elements may be fused together in the fire of a common animosity. What a motley assemblage is here! What could bring together in one company Ishmaelites and Tyrians, Moab and Asshur? The first seven names in the list of allies had their seats to the east and southeast of Palestine. Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Amalek were ancestral foes, the last of which had been destroyed in the time of Hezekiah (1 Chron. iv. 43). The mention of descendants of Ishmael and Hagar, nomad Arab tribes to the south and east, recalls their ancestors' expulsion from the patriarchal family. Gebal is probably the mountainous region to the south of the Dead Sea. Then the psalmist turns to the west, to Philistia, the ancient foe, and Tyre, "the two peoples of the Mediterranean coast, which also appear in Amos (ch. i.; cf. Joel iii.) as making common cause with the Edomites against Israel" (Delitzsch). Asshur brings up the rear—a strange post for it to occupy, to be reduced to be an auxiliary to "the children of Lot," *i. e.*, Moab and Ammon. The ideal character of this muster-roll is supported by this singular inferiority of position, as well as by the composition of the allied force, and by the allusion to the shameful origin of the two leading peoples, which is the only reference to Lot besides the narrative in Genesis.

The confederacy is formidable, but the psalmist does not enumerate its members merely in order to emphasise Israel's danger. He is contrasting this miscellaneous conglomeration of many peoples with the Almighty One, against whom they are vainly banded. Faith can look without a tremor on serried battalions of enemies, knowing that one poor man, with God at his back, outnumbers them all. Let them come from east and west, south and north, and close round Israel; God alone is mightier than they. So, after a pause marked by *Selah*, in which there is time to let the thought of the multitudinous enemies sink into the soul, the psalm passes into prayer, which throbs with confident assurance and anticipatory triumph. The singer recalls ancient victories, and prays for their repetition. To him, as to every devout man, to-day's exigencies are as sure of Divine help as any yesterday's were, and what God has done is pledge and specimen of what He

is doing and will do. The battle is left to be waged by Him alone. The psalmist does not seem to think of Israel's drawing sword, but rather that it should stand still and see God fighting for it. The victory of Gideon over Midian, to which Isaiah also refers as the very type of complete conquest (Isa. ix. 3), is named first, but thronging memories drive it out of the singer's mind for a moment, while he goes back to the other crushing defeat of Jabin and Sisera at the hands of Barak and Deborah (Judg. iv., v.). He adds a detail to the narrative in Judges, when he localises the defeat at Endor, which lies on the eastern edge of the great plain of Esdraelon. In ver. 11 he returns to his first example of defeat—the slaughter of Midian by Gideon. Oreb (raven) and Zeeb (wolf) were in command of the Midianites, and were killed by the Ephraimites in the retreat. Zebah and Zalmunnah were kings of Midian, and fell by Gideon's own hand (Judg. viii. 21). The psalmist bases his prayer for such a dread fate for the foes on their insolent purpose and sacrilegious purpose of making the dwellings (or, possibly, the pastures) of God their own property. Not because the land and its peaceful homes belonged to the suppliant and his nation, but because they were God's, does he thus pray. The enemies had drawn the sword; it was permissible to pray that they might fall by the sword, or by some Divine intervention, since such was the only way of defeating their God-insulting plans.

The psalm rises to high poetic fervour and imaginative beauty in the terrible petitions of vv. 13-16. The word rendered "whirling dust" in ver. 13 is somewhat doubtful. It literally means a *rolling thing*, but what particular thing of the sort is difficult to determine. The reference is perhaps to "spherical masses of dry weeds which course over the plains." Thomson ("Land and Book," 1870, p. 563) suggests the wild artichoke, which, when ripe, forms a globe of about a foot in diameter. "In autumn the branches become dry and as light as a feather, the parent stem breaks off at the ground, and the wind carries these vegetable globes whithersoever it pleaseth. At the proper season thousands of them come scudding over the plain, rolling, leaping, bounding." So understood, the clause would form a complete parallel with the next, which compares the fleeing foe to stubble, not, of course, rooted, but loose and whirled before the wind. The metaphor ver. 14 is highly poetic, likening the flight of the foe to the swift rush of a forest fire, which licks up (for so the word rendered *scorches* means) the woods on the hillsides, and leaves a bare, blackened space. Still more terrible is the petition in ver. 15, which asks that God Himself should chase the flying remnants, and beat them down, helpless and panic-stricken, with storm and hurricane, as He did the other confederacy of Canaanitish kings, when they fled down the pass of Beth-Horon, and "Jehovah cast down great stones on them from heaven" (Josh. x. 10, 11).

But there is a deeper desire in the psalmist's heart than the enemies' destruction. He wishes that they should be turned into God's friends, and he wishes for their chastisement as the means to that end. "That they may seek Thy face, Jehovah," is the sum of his aspirations, as it is the inmost meaning of God's punitive acts. The end of the judgment of the world, which is continually going on by means of the history of the

world, is none other than what this psalmist contemplated as the end of the defeat of that confederacy of God's enemies—that rebels should seek His face, not in enforced submission, but with true desire to sun themselves in its light, and with heart-felt acknowledgment of His Name as supreme through all the earth. The thought of God as standing alone in His majestic omnipotence, while a world is vainly arrayed against Him, which we have traced in vv. 5-7, is prominent in the close of the psalm. The language of ver. 18 is somewhat broken, but its purport is plain, and its thought is all the more impressive for the irregularity of construction. God alone is the Most High. He is revealed to men by His Name. It stands alone, as He in His nature does. The highest good of men is to know that that sovereign Name is unique and high above all creatures, hostile or obedient. Such knowledge is God's aim in punishment and blessing. Its universal extension must be the deepest wish of all who have for themselves learned how strong a fortress against a world in arms that Name is; and their desires for the foes of God and themselves are not in harmony with God's heart, nor with this psalmist's song, unless they are, that His enemies may be led, by salutary defeat of their enterprises and experience of the weight of God's hand, to bow, in loving obedience, low before the Name which, whether they recognise the fact or not, is high above all the earth.

PSALM LXXXIV.

- 1 How lovely are Thy dwellings,
Jehovah of Hosts!
- 2 My soul longs, yea, even languishes, for the
courts of Jehovah,
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living
God.
- 3 Yea, the sparrow has found a house,
And the swallow a nest for herself, where she
lays her young,
Thine altars, Jehovah of Hosts,
My King and my God.
- 4 Blessed they that dwell in Thy house!
They will be still praising Thee. Selah.
- 5 Blessed the man whose strength is in Thee,
In whose heart are the ways!
- 6 [Who] passing through the valley of weeping
make it a place of fountains,
Yea, the early rain covers it with blessings.
- 7 They go from strength to strength,
Each appears before God in Zion.
- 8 Jehovah, God of Hosts, hear my prayer,
Give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.
- 9 [Thou], our shield, behold, O God,
And look upon the face of Thine anointed.
- 10 For better is a day in Thy courts than a thou-
sand,
Rather would I lie on the threshold in the
house of my God,
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
- 11 For Jehovah God is sun and shield,
Grace and glory Jehovah gives,
No good does He deny to them that walk in
integrity.
- 12 Jehovah of Hosts,
Blessed the man that trusts in Thee!

THE same longing for and delight in the sanctuary which found pathetic expression in Psalms xlii., xliii., inspire this psalm. Like these, it is ascribed in the superscription to the Korachites, whose office of door-keepers in the Temple seems alluded to in ver. 10. To infer, however, identity of authorship from similarity of tone is hazardous. The differences are as obvious as the resemblances. As Cheyne well says, "the notes of the singer of Psalms xlii., xliii., are here transposed into a different key. It is still 'Te saluto, te suspiro,' but no longer 'De longinquo te saluto' (to quote Hildebert)." The longings after God and the sanctuary, in the first part of the psalm, do not necessarily imply exile from the latter, for they may be felt when we are nearest to Him, and are, in fact, an element in that nearness. It is profitless to inquire what were the singer's circumstances. He expresses the perennial emotions of devout souls, and his words are as enduring and as universal as the aspirations which they so perfectly express. No doubt the psalm identifies enjoyment of God's presence with the worship of the visible sanctuary more closely than we have to do, but the true object of its longing is God, and so long as spirit is tied to body the most spiritual worship will be tied to form. The psalm may serve as a warning against premature attempts to dispense with outward aids to inward communion.

It is divided into three parts by the Selahs. The last verse of the first part prepares the way for the first of the second, by sounding the note of "Blessed they," etc., which is prolonged in ver. 5. The last verse of the second part (ver. 8) similarly prepares for the first of the third (ver. 9) by beginning the prayer which is prolonged there. In each part there is a verse pronouncing blessing on Jehovah's worshippers, and the variation in the designations of these gives the key to the progress of thought in the psalm. First comes the blessing on those who dwell in God's house (ver. 4), and that abiding is the theme of the first part. The description of those who are thus blessed is changed, in the second strophe, to "those in whose heart are the [pilgrim] ways," and the joys of the progress of the soul towards God are the theme of that strophe. Finally, for dwelling in and journeying towards the sanctuary is substituted the plain designation of "the man that trusts in Thee," which trust is the impulse to following after God and the condition of dwelling with Him; and its joys are the theme of the third part.

The man who thus interpreted his own psalm had no unworthy conception of the relation between outward nearness to the sanctuary, and inward communion with the God who dwelt there. The psalmist's yearning for the Temple was occasioned by his longing for God. It was God's presence there which gave it all its beauty. Because they were "Thy tabernacles," he felt them to be lovely and lovable, for the word implies both. The abrupt exclamation beginning the psalm is the breaking into speech of thought which had long increased itself in silence. The intensity of his desires is expressed very strikingly by two words, of which the former (*longs*) literally means *grows pale*, and the latter *fails*, or *is consumed*. His whole being, body and spirit, is one cry for the living God. The word rendered "cry out" is usually employed for the shrill cry of joy, and that meaning is by many retained

here. But the cognate noun is not infrequently employed for any loud or high-pitched call, especially for fervent prayer (Psalm lxxxviii. 2), and it is better to suppose that this clause expresses emotion substantially parallel to that of the former one, than that it makes a contrast to it. "The living God" is an expression only found in Psalm xlii., and is one of the points of resemblance between it and this psalm. That Name is more than a contrast with the gods of the heathen. It lays bare the reason for the psalmist's longings. By communion with Him who possesses life in its fulness, and is its fountain for all that live, he will draw supplies of that "life whereof our veins are scant." Nothing short of a real, living Person can slake the immortal thirst of the soul, made after God's own life, and restless till it rests in Him. The surface current of this singer's desires ran towards the sanctuary; the depth of them set towards God; and, for the stage of revelation at which he stood, the deeper was best satisfied through the satisfaction of the more superficial. The one is modified by the progress of Christian enlightenment, but the other remains eternally the same. Alas that the longings of Christian souls for fellowship with God should be so tepid, as compared with the sacred passion of desire which has found imperishable utterance in these glowing and most sincere words!

Ver. 3 has been felt to present grammatical difficulties, which need not detain us here. The easiest explanation is that the happy, winged creatures who have found resting-places are contrasted by the psalmist with himself, seeking, homeless amid creation, for his haven of repose. We have to complete the somewhat fragmentary words with some supplement before "Thine altars," such as "So would I find," or the like. To suppose that he represents the swallows as actually nesting on the altar is impossible, and, if the latter clauses are taken to describe the places where the birds housed and bred, there is nothing to suggest the purpose for which the reference to them is introduced. If, on the other hand, the poet looks with a poet's eye on these lower creatures at rest in secure shelters, and longs to be like them, in his repose in the home which his deeper wants make necessary for him, a noble thought is expressed with adequate poetic beauty. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air roosting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." All creatures find environment suited to their need, and are at rest in it, man walks like a stranger on earth, and restlessly seeks for rest. Where but in God is it to be found? Who that seeks it in Him shall fail to find it? What their nests are to the swallows, God is to man. The solemnity of the direct address to God at the close of ver. 3 would be out of place if the altar were the dwelling of the birds, but is entirely natural if the psalmist is thinking of the Temple as the home of his spirit. By the accumulation of sacred and dear names, and by the lovingly reiterated "my," which claims personal relation to God, he deepens his conviction of the blessedness which would be his, were he in that abode of his heart, and lingeringly tells his riches, as a miser might delight to count his gold, piece by piece.

The first part closes with an exclamation which gathers into one all-expressive word the joy of communion with God. They who have it are blessed," with something more sacred and last-

ing than happiness, with something deeper and more tranquil than joy, even with a calm delight, not altogether unlike the still, yet not stagnant, rest of supreme felicity which fills the life of the living and ever-blessed God. That thought is prolonged by the music.

The second strophe (vv. 5-8) is knit to the first, chain-wise, by taking up again the closing strain, "Blessed the man!" But it turns the blessedness in another direction. Not only are they blessed who have found their rest in God, but so also are they who are seeking it. The goal is sweet, but scarcely less sweet are the steps towards it. The fruition of God has delights beyond all that earth can give, but the desire after Him, too, has delights of its own. The experiences of the soul seeking God in His sanctuary are here cast into the image of pilgrim bands going up to the Temple. There may be local allusions in the details. The "ways" in ver. 5 are the pilgrims' paths to the sanctuary. Hupfeld calls the reading "ways" senseless, and would substitute "trust"; but such a change is unnecessary, and tasteless. The condensed expression is not too condensed to be intelligible, and beautifully describes the true pilgrim spirit. They who are touched with that desire which impels men to "seek a better country, that is an heavenly," and to take flight from Time's vanities to the bosom of God, have ever "the ways" in their hearts. They count the moments lost during which they linger, or are anywhere but on the road. Amid calls of lower duties and distractions of many sorts, their desires turn to the path to God. Like some nomads brought into city life, they are always longing to escape. The caged eagle sits on the highest point of his prison, and looks with filmed eye to the free heavens. Hearts that long for God have an irrepressible instinct stinging them to ever-new attainments. The consciousness of "not having already attained" is no pain, when the hope of attaining is strong. Rather, the very blessedness of life lies in the sense of present imperfection, the effort for completeness, and the assurance of reaching it.

Ver. 6 is highly imaginative and profoundly true. If a man has "the ways" in his heart, he will pass through "the valley of weeping," and turn it into a "place of fountains." His very tears will fill the wells. Sorrow borne as a help to pilgrimage changes into joy and refreshment. The remembrance of past grief nourishes the soul which is aspiring to God. God puts our tears into His bottle; we lose the benefit of them, and fail to discern their true intent, unless we gather them into a well, which may refresh us in many a weary hour thereafter. If we do, there will be another source of fertility, plentifully poured out upon our life's path. "The early rain covers it with blessings." Heaven-descended gifts will not be wanting, nor the smiling harvests which they quicken and mature. God meets the pilgrims' love and faith with gently falling influences, which bring forth rich fruit. Trials borne aright bring down fresh bestowments of power for fruitful service. Thus possessed of a charm which transforms grief, and recipients of strength from on high, the pilgrims are not tired by travel, as others are, but grow stronger day by day, and their progressive increase in vigour is a pledge that they will joyously reach their journey's end, and stand in the courts of the Lord's house. The seekers after God are superior to the law of decay. It

may affect their physical powers, but they are borne up by an unfulfilled and certain hope, and reinvigorated by continual supplies from above; and therefore, though in their bodily frame they, like other men, faint and grow weary, they shall not utterly fail, but, waiting on Jehovah, "will renew their strength." The fabled fountain of perpetual youth rises at the foot of God's throne, and its waters flow to meet those who journey thither.

Such are the elements of the blessedness of those who seek God's presence: and with that great promise of certain finding of the good and the God whom they seek, the description and the strophe properly ends. But just as the first part prepared the way for the second, so the second does for the third, by breaking forth into prayer. No wonder that the thoughts which he has been dwelling on should move the singer to supplication that these blessednesses may be his. According to some, ver. 8 is the prayer of the pilgrim on arriving in the Temple, but it is best taken as the psalmist's own.

The final part begins with invocation. In ver. 9 "our shield" is in apposition to "God," not the object to "behold." It anticipates the designation of God in ver. 11. But why should the prayer for "Thine anointed" break in upon the current of thought? Are we to say that the psalmist "completes his work by some rhythmical but ill-connected verses" (Cheyne)? There is a satisfactory explanation of the apparently irrelevant petition, if we accept the view that the psalm, like its kindred Psalms xlii., xliii., was the work of a companion of David's in his flight. If so, the king's restoration would be the condition of satisfying the psalmist's longing for the sanctuary. Any other hypothesis as to his date and circumstances fails to supply a connecting link between the main subject of the psalm and this petition. The "For" at the beginning of ver. 10 favours such a view, since it gives the delights of the house of the Lord, and the psalmist's longing to share in them, as the reasons for his prayer that Jehovah would look upon the face of His anointed. In that verse he glides back to the proper theme of the psalm. Life is to be estimated, not according to its length, but according to the richness of its contents. Time is elastic. One crowded moment is better than a millennium of languid years. And nothing fills life so full or stretches the hours to hold so much of real living as communion with God, which works, on those who have plunged into its depths, some assimilation to the timeless life of Him with whom "one day is as a thousand years." There may be a reference to the Korachites' function of door-keepers, in that touchingly beautiful choice of the psalmist's, rather to lie on the threshold of the Temple than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. Whether there is or not, the sentiment breathes sweet humility, and deliberate choice. Just as the poet has declared that the briefest moment of communion is in his sight to be preferred to years of earthly delight, so he counts the humblest office in the sanctuary, and the lowest place there, if only it is within the doorway, as better than aught besides. The least degree of fellowship with God has delights superior to the greatest measure of worldly joys. And this man, knowing that, chose accordingly. How many of us know it, and yet cannot sav with him, "Rather would I lie on the door-sill of the Temple than sit in the chief places of the world's feasts!"

Such a choice is the only rational one. It is the choice of supreme good, correspondent to man's deepest needs, and lasting as his being. Therefore the psalmist vindicates his preference, and encourages himself in it, by the thoughts in ver. 11, which he introduces with "For." Because God is what He is, and gives what He gives, it is the highest wisdom to take Him for our true good, and never to let Him go. He is "sun and shield." This is the only place in which He is directly called a sun, though the idea conveyed is common. He is "the master light of all our seeing," the fountain of warmth, illumination, and life. His beams are too bright for human eyes to gaze on, but their effluence is the joy of creation. They who look to Him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." What folly to choose darkness rather than light, and, when that Sun is high in the heavens, ready to flood our hearts with its beams, to prefer to house ourselves in gloomy caverns of our own sad thoughts and evil doings! Another reason for the psalmist's choice is that God is a shield. (Compare ver. 9.) Who that knows the dangers and foes that cluster thick round every life can wisely refuse to shelter behind that ample and impenetrable buckler? It is madness to stand in the open field, with arrows whizzing invisible all round, when one step, one heartfelt desire, would place that sure defence between us and every peril. God being such, "grace and glory" will flow from Him to those who seek Him. These two are given simultaneously, not, as sometimes supposed, in succession, as though grace were the sum of gifts for earth, and glory the all-comprehending expression for the higher bestowments of heaven. The psalmist thinks that both are possessed here. *Grace* is the sum of God's gifts, coming from His loving regard to His sinful and inferior creatures. *Glory* is the reflection of His own lustrous perfection, which irradiates lives that are turned to Him, and makes them shine, as a poor piece of broken pottery will, when the sunlight falls on it. Since God is the sum of all good, to possess Him is to possess it all. The one gift unfolds into all things lovely and needful. It is the raw material, as it were, out of which can be shaped, according to transient and multiform needs, everything that can be desired or can bless a soul.

But high as is the psalmist's flight of mystic devotion, he does not soar so far as to lose sight of plain morality, as mystics have often been apt to do. It is the man who walks in his integrity who may hope to receive these blessings. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord"; and neither access to His house nor the blessings flowing from His presence can belong to him who is faithless to his own convictions of duty. The pilgrim paths are paths of righteousness. The psalmist's last word translates his metaphors of dwelling in and travelling towards the house of Jehovah into their simple meaning, "Blessed is the man that *trusteth* in Thee." That trust both seeks and finds God. There has never been but one way to His presence, and that is the way of trust. "I am the way. . . . No man cometh to the Father but by Me." So coming, we shall find, and then shall seek more eagerly and find more fully, and thus shall possess at once the joys of fruition and of desires always satisfied, never satiated, but continually renewed.

PSALM LXXXV.

- 1 Thou hast become favourable, Jehovah, to Thy land,
Thou hast turned back the captivity of Jacob.
- 2 Thou hast taken away the iniquity of Thy people,
Thou hast covered all their sin.
- 3 Thou hast drawn in all Thy wrath,
Thou hast turned Thyself from the glow of Thine anger.
- 4 Turn us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Thine indignation towards us to cease.
- 5 For ever wilt Thou be angry with us?
Wilt Thou stretch out Thine anger to generation after generation?
- 6 Wilt Thou not revive us again.
That Thy people may rejoice in Thee?
- 7 Show us, Jehovah, Thy lovingkindness,
And give us Thy salvation.
- 8 I will hear what God, Jehovah, will speak,
For He will speak peace to His people and to His favoured [ones];
Only let them not turn again to folly.
- 9 Surely near to them who fear Him is His salvation,
That glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Lovingkindness and Troth have met together,
Righteousness and Peace have kissed [each other].
- 11 Troth springs from the earth,
And Righteousness looks down from heaven.
- 12 Yea, Jehovah will give that which is good,
And our land will give her increase.
- 13 Righteousness shall go before Him,
And shall make His footsteps a way.

THE outstanding peculiarity of this psalm is its sudden transitions of feeling. Beginning with exuberant thanksgiving for restoration of the nation (vv. 1-3), it passes, without intermediate gradations, to complaints of God's continued wrath and entreaties for restoration (vv. 4-7), and then as suddenly rises to joyous assurance of inward and outward blessings. The condition of the exiles returned from Babylon best corresponds to such conflicting emotions. The book of Nehemiah supplies precisely such a background as fits the psalm. A part of the nation had returned indeed, but to a ruined city, a fallen Temple, and a mourning land, where they were surrounded by jealous and powerful enemies. Discouragement had laid hold on the feeble company; enthusiasm had ebbed away; the harsh realities of their enterprise had stripped off its imaginative charm; and the mass of the returned settlers had lost heart as well as devout faith. The psalm accurately reflects such a state of circumstances and feelings, and may, with some certitude, be assigned, as it is by most commentators, to the period of return from exile.

It falls into three parts, of increasing length,—the first, of three verses (vv. 1-3), recounts God's acts of mercy already received; the second, of four verses (vv. 4-7), is a plaintive prayer in view of still remaining national afflictions; and the third, of six verses, a glad report by the psalmist of the Divine promises which his waiting ear had heard, and which might well quicken the most faint-hearted into triumphant hope.

In the first strophe one great fact is presented in a threefold aspect, and traced wholly to Jehovah. "Thou hast turned back the captivity of Jacob." That expression is sometimes used in a figurative sense for any restoration of prosperity, but is here to be taken literally. Now, as at first, the restored Israel, like their ancestors under Joshua, had not won the land by their own arm, but "because God had a favour unto them," and had given them favour in the eyes of those who carried them captive. The restoration of the Jews, seen from the conqueror's point of view, was a piece of state policy, but from that of the devout Israelite was the result of God's working upon the heart of the new ruler of Babylon. The fact is stated in ver. 1; a yet more blessed fact, of which it is most blessed as being a token, is declared in ver. 2.

The psalmist knows that captivity had been chastisement, the issue of national sin. Therefore he is sure that restoration is the sign of forgiveness. His thoughts are running in the same line as in Isa. xl. 2 where the proclamation to Jerusalem that her iniquity is pardoned is connected with the assurance that her hard service is accomplished. He uses two significant words for pardon, both of which occur in Psalm xxxii. In ver. 2 *a* sin is regarded as a weight pressing down the nation, which God's mercy lifts off and takes away; in ver. 2 *b* it is conceived of as a hideous stain or foulness, which His mercy hides, so that it is no longer an offence to heaven. Ver. 3 ventures still deeper into the sacred recesses of the Divine nature, and traces the forgiveness, which in act had produced so happy a change in Israel's position, to its source in a change in God's disposition. "Thou hast drawn in all Thy wrath," as a man does his breath, or, if the comparison may be ventured, as some creature armed with a sting retracts it into its sheath. "Thou hast turned Thyself from the glow of Thine anger" gives the same idea under another metaphor. The word "turn" has a singular fascination for this psalmist. He uses it five times (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6—*lit.*, wilt Thou not turn, quicken us?—and 8). God's turning from His anger is the reason for Israel's returning from captivity.

The abruptness of the transition from joyous thanksgiving to the sad minor of lamentation and supplication is striking, but most natural, if the psalmist was one of the band of returning exiles, surrounded by the ruins of a happier past, and appalled by the magnitude of the work before them, the slenderness of their resources, and the fierce hostility of their neighbours. The prayer of ver. 4, "Turn us," is best taken as using the word in the same sense as in ver. 1, where God is said to have "turned" the captivity of Jacob. What was there regarded as accomplished is here conceived of as still to be done. That is, the restoration was incomplete, as we know that it was, both in regard to the bulk of the nation, who still remained in exile, and in regard to the depressed condition of the small part of it which had gone back to Palestine. In like manner the petitions of ver. 5 look back to ver. 3, and pray that the anger which there had been spoken of as passed may indeed utterly cease. The partial restoration of the people implied, in the psalmist's view, a diminution rather than a cessation of God's punitive wrath, and he beseeches Him to complete that which He had begun.

The relation of the first to the second strophe

is not only that of contrast, but the prayers of the latter are founded upon the facts of the former, which constitute both grounds for the suppliant's hope of answer and pleas with God. He cannot mean to deliver by halves. The mercies received are incomplete; and His work must be perfect. He cannot be partially reconciled, nor have meant to bring His people back to the land, and then leave them to misery. So the contrast between the bright dawning of the return and its clouded day is not wholly depressing; for the remembrance of what has been heartens for the assurance that what is shall not always be, but will be followed by a future more correspondent to God's purpose as shown in that past. When we are tempted to gloomy thoughts by the palpable incongruities between God's ideals and man's realisation of them, we may take a hint from this psalmist, and, instead of concluding that the ideal was a phantasm, argue with ourselves that the incomplete actual will one day give way to the perfect embodiment. God leaves no work unfinished. He never leaves off till He has done. His beginnings guarantee congruous endings. He does not half withdraw His anger; and, if He seems to do so, it is only because men have but half turned from their sins. This psalm is rich in teaching as to the right way of regarding the incompleteness of great movements, which, in their incipient stages, were evidently of God. It instructs us to keep the Divine intervention which started them clearly in view; to make the shortcomings, which mar them, a subject of lowly prayer; and to be sure that all which He begins He will finish, and that the end will fully correspond to the promise of the beginning. A "day of the Lord" which rose in brightness may cloud over as its hours roll, but "at eventide it shall be light," and none of the morning promise will be unfulfilled.

The third strophe (vv. 8-13) brings solid hopes, based upon Divine promises, to bear on present discouragements. In ver. 8 the psalmist, like Habakkuk (ii. 1), encourages himself to listen to what God will speak. The word "I will hear" expresses resolve or desire, and might be rendered *Let me hear*, or *I would hear*. Faithful prayer will always be followed by patient and faithful waiting for response from God. God will not be silent, when His servant appeals to Him with recognition of His past mercies, joined with longing that these may be perfected. No voice will break the silence of the heavens; but, in the depths of the waiting soul, there will spring a sweet assurance which comes from God, and is really His answer to prayer, telling the suppliant that "He will speak peace to His people," and warning them not to turn away from Him to other helps, which is folly. "His favoured ones" seems here to be meant as coextensive with "His people." Israel is regarded as having entered into covenant relations with God; and the designation is the pledge that what God speaks will be "peace." That word is to be taken in its widest sense, as meaning, first and chiefly, peace with Him, who has "turned Himself from His anger"; and then, generally, well-being of all kinds, outward and inward, as a consequence of that rectified relation with God.

The warning of ver. 8 c is thought by some to be out of place, and an emendation has been suggested, which requires little change in the Hebrew—namely, "to those who have turned their hearts

towards Him." This reading is supported by the LXX.; but the warning is perfectly appropriate, and carries a large truth—that the condition of God's speaking of peace is our firm adherence to Him. Once more the psalmist uses his favourite word "turn." God had turned the captivity; He had turned Himself from His anger; the psalmist had prayed Him to turn or restore the people, and to turn and revive them, and now He warns against turning them again to folly. There is always danger of relapse in those who have experienced God's delivering mercy. There is a blessed turning, when they are brought from the far-off land to dwell near God. But there is a possible fatal turning away from the Voice that speaks peace, and the Arm that brings salvation, to the old distance and bondage. Strange that any ears, which have heard the sweetness of His still small Voice whispering Peace should wish to stray where it cannot be heard! Strange that the warning should ever be required, and tragic that it should so often be despised!

After the introductory ver. 8, the substance of what Jehovah spoke to the psalmist is proclaimed in the singer's own words. The first assurance which the psalmist drew from the Divine word was that God's salvation, the whole fulness of His delivering grace both in regard to external and in inward evils, is ever near to them that fear Him. "Salvation" here is to be taken in its widest sense. It means, negatively, deliverance from all possible evils, outward and inward; and, positively, endowment with all possible good, both for body and spirit. With such fulness of complete blessings, they, and they only, who keep near to God, and refuse to turn aside to foolish confidences, shall be enriched. That is the inmost meaning of what God said to the psalmist: and it is said to all. And that salvation being thus possessed, it would be possible for "glory"—i.e., the manifest presence of God, as in the Shechinah—to tabernacle in the land. The condition of God's dwelling with men is their acceptance of His salvation. That purifies hearts to be temples.

The lovely personifications in vv. 10-13 have passed into Christian poetry and art, but are not clearly apprehended when they are taken to describe the harmonious meeting and co-operation, in Christ's great work, of apparently opposing attributes of the Divine nature. No such thoughts are in the psalmist's mind. Lovingkindness and Faithfulness or Troth are constantly associated in Scripture as Divine attributes. Righteousness and Peace are as constantly united, as belonging to the perfection of human character. Ver. 10 seems to refer to the manifestation of God's Lovingkindness and Faithfulness in its first clause, and to the exhibition of His people's virtues and consequent happiness in its second. In all God's dealings for His people, His Lovingkindness blends with Faithfulness. In all His people's experience Righteousness and Peace are inseparable. The point of the assurance in ver. 10 is that heaven and earth are blended in permanent amity. These four radiant angels "dwell in the land." Then, in ver. 11, there comes a beautiful inversion of the two pairs of personifications, of each of which one member only reappears. Troth or Faithfulness, which in ver. 10 came into view principally as a Divine attribute, in ver. 11 is conceived of as a human virtue. It "springs out of the earth"—that is, is produced among men. All human virtue is an echo of the Divine, and they

who have received into their hearts the blessed results of God's Faithfulness will bring forth in their lives fruits like it in kind. Similarly, Righteousness, which in ver. 10 was mainly viewed as a human excellence, here appears as dwelling in and looking down from heaven, like a gracious angel smiling on the abundance of Faithfulness which springs from earth. Thus "the bridal of the earth and sky" is set forth in these verses.

The same idea is further presented in ver. 12, in its most general form. God gives that which is good, both outward and inward blessings, and, thus fructified by bestowments from above, earth yields her increase. His gifts precede men's returns. Without sunshine and rain there are no harvests. More widely still, God gives first before He asks. He does not gather where He has not sowed, nor reap what He has not sown. Nor does He only sow, but He "blesses the springing thereof"; and to Him should the harvest be rendered. He gives before we can give. Isa. xlv. 8 is closely parallel, representing in like manner the co-operation of heaven and earth, in the new world of Messianic times.

In ver. 13 the thought of the blending of heaven and earth, or of Divine attributes as being the foundation and parents of their human analogues, is still more vividly expressed. Righteousness, which in v. 10 was regarded as exercised by men, and in v. 11 as looking down from heaven, is now represented both as a herald preceding God's royal progress, and as following in His footsteps. The last clause is rendered in different ways, which all have the same general sense. Probably the rendering above is best: "Righteousness shall make His footsteps a way"—that is, for men to walk in. All God's workings among men, which are poetically conceived as His way, have stamped on them Righteousness. That strong angel goes before Him to clear a path for Him, and trace the course which He shall take. That is the imaginative expression of the truth—that absolute, inflexible Righteousness guides all the Divine acts. But the same Righteousness, which precedes, also follows Him, and points His footsteps as the way for us. The incongruity of this double position of God's herald makes the force of the thought greater. It is the poetical embodiment of the truth, that the perfection of man's character and conduct lies in his being an "imitator of God," and that, however different in degree, our righteousness must be based on His. What a wonderful thought that is, that the union between heaven and earth is so close that God's path is our way! How deep into the foundation of ethics the psalmist's glowing vision pierces! How blessed the assurance that God's Righteousness is revealed from heaven to make men righteous!

Our psalm needs the completion, which tells of that gospel in which "the Righteousness of God from faith is revealed for faith." In Jesus the "glory" has tabernacled among men. He has brought heaven and earth together. In Him God's Lovingkindness and Faithfulness have become denizens of earth, as never before. In Him heaven has emptied its choicest good on earth. Through Him our barrenness and weeds are changed into harvests of love, praise, and service. In Him the Righteousness of God is brought near; and, trusting in Him, each of us may tread in His footsteps, and have His Righteousness fulfilled in us "who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

PSALM LXXXVI.

- 1 Bow down Thine ear, Jehovah, answer me,
For I am afflicted and poor,
- 2 Keep my soul, for I am favoured [by Thee],
Save Thy servant, O Thou my God,
That trusts in Thee.
- 3 Be gracious to me, Lord,
For to Thee I cry all the day.
- 4 Rejoice the soul of Thy servant,
For to Thee, Lord, do I lift up my soul.
- 5 For Thou, Lord, art good and forgiving,
And plenteous in lovingkindness to all who
call on Thee.
- 6 Give ear, Jehovah, to my prayer,
And take heed to the voice of my supplica-
tions.
- 7 In the day of my straits will I call [on] Thee,
For Thou wilt answer me.
- 8 There is none like Thee among the gods, O
Lord,
And no [works] like Thy works.
- 9 All nations whom Thou hast made
Shall come and bow themselves before Thee,
And shall give glory to Thy Name.
- 10 For great art Thou and doest wonders,
Thou art God alone.
- 11 Teach me, Jehovah, Thy way,
I will walk in Thy troth,
Unite my heart to fear Thy Name.
- 12 I will thank Thee, O Lord my God, with all
my heart,
And I will glorify Thy Name forever.
- 13 For Thy lovingkindness is great towards me,
And Thou hast delivered my soul from Sheol
beneath.
- 14 O God, the proud have risen against me,
And a crew of violent men have sought after
my soul,
And have not set Thee before them.
- 15 But Thou, Lord, art a God compassionate
and gracious,
Long suffering and plenteous in lovingkind-
ness and troth.
- 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
Give Thy strength to Thy servant,
And save the son of Thy handmaid.
- 17 Work for me a sign for good.
That they who hate me may see and be
ashamed,
For Thou, Jehovah, hast helped me and com-
forted me.

THIS psalm is little more than a mosaic of quotations and familiar phrases of petition. But it is none the less individual, nor is the psalmist less heavily burdened, or less truly beseeching and trustful, because he casts his prayer into well-worn words. God does not give "originality" to every devout man; and He does not require it as a condition of accepted prayer. Humble souls, who find in more richly endowed men's words the best expression of their own needs, may be encouraged by such a psalm. Critics may think little of it, as a mere cento; but God does not refuse to bow His ear, though He is asked to do so in borrowed words. A prayer full of quotations may be heartfelt, and then it will be heard and answered. This psalmist has not only shown his intimate acquaintance with earlier devotional words, but

he has woven his garland with much quiet beauty, and has blended its flowers into a harmony of colour all his own.

There is no fully developed strophical arrangement, but there is a discernible flow of thought, and the psalm may be regarded as falling into three parts.

The first of these (vv. 1-5) is a series of petitions, each supported by a plea. The petitions are the well-worn ones which spring from universal need, and there is a certain sequence in them. They begin with "Bow down Thine ear," the first of a suppliant's desires, which, as it were, clears the way for those which follow. Trusting that he will not ask in vain, the psalmist then prays that God would "keep" his soul as a watchful guardian or sentry does, and that, as the result of such care, he may be saved from impending perils. Nor do his desires limit themselves to deliverance. They rise to more inward and select manifestations of God's heart of tenderness, for the prayer "Be gracious" asks for such, and so goes deeper into the blessedness of the devout life than the preceding. And the crown of all these requests is "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant," with the joy which flows from experience of outward deliverance and of inward whispers of God's grace, heard in the silent depths of communion with Him. It matters not that every petition has parallels in other psalms, which this singer is quoting. His desires are none the less his, because they have been shared by a company of devout souls before him. His expression of them is none the less his, because his very words have been uttered by others. There is rest in thus associating oneself with an innumerable multitude who have "cried to God and been lightened." The petition in ver. 1 is like that in Psalm lv. 2. Ver. 2 sounds like a reminiscence of Psalm xxv. 20; ver. 3 closely resembles Psalm lvii. 1.

The pleas on which the petitions are grounded are also beautifully wreathed together. First, the psalmist asks to be heard because he is afflicted and poor (compare Psalm xl. 17). Our need is a valid plea with a faithful God. The sense of it drives us to Him; and our recognition of poverty and want must underlie all faithful appeal to Him. The second plea is capable of two interpretations. The psalmist says that he is *Chasid*; and that word is by some commentators taken to mean *one who exercises*, and by others *one who is the subject of, Chesed*—i. e., lovingkindness. As has been already remarked on Psalm iv. 3, the passive meaning—i. e., one to whom God's lovingkindness is shown—is preferable. Here it is distinctly better than the other. The psalmist is not presenting his own character as a plea, but urging God's gracious relation to him, which, once entered on, pledges God to unchanging continuance in manifesting His lovingkindness. But though the psalmist does not plead his character, he does, in the subsequent pleas, present his faith, his daily and day-long prayers, and his lifting of his desires, aspirations, and whole self above the trivialities of earth to set them on God. These are valid pleas with Him. It cannot be that trust fixed on Him should be disappointed, nor that cries perpetually rising to His ears should be unanswered, nor that a soul stretching its tendrils heavenward should fail to find the strong stay, round which it can cling and climb. God owns the force of such appeals, and delights to be

moved to answer, by the spreading before Him of His servant's faith and longings.

But all the psalmist's other pleas are merged at last in that one contained in ver. 5, where he gazes on the revealed Name of God, and thinks of Him as He had been described of old, and as this suppliant delights to set to his seal that he has found Him to be—good and placable, and rich in lovingkindness. God is His own motive, and Faith can find nothing mightier to urge with God, nor any surer answer to its own doubts to urge with itself, than the unfolding of all that lies in the Name of the Lord. These pleas, like the petitions which they support, are largely echoes of older words. "Afflicted and poor" comes, as just noticed, from Psalm xl. 17. The designation of "one whom God favours" is from Psalm iv. 3. "Unto Thee do I lift up my soul" is taken verbatim from Psalm xxv. 1. The explication of the contents of the Name of the Lord, like the fuller one in ver. 15, is based upon Exod. xxxiv. 6.

Vv. 6-13 may be taken together, as the prayer proper, to which vv. 1-5 are introductory. In them there is first, a repetition of the cry for help, and of the declaration of need (vv. 6, 7); then a joyful contemplation of God's unapproachable majesty and works, which insure the ultimate recognition of His Name by all nations (vv. 8-10); then a profoundly and tenderly spiritual prayer for guidance and consecration—wants more pressing still than outward deliverance (ver. 11); and, finally, as in so many psalms, anticipatory thanksgivings for deliverance yet future, but conceived of as present by vivid faith.

Echoes of earlier psalms sound through the whole; but the general impression is not that of imitation, but of genuine personal need and devotion. Ver. 7 is like Psalm xvii. 6 and other passages; ver. 8 *a* is from Exod. xv. 11; ver. 8 *b* is modelled on Deut. iii. 24; ver. 9, on Psalm xxii. 27; ver. 11 *a*, on Psalm xxvii. 11; ver. 11 *b*, on Psalm xxvi. 3; "Sheol beneath" is from Deut. xxxii. 22. But, withal, there are unity and progress in this cento of citations. The psalmist begins with reiterating his cry that God would hear, and in ver. 7 advances to the assurance that He will. Then in vv. 8-10 he turns from all his other pleas to dwell on his final one (ver. 5) of the Divine character. As, in the former verse, he had rested his calm hope on God's willingness to help, so now he strengthens himself, in assurance of an answer, by the thought of God's unmatched power, the unique majesty of His works and His sole Divinity. Ver. 8 might seem to assert only Jehovah's supremacy above other gods of the heathen; but ver. 10 shows that the psalmist speaks the language of pure Monotheism. Most naturally the prophetic assurance that all nations shall come and worship Him is deduced from His sovereign power and incomparableness. It cannot be that "the nations whom Thou hast made" shall for ever remain ignorant of the hand that made them. Sooner or later that great character shall be seen by all men in its solitary elevation; and universal praise shall correspond to His sole Divinity.

The thought of God's sovereign power carries the psalmist beyond remembrance of his immediate outward needs, and stirs higher desires in him. Hence spring the beautiful and spiritual petitions of ver. 11, which seek for clearer insight into God's will concerning the psalmist's conduct, breathe aspirations after a "walk" in that God-appointed way and in "Thy troth," and culminate

in one of the sweetest and deepest prayers of the Psalter: "Unite my heart to fear Thy Name." There, at least, the psalmist speaks words borrowed from no other, but springing fresh from his heart's depths. Jer. xxxii. 39 is the nearest parallel, and the commandment in Deut. vi. 5, to love God "with all thine heart," may have been in the psalmist's mind; but the prayer is all his own. He has known the misery of a divided heart, the affections and purposes of which are drawn in manifold directions, and are arrayed in conflict against each other. There is no peace nor blessedness, neither is any nobility of life possible, without whole-hearted devotion to one great object; and there is no object capable of evoking such devotion or worthy to receive it, except Him who is "God alone." Divided love is no love. It must be "all in all, or not at all." With deep truth, the command to love God with all the heart is based upon his Unity—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord Thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" (Deut. vi. 4). The very conception of religion requires that it should be exclusive, and should dominate the whole nature. It is only God who is great enough to fill and engage all our capacities. Only the mass of the central sun is weighty enough to make giant orbs its satellites, and to wheel them in their courses. There is no tranquillity nor any power in lives frittered away on a thousand petty loves. The river that breaks into a multitude of channels is sucked up in the sand without reaching the ocean, and has no force in its current to scour away obstructions. Concentration makes strong men; consecration makes saints. "This one thing I do" is the motto of all who have done anything worthy. "Unite my heart to fear Thy Name" is the prayer of all whose devotion is worthy of its object, and is the source of joy and power to themselves. The psalmist asks for a heart made one with itself in the fear of God, and then vows that, with that united heart, he will praise his delivering God. As in many other psalms, he anticipates the answers to his prayers, and in ver. 13 speaks of God's lovingkindness as freshly manifested to him, and of deliverance from the dismal depths of the unseen world, which threatened to swallow him up. It seems more in accordance with the usage in similar psalms to regard ver. 13 as thus recounting, with prophetic certainty, the coming deliverance as if it were accomplished, than to suppose that in it the psalmist is falling back on former instances of God's rescuing grace.

In the closing part (vv. 14-17), the psalmist describes more precisely his danger. He is surrounded by a rabble rout of proud and violent men, whose enmity to him is, as in so many of the psalms of persecuted singers, a proof of their forgetfulness of God. Right against this rapid outline of his perils, he sets the grand unfolding of the character of God in ver. 15. It is still fuller than that in ver. 5, and like it, rests on Exod. xxxiv. Such juxtaposition is all that is needed to show how little he has to fear from the hostile crew. On one hand are they in their insolence and masterfulness, eagerly hunting after his life; on the other is God with His infinite pity and lovingkindness. Happy are they who can discern high above dangers and foes the calm presence of the only God, and, with hearts undistracted and undismayed, can oppose to all that assails them the impenetrable shield of the Name of the Lord!

It concerns our peaceful fronting of the darker facts of life, that we cultivate the habit of never looking at dangers or sorrows without seeing the helping God beside and above them.

The psalm ends with prayer for present help. If God is, as the psalmist has seen Him to be, "full of compassion and gracious," it is no presumptuous petition that the streams of these perfections should be made to flow towards a needy suppliant. "Be gracious to *me*" asks that the light which pours through the universe, may fall on one heart, which is surrounded by earth-born darkness. As in the introductory verses, so in the closing petitions, the psalmist grounds his prayer principally on God's manifested character, and secondarily on his own relation to God. Thus in ver. 16 he pleads that he is God's servant, and "the son of Thy handmaid" (compare Psalm cxvi. 16). That expression does not imply any special piety in the psalmist's mother, but pleads his hereditary relation as servant to God, or, in other words, his belonging by birth to Israel, as a reason for his prayers being heard. His last petition for "a sign" does not necessarily mean a miracle, but a clear manifestation of God's favour, which might be as unmistakably shown by an every-day event as by a supernatural intervention. To the devout heart, all common things are from God, and bear witness for Him. Even blind eyes and hard hearts may be led to see and feel that God is the helper and comforter of humble souls who trust in Him. A heart that is made at peace with itself by the fear of God, and has but one dominant purpose and desire, will long for God's mercies, not only because they have a bearing on its own outward well-being, but because they will demonstrate that it is no vain thing to wait on the Lord, and may lead some, who cherished enmity to God's servant and alienation from Himself, to learn the sweetness of His Name and the security of trust in Him.

PSALM LXXXVII.

- 1 His foundation on the holy mountains,
- 2 The gates of Zion Jehovah loves
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.
- 3 Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of
God. Selah.
- 4 I will proclaim Rahab and Babylon as those
who know Me:
"Behold Philistia and Tyre, with Cush;
This one was born there."
- 5 And of Zion it shall be said,
"Man after man was born in her,"
And He, the Most High, shall establish her.
- 6 Jehovah shall reckon when He writes down the
peoples,
"This one was born there." Selah.
- 7 And singers and dancers [shall chant],
"All my fountains are in Thee."

ONE clear note sounds in this remarkable psalm. Its single theme is the incorporation of ancestral foes and distant nations with the people of God. Aliens are to be enrolled as home-born citizens of Jerusalem. In modern words, the vision of a universal Church, a brotherhood of humanity, shines radiant before the seer. Other psalmists and prophets have like insight into the future

expansion of the nation, but this psalm stands alone in the emphasis which it places upon the idea of birth into the rights of citizenship. This singer has had granted to him a glimpse of two great truths—the universality of the Church, and the mode of entrance into it by reception of a new life. To what age of Israel he belonged is uncertain. The mention of Babylon as among the enemies who have become fellow-citizens favours the supposition of a post-exilic date, which is also supported by resemblances to Isa. xl.-lxvi.

The structure is simple. The psalm is divided by *Selah* into two strophes, to which a closing verse is appended. The first strophe bursts abruptly into rapturous praise of Zion, the beloved of God. The second predicts the gathering of all nations into her citizenship, and the closing verse apparently paints the exuberant joy of the festal crowds, who shall then throng her streets.

The abrupt beginning of the first strophe offends some commentators, who have tried to smooth ver. 1 into propriety and tameness, by suggesting possible preliminary clauses, which they suppose to have dropped out. But there is no canon which forbids a singer, with the rush of inspiration, either poetic or other, on him, to plunge into the heart of his theme. Ver. 1 may be construed, as in the A.V. and R.V. (text), as a complete sentence, but is then somewhat feeble. It is better to connect it with ver. 2, and to regard "His foundation upon the holy mountains" as parallel with "the gates of Zion," and as, like that phrase, dependent on the verb "loves." Hupfeld, indeed, proposes to transfer "Jehovah loves" from the beginning of ver. 2, where it now stands, to the end of ver. 1, supplying the verb mentally in the second clause. He thus gets a complete parallelism:—

His foundation upon the holy mountains Jehovah
loves,
The gates of Zion before all the dwellings of
Jacob.

But this is not necessary; for the verb may as well be supplied to the first as to the second clause. The harshness of saying "His foundation," without designating the person to whom the pronoun refers, which is extreme if ver. 1 is taken as a separate sentence, is diminished when it is regarded as connected with ver. 2, in which the mention of Jehovah leaves no doubt as to whose the "foundation" is. The psalmist's fervent love for Jerusalem is something more than national pride. It is the apotheosis of that emotion, clarified and hallowed into religion. Zion is founded by God Himself. The mountains on which it stands are made holy by the Divine dwelling. On their heads shines a glory before which the light that lies on the rock crowned by the Parthenon or on the seven hills of Rome pales. Not only the Temple mountain is meant, but the city is the psalmist's theme. The hills, on which it stands, are emblems of the firmness of its foundation in the Divine purpose, on which it reposes. It is beloved of God, and that, as the form of the word "loves" shows, with an abiding affection. The "glorious things" which are spoken of Zion may be either the immediately following Divine oracle, or, more probably, prophetic utterances such as many of those in Isaiah, which predict its future glory. The Divine utter-

ance which follows expresses the substance of these. So far, the psalm is not unlike other outpourings in praise of Zion, such as Psalm xlviii. But, in the second strophe, to which the first is introductory, the singer strikes a note all his own.

There can be no doubt as to who is the speaker in ver. 4. The abrupt introduction of a Divine Oracle accords with a not infrequent usage in the Psalter, which adds much to the solemnity of the words. If we regard the "glorious things" mentioned in ver. 3 as being the utterances of earlier prophets, the psalmist has had his ears purged to hear God's voice, by meditation on and sympathy with these. The faithful use of what God has said prepares for hearing further disclosures of His lips. The enumeration of nations in ver. 4 carries a great lesson. First comes the ancient enemy, Egypt, designated by the old name of contempt (*Rahab*, i.e. pride), but from which the contempt has faded; then follows Babylon, the more recent inflicter of many miseries, once so detested, but towards whom animosity has died down. These two, as the chief oppressors, between whom, like a piece of metal between hammer and anvil, Israel's territory lay, are named first, with the astonishing declaration that God will proclaim them as among those who know Him. That knowledge, of course, is not merely intellectual, but the deeper knowledge of personal acquaintance or friendship—a knowledge of which love is an element, and which is vital and transforming. Philistia is the old neighbour and foe, which from the beginning had hung on the skirts of Israel, and been ever ready to utilise her disasters and add to them. Tyre is the type of godless luxury and inflated material prosperity, and, though often in friendly alliance with Israel, as being exposed to the same foes which harassed her, she was as far from knowing God as the other nations were. Cush, or Ethiopia, seems mentioned as a type of distant peoples, rather than because of its hostility to Israel. God points to these nations—some of them near, some remote, some powerful and some feeble, some hereditarily hostile and some more or less amicable with Israel—and gives forth the declaration concerning them, "This one was born there."

God's voice ceases, and in ver. 5 the psalmist takes up the wonderful promise which he has just heard. He slightly shifts his point of view: for while the nations that were to be gathered into Zion were the foremost figures in the Divine utterance, the Zion into which they are gathered is foremost in the psalmist's, in ver. 5. Its glory, when thus enriched by a multitude of new citizens, bulks in his eyes more largely than their blessedness. Another shade of difference between the two verses is that, in the former, the ingathering of the peoples is set forth as collective or national incorporation, and, in the latter,—as the expression "man after (or by) man" suggests,—individual accession is more clearly foretold. The establishment of Zion, which the psalmist prophesies, is the result of her reinforcement by these new citizens. The grand figure of ver. 6 pictures God as taking a census of the whole world; for it is "the peoples" whom He numbers. As He writes down each name, He says concerning it, "This one was born there." That list of citizens is "the Book of the Living." So "the end of all history is that Zion becomes the metropolis of all people" (*Delitzsch*).

Three great truths had dawned on this psalmist,

though their full light was reserved for the Christian era. He had been led to apprehend that the Jewish Church would expand into a world-wide community. If one thinks of the gulfs of hatred and incompatibility which parted the peoples in his day, his clear utterance of that great truth, the apprehension of which so far transcended his time, and the realisation of which so far transcends ours, will surely be seen to be due to a Divine breath. The broadest New Testament expression of Universalism does not surpass the psalmist's confident certainty. "There is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian," says no more than he said. More remarkable still is his conception of the method by which the nations should be gathered in to Zion. They are to be "born there." Surely there shines before the speaker some glimmering ray of the truth that incorporation with the people of God is effected by the communication of a new life, a transformation of the natural, which will set men in new affinities, and make them all brethren, because all participant of the same wondrous birth. It would be anachronism to read into the psalm the clear Christian truth "Ye must be born again," but it would be as false a weakening of its words to refuse to see in them the germ of that truth. The third discovery which the psalmist has made, or rather the third revelation which he has received, is that of the individual accession of the members of the outlying nations. The Divine voice, in ver. 4, seems to speak of birth into citizenship as national; but the psalmist, in ver. 6, represents Jehovah as writing the names of individuals in the burgess-roll, and of saying in regard to each, as He writes, "This one was born there." In like manner, in ver. 5, the form of expression is "Man after man," which brings out the same thought, with the addition that there is an unbroken series of new citizens. It is by accession of single souls that the population of Zion is increased. God's register resolves the community into its component units. Men are born one by one, and one by one they enter the true kingdom. In the ancient world the community was more than the individual. But in Christ the individual acquires new worth, while the bands of social order are not thereby weakened, but made more stringent and sacred. The city, whose inhabitants have one by one been won by its King, and have been knit to Him in the sacred depths of personal being, is more closely "compact together" than the mechanical aggregations which call themselves civil societies. The unity of Christ's kingdom does not destroy national characteristics any more than it interferes with individual idiosyncrasies. The more each constituent member is himself, the more will he be joined to others, and contribute his special mite to the general wealth and well-being.

Ver. 7 is, on any interpretation, extremely obscure, because so abrupt and condensed. But probably the translation adopted above, though by no means free from difficulty or doubt, brings out the meaning which is most in accordance with the preceding. It may be supposed to flash vividly before the reader's imagination the picture of a triumphal procession of rejoicing citizens, singers as well as dancers, who chant, as they advance, a joyous chorus in praise of the city, in which they have found all fountains of joy and satisfaction welling up for their refreshment and delight.

PSALM LXXXVIII.

- 1 Jehovah, God of my salvation,
By day, by night I cry before Thee.
- 2 Let my prayer come before Thy face,
Bow thine ear to my shrill cry.
- 3 For sated with troubles is my soul,
And my life has drawn near to Sheol.
- 4 I am counted with those that have gone down
to the pit,
I am become as a man without strength.
- 5 [I am] free among the dead,
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Whom Thou rememberest no more,
But they are cut off from Thy hand.
- 6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit,
In dark places, in the deeps.
- 7 Upon me Thy wrath presses hard,
And [with] all Thy breakers Thou hast afflicted [me]. Selah.
- 8 Thou hast put my familiar friends far from
me,
Thou hast made me an abomination to them,
I am shut up so that I cannot come forth.
- 9 My eye wastes away because of affliction,
I have called on Thee daily, Jehovah,
I have spread out my palms to Thee.
- 10 For the dead canst Thou do wonders?
Or can the shades arise [and] praise Thee?
Selah.
- 11 In the grave can Thy lovingkindness be told,
And Thy faithfulness in destruction?
- 12 Can Thy wonders be made known in darkness,
And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
- 13 But I, I have cried unto Thee, Jehovah,
And in the morning my prayer comes to meet
Thee.
- 14 Why, Jehovah, dost Thou cast off my soul,
[And] hidest Thy face from me?
- 15 Afflicted am I and at the point of death from
[my] youth,
I have borne Thy terrors [till] I am distracted.
- 16 Over me have Thy [streams of] wrath
passed,
Thy horrors have cut me off.
- 17 They have compassed me about like waters
all the day,
They have come round me together.
- 18 Thou hast put far from me lover and friend,
My familiar friends are—darkness.

A PSALM which begins with "God of my salvation" and ends with "darkness" is an anomaly. All but unbroken gloom broods over it, and is densest at its close. The psalmist is so "weighed upon by sore distress," that he has neither definite petition for deliverance nor hope. His cry to God is only a long-drawn complaint, which brings no respite from his pains nor brightening of his spirit. But yet to address God as the God of his salvation, to discern His hand in the infliction of sorrows, is the operation of true though feeble faith. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is the very spirit of this psalm. It stands alone in the Psalter, which would be incomplete as a mirror of phases of devout experience, unless it had one psalm express-

ing trust which has ceased to ask or hope for the removal of life-long griefs, but still clasps God's hand even in the "darkness." Such experience is comparatively rare, and is meant to be risen above. Therefore this psalm stands alone. But it is not unexampled, and all moods of the devout life would not find lyrical expression in the book unless this deep note was once sounded.

It is useless to inquire what was the psalmist's affliction. His language seems to point to physical disease of long continuance and ever threatening a fatal termination; but in all probability sickness is a symbol here, as so often. What racked his sensitive spirit matters little. The cry which his pains evoked is what we are concerned with. There is little trace of strophical arrangement, and commentators differ much in their disposition of the parts of the psalm. But we venture to suggest a principle of division which has not been observed, in the threefold recurrence of "I cry" or "I call," accompanied in each case by direct address to Jehovah. The resulting division into three parts gives, first, the psalmist's description of his hopeless condition as, in effect, already dead (vv. 1-8); second, an expostulation with God on the ground that, if the psalmist is actually numbered with the dead, he can no more be the object of Divine help, nor bring God praise (vv. 9-12); and, third, a repetition of the thoughts of the first part with slight variation and addition.

The central portion of the first division is occupied with an expansion of the thought that the psalmist is already as good as dead (vv. 3 b-6). The condition of the dead is drawn with a powerful hand and the picture is full of solemn grandeur and hopelessness. It is preceded in vv. 1, 2, by an invocation which has many parallels in the psalms, but which here is peculiarly striking. This saddest of them all has for its first words the Name which ought to banish sadness. He who can call on Jehovah as the God of his salvation possesses a charm which has power to still agitation, and to flush despair with some light of hope as from an unrisen sun. But this poet feels no warmth from the beams, and the mists surge up, if not to hide the light, yet to obscure it. All the more admirable, then, the persistence of his cry; and all the more precious the lesson that Faith is not to let present experience limit its conceptions. God is none the less the God of salvation and none the less to be believed to be so though no consciousness of His saving power blesses the heart at the moment.

Ver. 1 *b* is obscure. Psalm xxii. 2 and other places suggest that the juxtaposition of day and night is meant to express the continuity of the psalmist's prayer; but, as the text now stands, the first part of the clause can only mean "In the time (day) when I cry," and the second has to be supplemented so as to read "[My cry comes] before Thee." This gives a poor meaning, and there is probability in the slight emendation on the word for *day*, which is required in order to make it an adverb of time equivalent to "In the day," as in the passage already quoted. Another emendation, adopted by Graetz, Bickell, and Cheyne, changes "God of" into "my God," and "my salvation" into "I cry" (the same word as in ver. 13), and attaches "by day" to the first clause. The result is,—

Jehovah, my God, I cry to Thee by day,
I call in the night before Thee.

The changes are very slight and easy, and the effect of them is satisfactory. The meaning of the verse is obvious, whether the emendation is accepted or not. The gain from the proposed change is dearly purchased by the loss of that solitary expression of hope in the name of "God of my salvation," the one star which gleams for a moment through a rift in the blackness.

With "For" in ver. 3 the psalmist begins the dreary description of his affliction, the desperate and all but deadly character of which he spreads before God as a reason for hearing his prayer. Despair sometimes strikes men dumb, and sometimes makes them eloquent. The sorrow which has a voice is less crushing than that which is tongueless. This overcharged heart finds relief in self-pitying depicting of its burdens, and in the exercise of a gloomy imagination, which draws out in detail the picture of the feebleness, the recumbent stillness, the seclusion and darkness of the dead. They have "no strength." Their vital force has ebbed away, and they are but as weak shadows, having an impotent existence, which does not deserve to be called life. The remarkable expression of ver. 5 "free among the dead," is to be interpreted in the light of Job. iii. 19, which counts it as one blessing of the grave, that "there the servant is free from his master." But the psalmist thinks that that "freedom" is loathsome, not desirable, for it means removal from the stir of a life, the heaviest duties and cares of which are better than the torpid immunity from these, which makes the state of the dead a dreary monotony. They lie stretched out and motionless. No ripple of cheerful activity stirs that stagnant sea. One unvarying attitude is theirs. It is not the stillness of rest which prepares for work, but of incapacity of action or of change. They are forgotten by Him who remembers all that are. They are parted from the guiding and blessing influence of the Hand that upholds all being. In some strange fashion they are and yet are not. Their death has a simulacrum of life. Their shadowy life is death. Being and non-being may both be predicated of them. The psalmist speaks in riddles; and the contradictions in his speech reflect his dim knowledge of that place of darkness. He looks into its gloomy depths, and he sees little but gloom. It needed the resurrection of Jesus to flood these depths with light, and to show that the life beyond may be fuller of bright activity than life here—a state in which vital strength is increased beyond all earthly experience, and wherein God's all-quickening hand grasps more closely, and communicates richer gifts than are attainable in that death which sense calls life.

Ver. 7 traces the psalmist's sorrows to God. It breathes not complaint but submission, or, at least, recognition of His hand; and they who, in the very paroxysm of their pains, can say, "It is the Lord," are not far from saying, "Let Him do what seemeth Him good," nor from the peace that comes from a compliant will. The recognition implies, too, consciousness of sin which has deserved the "wrath" of God, and in such consciousness lies the germ of blessing. Sensitive nerves may quiver, as they feel the dreadful weight with which that wrath presses down on them, as if to crush them; but if the man lies still, and lets the pressure do its work, it will not force out his life, but only his evil, as foul water is squeezed from cloth. Ver. 7 *b* is rendered by Delitzsch "All

Thy billows Thou pressest down," which gives a vivid picture; but "billows" is scarcely the word to use for the downward rushing waters of a cataract, and the ordinary rendering, adopted above, requires only natural supplements.

Ver. 8 approaches nearer to a specification of the psalmist's affliction. If taken literally, it points to some loathsome disease, which had long clung to him, and made even his friends shrink from companionship, and thus had condemned him to isolation. All these details suggest leprosy, which, if referred to here, is most probably to be taken, as sickness is in several psalms, as symbolic of affliction. The desertion by friends is a common feature in the psalmist's complaints. The seclusion as in a prison-house is, no doubt, appropriate to the leper's condition, but may also simply refer to the loneliness and compulsory inaction arising from heavy trials. At all events, the psalmist is flung back friendless on himself, and hemmed in, so that he cannot expatiate in the joyous bustle of life. Blessed are they who, when thus situated, can betake themselves to God, and find that He does not turn away! The consciousness of His loving presence has not yet lighted the psalmist's soul; but the clear acknowledgment that it is God who has put the sweetness of earthly companionship beyond his reach is, at least, the beginning of the happier experience, that God never makes a solitude round a soul without desiring to fill it with Himself.

If the recurring cry to Jehovah in ver. 9 is taken, as we have suggested it should be, as marking a new turn in the thoughts, the second part of the psalm will include vv. 9-12. Vv. 10-12 are apparently the daily prayer referred to in ver. 9. They appeal to God to preserve the psalmist from the state of death, which he has just depicted himself as having in effect already entered, by the consideration which is urged in other psalms as a reason for Divine intervention (vi. 5, xxx. 9, etc.)—namely, that His power had no field for its manifestation in the grave, and that He could draw no revenue of praise from the pale lips that lay silent there. The conception of the state of the dead is even more dreary than that in vv. 4, 5. They are "shades," which word conveys the idea of relaxed feebleness. Their dwelling is Abaddon—i.e., "destruction,"—"darkness," "the land of forgetfulness" whose inhabitants remember not, nor are remembered, either by God or man. In that cheerless region God had no opportunity to show His wonders of delivering mercy, for monotonous immobility was stamped upon it, and out of that realm of silence no glad songs of praise could sound. Such thoughts are in startling contrast with the hopes that sparkle in some psalms (such as xvi. 10, etc.), and they show that clear, permanent assurance of future blessedness was not granted to the ancient Church. Nor could there be sober certainty of it until after Christ's resurrection. But it is also to be noticed that this psalm neither affirms nor denies a future resurrection. It does affirm continuous personal existence after death, of however thin and shadowy a sort. It is not concerned with what may lie far ahead, but is speaking of the present state of the dead, as it was conceived of, at the then stage of revelation, by a devout soul, in its hours of despondency.

The last part (vv. 13-18) is marked, like the two preceding, by the repetition of the name of Jehovah, and of the allusion to the psalmist's con-

tinual prayer. It is remarkable, and perhaps significant, that the time of prayer should here be "the morning," whereas in ver. 1 it was, according to Delitzsch, *the night*, or, according to the other rendering, *day and night*. The psalmist had asked in ver. 2 that his prayer might enter into God's presence; he now vows that it will come to meet Him. Possibly some lightening of his burden may be hinted at by the reference to the time of his petition. Morning is the hour of hope, of new vigour, of a fresh beginning, which may not be only a prolongation of dreary yesterdays. But if there is any such alleviation, it is only for a moment, and then the cloud settles down still more heavily. But one thing the psalmist has won by his cry. He now longs to know the reason for his affliction. He is confident that God is righteous when He afflicts, and, heavy as his sorrow is, he has passed beyond mere complaint concerning it, to the wish to understand it. The consciousness that it is chastisement, occasioned by his own evil, and meant to purge that evil away, is present, in a rudimentary form at least, in that cry, "*Why castest Thou off my soul?*" If sorrow has brought a man to offer that prayer, it has done its work, and will cease before long, or, if it lasts, will be easier to bear, when its meaning and purpose are clear. But the psalmist rises to such a height but for a moment, though his momentary attaining it gives promise that he will, by degrees, be able to remain there permanently. It is significant that the only direct naming of Jehovah, in addition to the three which accompany the references to his prayers, is associated with this petition for enlightenment. The singer presses close to God in his faith that His hardest blows are not struck at random, and that His administration has for its basis, not caprice, but reason, moved by love and righteousness.

Such a cry is never offered in vain, even though it should be followed, as it is here, by plaintive reiterations of the sufferer's pains. These are now little more than a summary of the first part. The same idea of being in effect dead even while alive is repeated in ver. 15, in which the psalmist wails that from youth he had been but a dying man, so close to him had death seemed, or so death-like had been his life. He has borne God's terrors till he is distracted. The word rendered "I am distracted" is only used here, and consequently is obscure. Hupfeld and others deny that it is a word at all (he calls it an "Unwort"), and would read another which means *to become torpid*. The existing text is defended by Delitzsch and others, who take the word to mean to be weakened in mind or bewildered. The meaning of the whole seems to be as rendered above. But it might also be translated, as by Cheyne, "I bear Thy terrors, my senses must fail." In ver. 16 the word for wrath is in the plural, to express the manifold outbursts of that deadly indignation. The word means literally heat; and we may represent the psalmist's thought as being that the wrath shoots forth many fierce tongues of licking flame, or, like a lava stream, pours out in many branches. The word rendered "Cut me off" is anomalous, and is variously translated *annihilate*, *extinguish*, or as above. The wrath which was a fiery flame in ver. 16 is an overwhelming flood in ver. 17. The complaint of ver. 8 recurs in ver. 18, in still more tragic form. All human sympathy and help are far away, and the psalmist's only familiar friend

is—darkness. There is an infinitude of despair in that sad irony. But there is a gleam of hope, though faint and far, like faint daylight seen from the innermost recesses of a dark tunnel, in his recognition that his dismal solitude is the work of God's hand; for, if God has made a heart or a life empty of human love, it is that He may Himself fill it with His own sweet and all-compensating presence.

PSALM LXXXIX.

- 1 The lovingkindnesses of Jehovah will I sing
for ever,
To generation after generation will I make
known Thy Faithfulness with my mouth.
- 2 For I said, For ever shall Lovingkindness be
built up.
The heavens—in them wilt Thou establish Thy
Faithfulness.
- 3 I have made a covenant with My chosen one,
I have sworn to David My servant;
- 4 For ever will I establish thy seed.
And build up thy throne to generation after
generation. Selah.
- 5 And the heavens shall make known Thy won-
ders, Jehovah.
Thy Faithfulness also in the congregation of
Thy holy ones.
- 6 For who in the skies can be set beside Jehovah,
[Or] likened to Jehovah, amongst the sons of
the mighty ones?
- 7 A God very terrible in the council of the holy
ones,
And dread above all round about Him.
- 8 Jehovah, God of Hosts, who like Thee is
mighty, Jah?
And Thy Faithfulness [is] round Thee.
- 9 Thou, Thou rulest the insolence of the sea,
When its waves lift themselves on high, Thou,
Thou stillest them.
- 10 Thou, Thou hast crushed Rahab as one that is
slain,
By the arm of Thy strength Thou hast scat-
tered Thine enemies.
- 11 Thine are the heavens, Thine also the earth,
The world and its fulness, Thou, Thou hast
founded them.
- 12 North and south, Thou, Thou hast created
them.
Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Thy Name.
- 13 Thine is an arm with might,
Strong is Thy hand, high is Thy right hand.
- 14 Righteousness and Justice are the foundation
of Thy throne,
Lovingkindness and Troth go to meet Thy face.
- 15 Blessed the people who know the festal shout!
Jehovah, in the light of Thy face they walk.
- 16 In Thy Name do they exult all the day,
And in Thy righteousness are they exalted.
- 17 For the glory of their strength art Thou,
And in Thy favour shall our horn be exalted.
- 18 For to Jehovah [belongs] our shield,
And to the Holy One of Israel our king.
- 19 Then Thou didst speak in vision to Thy fa-
voured one and didst say,
I have laid help upon a hero,
I have exalted one chosen from the people,
- 20 I have found David My servant,
With my holy oil have I anointed him.
- 21 With whom My hand shall be continually,
Mine arm shall also strengthen him,
- 22 No enemy shall steal upon him,
And no son of wickedness shall afflict him.
- 23 And I shatter his adversaries before him,
And them that hate him will I smite,
- 24 And My Faithfulness and My Lovingkindness
[shall be] with him,
And in My name shall his horn be exalted.
- 25 And I will set his hand on the sea,
And his right hand on the rivers.
- 26 He, he shall call upon Me, My Father art Thou,
My God and the rock of my salvation.
- 27 Also I, I will give him [to be My] first-born,
Higher than the kings of the earth.
- 28 For ever will I keep for him My lovingkind-
ness,
And My covenant shall be inviolable towards
him.
- 29 And I will make his seed [to last] for ever,
And his throne as the days of heaven.
- 30 If his sons forsake My law,
And walk not in My judgments,
- 31 If they profane My statutes,
And keep not My commandments,
- 32 Then will I visit their transgression with a rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
- 33 But My Lovingkindness will I not break off
from him.
And I will not be false to My Faithfulness.
- 34 I will not profane My covenant,
And that which has gone forth from My lips
will I not change.
- 35 Once have I sworn by My holiness,
Verily I will not be false to David.
- 36 His seed shall be for ever,
And his throne as the sun before me,
- 37 As the moon shall he be established for ever,
And the witness in the sky is true. Selah.
- 38 But Thou, Thou hast cast off and rejected,
Thou hast been wroth with Thine anointed,
- 39 Thou hast abhorred the covenant of Thy ser-
vant,
Thou hast profaned his crown to the ground.
- 40 Thou hast broken down all his fences.
Thou hast made his strongholds a ruin.
- 41 All that pass on the way spoil him,
He is become a reproach to his neighbours.
- 42 Thou hast exalted the hand of his adversaries,
Thou hast made all his enemies rejoice.
- 43 Also Thou turnest the edge of his sword,
And hast not made him to stand in the battle.
- 44 Thou hast made an end of his lustre,
And cast his throne to the ground,
- 45 Thou hast shortened the days of his youth,
Thou hast wrapped shame upon him. Selah.

- 46 How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever?
[How long] shall Thy wrath burn like fire?
- 47 Remember how short a time I [have to live],
For what vanity hast Thou created all the sons of men!
- 48 Who is the man who shall live and not see death.
[Who] shall deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?
- 49 Where are Thy former lovingkindnesses, Jehovah.
Which Thou swearest to David in Thy faithfulness?
- 50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Thy servants,
How I bear in my bosom the shame of the peoples (?)
- 51 Wherewith Thine enemies have reproached Thee, Jehovah.
Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of Thine anointed.
- 52 Blessed be Jehovah for evermore.
Amen and Amen.

THE foundation of this psalm is the promise in 2 Sam. vii. which guaranteed the perpetuity of the Davidic kingdom. Many of the characteristic phrases of the prophecy recur here—*e.g.*, the promises that the children of wickedness shall not afflict, and that the transgressions of David's descendants should be followed by chastisement only, not by rejection. The contents of Nathan's oracle are first given in brief in vv. 3, 4—"like a text," as Hupfeld says—and again in detail and with poetic embellishments in vv. 19-37. But these glorious promises are set in sharpest contrast with a doleful present, which seems to contradict them. They not only embitter it, but they bewilder faith, and the psalmist's lament is made almost a reproach of God, whose faithfulness seems imperilled by the disasters which had fallen on the monarchy and on Israel. The complaint and petitions of the latter part are the true burden of the psalm, to which the celebration of Divine attributes in vv. 1-18, and the expansion of the fundamental promise in vv. 19-37, are meant to lead up. The attributes specified are those of Faithfulness (vv. 1, 2, 5, 8, 14) and of Power, which render the fulfilment of God's promises certain. By such contemplations the psalmist would fortify himself against the whispers of doubt, which were beginning to make themselves heard in his mind, and would find in the character of God both assurance that His promise shall not fail, and a powerful plea for his prayer that it may not fail.

The whole tone of the psalm suggests that it was written when the kingdom was toppling to ruin, or perhaps even after its fall. Delitzsch improbably supposes that the young king, whom loss and shame make an old man (ver. 45), is Rehoboam, and that the disasters which gave occasion to the psalm were those inflicted by the Egyptian king Shishak. Others see in that youthful prince Jehoiachin, who reigned for three months, and was then deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, and whom Jeremiah has bewailed (xxii. 24-29). But all such conjectures are precarious.

The structure of the psalm can scarcely be called strophical. There are three well-marked turns in the flow of thought,—first, the hymn to

the Divine attributes (vv. 1-18); second, the expansion of the promise, which is the basis of the monarchy (vv. 19-37); and, finally, the lament and prayer, in view of present afflictions, that God would be true to His attributes and promises (vv. 38-51). For the most part the verses are grouped in pairs, which are occasionally lengthened into triplets.

The psalmist begins with announcing the theme of his song—the Lovingkindness and Faithfulness of God. Surrounded by disasters, which seem in violent contradiction to God's promise to David, he falls back on thoughts of the Mercy which gave it and the Faithfulness which will surely accomplish it. The resolve to celebrate these in such circumstances argues a faith victorious over doubts, and putting forth energetic efforts to maintain itself. This bird can sing in midwinter. True, the song has other notes than joyous ones, but they, too, extol God's Lovingkindness and Faithfulness, even while they seem to question them. Self-command, which insists on a man's averting his thoughts from a gloomy outward present to gaze on God's loving purpose and unalterable veracity, is no small part of practical religion. The psalmist will *sing*, because he *said* that these two attributes were ever in operation, and lasting as the heavens. "Lovingkindness shall be built up for ever," its various manifestations being conceived as each being a stone in the stately building which is in continual course of progress through all ages, and can never be completed, since fresh stones will continually be laid as long as God lives and pours forth His blessings. Much less can it ever fall into ruin, as impatient sense would persuade the psalmist that it is doing in his day. The parallel declaration as to God's Faithfulness takes the heavens as the type of duration and immobility, and conceives that attribute to be eternal and fixed, as they are. These convictions could not burn in the psalmist's heart without forcing him to speak. Lover, poet, and devout man, in their several ways, feel the same necessity of utterance. Not every Christian can "sing," but all can and should speak. They will, if their faith is strong.

The Divine promise, on which the Davidic throne rests, is summed up in the abruptly introduced pair of verses (3, 4). That promise is the second theme of the psalm; and just as, in some great musical composition, the overture sounds for the first time phrases which are to be recurrent and elaborated in the sequel, so, in the four first verses of the psalm, its ruling thoughts are briefly put. Vv. 1, 2, stand first, but are second in time to vv. 3, 4. God's oracle preceded the singer's praise. The language of these two verses echoes the original passage in 2 Sam. vii., as in "*David My servant, establish, for ever, build.*" the last three of which expressions were used in ver. 2, with a view to their recurrence in ver. 4. The music keeps before the mind the perpetual duration of David's throne.

In vv. 6-18 the psalmist sets forth the Power and Faithfulness of God, which insure the fulfilment of His promises. He is the incomparably great and terrible God, who subdues the mightiest forces of nature and tames the proudest nations (vv. 9, 10), who is Maker and Lord of the world (vv. 11, 12), who rules with power, but also with righteousness, faithfulness, and grace (vv. 13, 14), and who, therefore, makes His people blessed and safe (vv. 15-18). Since God is

such a God, His promise cannot remain unfulfilled. Power and willingness to execute it to the last tittle are witnessed by heaven and earth, by history and experience. Dark as the present may be, it would, therefore, be folly to doubt for a moment.

The psalmist begins his contemplations of the glory of the Divine nature with figuring the very heavens as vocal with His praise. Not only the object but the givers of that praise are noteworthy. The heavens are personified, as in Psalm xix.; and from their silent depths comes music. There is One higher, mightier, older, more unperturbed, pure, and enduring than they, whom they extol by their lustre which they owe to Him. They praise God's "wonder" (which here means, not so much His marvellous acts, as the wonderfulness of His Being, His incomparable greatness and power), and His Faithfulness, the two guarantees of the fulfilment of His promises. Nor are the visible heavens His only praisers. The holy ones, sons of the mighty—i.e., the angels—bow before Him who is high above their holiness and might, and own Him for God alone.

With ver. 9 the hymn descends to earth, and magnifies God's Power and Faithfulness as manifested there. The sea is, as always, the emblem of rebellious tumult. Its insolence is calmed by Him. And the proudest of the nations, such as Rahab ("Pride," a current name for Egypt), had cause to own His power, when He brought the waves of the sea over her hosts, thus in one act exemplifying His sovereign sway over both nature and nations. He is Maker, and therefore Lord, of heaven and earth. In all quarters of the world His creative hand is manifest, and His praise sounds. Tabor and Hermon may stand, as the parallelism requires, for west and east, though some suppose that they are simply named as conspicuous summits. They "shout for joy at Thy Name," an expression like that used in ver. 16, in reference to Israel. The poet thinks of the softly swelling Tabor with its verdure, and of the lofty Hermon with its snows, as sharing in that gladness, and praising Him to whom they owe their beauty and majesty. Creation vibrates with the same emotions which thrill the poet. The sum of all the preceding is gathered up in ver. 13, which magnifies the might of God's arm.

But more blessed still for the psalmist, in the midst of national gloom, is the other thought of the moral character of God's rule. His throne is broad-based upon the sure foundation of righteousness and justice. The pair of attributes always closely connected—namely, Lovingkindness and Truth or Faithfulness—are here, as frequently, personified. They "go to meet Thy face"—that is, in order to present themselves before Him. "The two genii of the history of redemption (Psalm xliii. 3) stand before His countenance, like attendant maidens, waiting the slightest indication of His will" (Delitzsch).

Since God is such a God, His Israel is blessed, whatever its present plight. So the psalmist closes the first part of his song, with rapturous celebration of the favoured nation's prerogatives. "The festal shout" or "the trumpet-blast" is probably the music at the festivals (Numb. xxiii. 21 and xxxi. 6), and "those who know" it means "those who are familiar with the worship of this great God." The elements of their blessedness are then unfolded. "They walk in the light of Thy face." Their outward life is passed

in continual happy consciousness of the Divine presence, which becomes to them a source of gladness and guidance. "In Thy Name do they exult all the day." God's self-manifestation, and the knowledge of Him which arises therefrom, become the occasion of a calm, perpetual joy, which is secure from change, because its roots go deeper than the region where change works. "In Thy righteousness shall they be exalted." Through God's strict adherence to His covenant, not by any power of their own, shall they be lifted above foes and fears. "The glory of their strength art Thou." In themselves they are weak, but Thou, not any arm of flesh, art their strength, and by possession of Thee they are not only clothed with might, but resplendent with beauty. Human power is often unlovely; God-given strength is, like armour inlaid with gold ornament as well as defence. "In Thy favour our horn shall be exalted." The psalmist identifies himself at last with the people, whose blessedness he has so glowingly celebrated. He could keep up the appearance of distinction no longer. "They" gives place to "we" unconsciously, as his heart swells with the joy which he paints. Depressed as he and his people are for the moment, he is sure that there is lifting up. The emblem of the lifted horn is common, as expressive of victory. The psalmist is confident of Israel's triumph, because he is certain that the nation, as represented by and, as it were, concentrated in its king, belongs to God, who will not lose what is His. The rendering of ver. 18 in the A.V. cannot be sustained. "Our shield" in the first clause is parallel with "our king" in the second, and the meaning of both clauses is that the king of Israel is God's, and therefore secure. That ownership rests on the promise to David, and on it in turn is rested the psalmist's confidence that Israel and its king are possessed of a charmed life, and shall be exalted, however now abject and despondent.

The second part (vv. 19-37) draws out in detail, and at some points with heightened colouring, the fundamental prophecy by Nathan. It falls into two parts, of which the former (vv. 19-27) refers more especially to the promises given to David, and the second (vv. 28-37) to those relating to his descendants. In ver. 19 "vision" is quoted from 2 Sam. vii. 17; "then" points back to the period of giving the promise; "Thy favoured one" is possibly Nathan, but more probably David. The Masoretic reading, however, which is followed by many ancient versions, has the plural "favoured ones," which Delitzsch takes to mean Samuel and Nathan. "Help" means the help which, through the king, comes to his people, and especially, as appears from the use of the word "hero," aid in battle. But since the selection of David for the throne is the subject in hand, the emendation which reads for "help" *crown* recommends itself as probable. David's prowess, his humble origin, and his devotion to God's service are brought into view in vv. 19, 20, as explaining and magnifying the Divine choice. His dignity is all from God. Consequently, as the next pair of verses goes on to say, God's protecting hand will ever be with him, since He cannot set a man in any position and fail to supply the gifts needed for it. Whom He chooses He will protect. Sheltered behind that strong hand, the king will be safe from all assaults. The word rendered "steal upon" in ver. 22 is doubtful,

and by some is taken to mean *to exact*, as a creditor does, but that gives a flat and incongruous turn to the promise. For ver. 22 *b* compare 2 Sam. vii. 10. Victory over all enemies is next promised in vv. 23-25, and is traced to the perpetual presence with the king of God's Faithfulness and Lovingkindness, the two attributes of which so much has been sung in the former part. The manifestation of God's character (*i.e.*, His Name) will secure the exaltation of David's horn—*i.e.*, the victorious exercise of his God-given strength. Therefore a wide extension of his kingdom is promised in ver. 25, from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and its canals, on which God will lay the king's hand—*i.e.*, will put them in his possession.

The next pair of verses (26, 27) deals with the inward side of the relations of God and the king. On David's part there will be child-like love, with all the lowliness of trust and obedience which lies in the recognition of God's fatherhood, and on God's part there will be the acknowledgment of the relation, and the adoption of the king as His "first-born," and therefore, in a special sense, beloved and exalted. Israel is called by the same name in other places, in reference to its special prerogative amongst the nations. The national dignity is concentrated in the king, who stands to other monarchs as Israel to other nations, and is to them "Most High," the august Divine title, which here may possibly mean that David is to the rulers of the earth an image of God. The reciprocal relation of Father and Son is not here conceived in its full inwardness and depth as Christianity knows it, for it has reference to office rather than to the person sustaining the office, but it is approximating thereto. There is an echo of the fundamental passage in ver. 26. (Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14.)

From ver. 28 onwards the psalmist turns to expand the promises to David's line. His words are mainly a poetical paraphrase of 2 Sam. vii. 14. Transgression shall indeed be visited with chastisement, which the fatherly relation requires, as the original passage indicates by the juxtaposition of the promise "I will be his Father," and the declaration "I will chasten him." But it will be chastisement only, and not rejection. The unchangeableness of God's loving purpose is very strongly and beautifully put in ver. 33, in which the twin attributes of Lovingkindness and Faithfulness are again blended as the ground of sinful men's hope. The word rendered above "break off" occasions a difficulty, both in regard to its form and its appropriateness in this connection. The clause is a quotation from 2 Sam. vii. 15, and the emendation which substitutes for *break off* the more natural word used there—namely, *withdraw*—is to be preferred. In ver. 33 *b* the paradoxical expression of *being false to My faithfulness* suggests the contradiction inherent in the very thought that He can break His plighted word. The same idea is again put in striking form in ver. 34: "I will not profane My covenant," even though degenerate sons of David "profane" God's statute. His word, once spoken, is inviolable. He is bound by His oath. He has given His holiness as the pledge of His word, and, till that holiness wanes, those utterances which He has sealed with it cannot be recalled. The certainty that sin does not alter God's promise is not traced here to His placableness, but to His immutable nature, and to the obligations under which He is

laid by His own word and acts. That unchangeableness is a rock-foundation, on which sinful men may build their certitude. It is much to know that they cannot sin away God's mercy nor exhaust His gentle long-suffering. It is even more to know that His holiness guarantees that they cannot sin away His promises, nor by any breach of His commandments provoke Him to break His covenant.

The allusions to the ancient promise are completed in vv. 36, 37, with the thought of the perpetual continuance of the Davidic line and kingdom, expressed by the familiar comparison of its duration to that of the sun and moon. Ver. 37 *b* is best understood as above. Some take the faithful witness to be the moon; others the rainbow, and render, as in the A.V. and R.V., "and as the faithful witness." But the designation of the moon as a witness is unexampled and almost unintelligible. It is better to take the clause as independent, and to suppose that Jehovah is His own witness, and that the psalmist here speaks in his own person, the quotation of the promises being ended. Cheyne encloses the clause in a parenthesis and compares Rev. iii. 14.

The third part begins with ver. 38, and consists of two portions, in the first of which the psalmist complains with extraordinary boldness of remonstrance, and describes the contrast between these lofty promises and the sad reality (vv. 38-45), and, in the second prays for the removal of the contradiction of God's promise by Israel's affliction, and bases this petition on the double ground of the shortness of life, and the dishonour done to His own Name thereby.

The expostulation very nearly crosses the boundary of reverent remonstrance, when it charges God with having Himself "abhorred" or, according to another rendering, "made void" His covenant, and cast the king's crown to the ground. The devastation of the kingdom is described, in vv. 40, 41, in language borrowed from Psalm lxxx. 12. The pronouns grammatically refer to the king, but the ideas of the land and the monarch are blended. The next pair of verses (42, 43) ventures still further in remonstrance, by charging God with taking the side of Israel's enemies and actively intervening to procure its defeat. The last verse-pair of this part (44, 45) speaks more exclusively of the king, or perhaps of the monarchy. The language, especially in ver. 45 *a*, seems most naturally understood of an individual. Delitzsch takes such to be its application, and supposes it to describe the king as having been prematurely aged by calamity; while Hupfeld, with Hengstenberg and others, prefer to regard the expression as lamenting that the early days of the monarchy's vigour had so soon been succeeded by decrepitude like that of age. That family, which had been promised perpetual duration and dominion, has lost its lustre, and is like a dying lamp. That throne has fallen to the ground, which God had promised should stand for ever. Senile weakness has stricken the monarchy and disaster, which makes it an object of contempt, wraps it like a garment, instead of the royal robe. A long, sad wail of the music fixes the picture on the mind of the hearer.

Then follows prayer, which shows how consistent with true reverence and humble dependence is the outspoken vigour of the preceding remonstrance. The boldest thoughts about the apparent contradiction of God's words and deeds are

not too bold, if spoken straight to Him, and not muttered against Him, and if they lead the speaker to prayer for the removal of the anomaly. In ver. 46 there is a quotation from Psalm lxxix. 5. The question "How long" is the more imploring because life is so short. There is but a little while during which it is possible for God to manifest Himself as full of Lovingkindness and Faithfulness. The psalmist lets his feelings of longing to see for himself the manifestation of these attributes peep forth for a moment, in that pathetic sudden emergence of "I" instead of "we" or "men," in ver. 47 *a*. His language is somewhat obscure, but the sense is clear. Literally, the words read "Remember—I, what a transitoriness." The meaning is plain enough, when it is observed that, as Perowne rightly says, "I" is placed first for the sake of emphasis. It is a tender thought that God may be moved to show forth His Lovingkindness by remembrance of the brief period within which a man's opportunity of beholding it is restricted, and by the consideration that so soon he will have to look on a grimmer sight, and "see death." The music again comes in with a melancholy cadence, emphasising the sadness which enwraps man's short life, if no gleams of God's lovingkindness fall on its fleeting days.

The last three verses (vv. 49-51) urge yet another plea—that of the dishonour accruing to God from the continuance of Israel's disasters. A second "Remember" presents that plea, which is preceded by the wistful question "Where are Thy former lovingkindnesses?" The psalmist looks back on the glories of early days, and the retrospect is bitter and bewildering. That these were sworn to David in God's faithfulness staggers him, but he makes the fact a plea with God. Then in vv. 50, 51, he urges the insults and reproaches which enemies hurled against him and against "Thy servants," and therefore against God.

Ver. 50 *b* is obscure. To "bear in the bosom" usually implies tender care, but here can only mean sympathetic participation. The psalmist again lets his own personality appear for a moment, while he identifies himself as a member of the nation with "Thy servants" and "Thine anointed." The last words of the clause are so obscure that there must apparently have been textual corruption. If the existing text is retained, the object of the verb *I bear* must be supplied from *a*, and this clause will run, "I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples." But the collocation of *all* and *many* is harsh, and the position of *many* is anomalous. An ingenious conjecture, adopted by Cheyne from Böttcher and Bickell, and accepted by Baethgen, reads for "all, many peoples," *the shame of the peoples*, which gives a good meaning, and may be received as at all events probable, and expressing the intent of the psalmist. Insolent conquerors and their armies triumph over the fallen Israel, and "reproach the footsteps" of the dethroned king or royal line—*i.e.*, they pursue him with their taunts, wherever he goes. These reproaches cut deep into the singer's heart; but they glance off from the earthly objects and strike the majesty of Heaven. God's people cannot be flouted without His honour being touched. Therefore the prayer goes up, that the Lord would remember these jeers which mocked Him as well as His afflicted people, and would arise to action on behalf of His own Name. His Lovingkindness and Faithfulness, which the psalmist has magnified, and on which he rests his

hopes, are darkened in the eyes of men and even of His own nation by the calamities, which give point to the rude gibes of the enemy. Therefore the closing petitions beseech God to think on these reproaches, and to bring into act once more His Lovingkindness, and to vindicate His Faithfulness, which He had sealed to David by His oath.

Ver. 52 is no part of the original psalm, but is the closing doxology of Book III.

PSALM XC.

- 1 Lord, a dwelling-place hast Thou been for us
In generation after generation.
- 2 Before the mountains were born,
Or Thou gavest birth to the earth and the
world,
Even from everlasting, Thou art God.
- 3 Thou turnest frail man back to dust,
And sayest, "Return, ye sons of man."
- 4 For a thousand years in Thine eyes are as
yesterday when it was passing,
And a watch in the night.
- 5 Thou dost flood them away, a sleep do they
become,
In the morning they are like grass [which]
springs afresh.
- 6 In the morning it blooms and springs afresh,
By evening it is cut down and withers.
- 7 For we are wasted away in Thine anger,
And by Thy wrath have we been panic-
struck.
- 8 Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee,
Our secret [sins] in the radiance of Thy face.
- 9 For all our days have vanished in Thy wrath,
We have spent our years as a murmur.
- 10 The days of our years—in them are seventy
years,
Or if [we are] in strength, eighty years.
And their pride is [but] trouble and vanity,
For it is passed swiftly, and we fly away.
- 11 Who knows the power of Thine anger,
And of Thy wrath according to the [due]
fear of Thee?
- 12 To number our days—thus teach us,
That we may win ourselves a heart of wis-
dom.
- 13 Return, Jehovah; how long?
And have compassion upon Thy servants.
- 14 Satisfy us in the morning [with] Thy loving-
kindness,
And we shall ring out joyful cries and be
glad all our days.
- 15 Gladden us according to the days [when]
Thou hast afflicted us,
The years [when] we have seen adversity.
- 16 To Thy servants let Thy working be mani-
fested,
And Thy majesty upon their children. •
- 17 And let the graciousness of the Lord our
God be upon us,
And the work of our hands establish upon us,
Yea, the work of our hands establish it.

THE sad and stately music of this great psalm befits the dirge of a world. How artificial and poor, beside its restrained emotion and majestic simplicity, do even the most deeply felt strains of other poets on the same themes sound! It preaches man's mortality in immortal words. In its awe-struck yet trustful gaze on God's eternal being, in its lofty sadness, in its archaic directness, in its

grand images so clearly cut and so briefly expressed, in its emphatic recognition of sin as the occasion of death, and in its clinging to the eternal God who can fill fleeting days with ringing gladness, the psalm utters once for all the deepest thoughts of devout men. Like the God whom it hymns it has been "for generation after generation" an asylum.

The question of its authorship has a literary interest, but little more. The arguments against the Mosaic authorship, apart from those derived from the as yet unsettled questions in regard to the Pentateuch, are weak. The favourite one, adduced by Cheyne after Hupfeld and others, is that the duration of human life was greater, according to the history, in Moses' time than seventy years; but the prolonged lives of certain conspicuous persons in that period do not warrant a conclusion as to the average length of life; and the generation that fell in the wilderness can clearly not have lived beyond the psalmist's limit. The characteristic Mosaic tone in regarding death as the wages of sin, the massive simplicity and the entire absence of dependence on other parts of the Psalter, which separate this psalm from almost all the others of the fourth part, are strongly favourable to the correctness of the superscription. Further, the section vv. 7-12 is distinctly historical, and is best understood as referring not to mankind in general, but to Israel; and no period is so likely to have suggested such a strain of thought as that when the penalty of sin was laid upon the people, and they were condemned to find graves in the wilderness. But however the question of authorship may be settled, the psalm is "not of an age, but for all time."

It falls into three parts, of which the two former contain six verses each, while the last has but five. In the first section (vv. 1-6), the transitoriness of men is set over against the eternity of God; in the second, (vv. 7-12) that transitoriness is traced to its reason, namely sin; and in the third, prayer that God would visit His servants is built upon both His eternity and their fleeting days. The short ver. 1 blends both the thoughts which are expanded in the following verses, while in it the singer breathes awed contemplation of the eternal God as the dwelling-place or asylum of generations that follow each other, swift and unremembered, as the waves that break on some lonely shore. God is invoked as "Lord," the sovereign ruler, the name which connotes His elevation and authority. But, though lofty, He is not inaccessible. As some ancestral home shelters generation after generation of a family, and in its solid strength stands unmoved, while one after another of its sometime tenants is borne forth to his grave, and the descendants sit in the halls where centuries before their ancestors sat. God is the home of all who find any real home amidst the fluctuating nothings of this shadowy world. The contrast of His eternity and our transiency is not bitter, though it may hush us into wisdom, if we begin with the trust that He is the abiding abode of short-lived man. For this use of *dwelling-place* compare Deut. xxxiii. 27.

What God has been to successive generations results from what He is in Himself before all generations. So ver. 2 soars to the contemplation of His absolute eternity, stretching boundless on either side of "this bank and shoal of time"—"From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God"; and in that name is proclaimed His self-derived strength, which, being eternal, is neither derived

from nor diminished by time, that first gives to, and then withdraws from, all creatures their feeble power. The remarkable expressions for the coming forth of the material world from the abyss of Deity regard creation as a birth. The Hebrew text reads in ver. 2 *b* as above, "Thou gavest birth to"; but a very small change in a single vowel gives the possibly preferable reading which preserves the parallelism of a passive verb in both clauses, "Or the earth and the world were brought forth."

The poet turns now to the other member of his antithesis. Over against God's eternal Being is set the succession of man's generations, which has been already referred to in ver. 1. This thought of successiveness is lost unless ver. 3 *b* is understood as the creative fiat which replaces by a new generation those who have been turned back to dust. Death and life, decay and ever-springing growth, are in continual alternation. The leaves, which are men, drop; the buds swell and open. The ever-knitted web is being ever run down and woven together again. It is a dreary sight, unless one can say with our psalm, "Thou turnest . . . Thou sayest, Return." Then one understands that it is not aimless or futile. If a living Person is behind the transiencies of human life, these are still pathetic and awe-kindling, but not bewildering. In ver. 3 *a* there is clear allusion to Gen. iii. 19. The word rendered "dust" may be an adjective taken as neuter=*that which is crushed*, i.e. dust; or, as others suppose, a substantive=*crushing*; but is probably best understood in the former sense. The psalm significantly uses the word for *man* which connotes frailty, and in *b* the expression "sons of man" which suggests birth.

The psalmist rises still higher in ver. 4. It is much to say that God's Being is endless, but it is more to say that He is raised above Time, and that none of the terms in which men describe duration have any meaning for Him. A thousand years, which to a man seem so long, are to Him dwindled to nothing, in comparison with the eternity of His being. As Peter has said, the converse must also be true, and "one day be with the Lord as a thousand years." He can crowd a fulness of action into narrow limits. Moments can do the work of centuries. The longest and shortest measures of time are absolutely equivalent, for both are entirely inapplicable, to His timeless Being. But what has this great thought to do here, and how is the "For" justified? It may be that the psalmist is supporting the representation of ver. 2, God's eternity, rather than that of ver. 3, man's transiency; but, seeing that this verse is followed by one which strikes the same note as ver. 3, it is more probable that here, too, the dominant thought is the brevity of human life. It never seems so short, as when measured against God's timeless existence. So, the underlying thought of ver. 3, namely, the brevity of man's time, which is there illustrated by the picture of the endless flux of generations, is here confirmed by the thought that all measures of time dwindle to equal insignificance with Him.

The psalmist next takes his stand on the border-moment between to-day and yesterday. How short looks the day that is gliding away into the past! "A watch in the night" is still shorter to our consciousness, for it passes over us unnoted.

The passing of mortal life has hitherto been contemplated in immediate connection with God's permanence, and the psalmist's tone has been a

wonderful blending of melancholy and trust. But in ver. 5 the sadder side of his contemplations becomes predominant. Frail man, frail because sinful, is his theme. The figures which set forth man's mortality are grand in their unelaborated brevity. They are like some of Michael Angelo's solemn statues. "Thou floodest them away"—a bold metaphor, suggesting the rush of a mighty stream, bearing on its tawny bosom crops, household goods, and corpses, and hurrying with its spoils to the sea. "They become a sleep." Some would take this to mean falling into the sleep of death; others would regard life as compared to a sleep—"for before we are rightly conscious of being alive, we cease to live" (Luther, quoted by Cheyne); while others find the point of comparison in the disappearance, without leaving a trace behind, of the noisy generations, sunk at once into silence, and "occupying no more space on the scroll of Time than a night's sleep" (so Kay). It is tempting to attach "in the morning" to "a sleep," but the recurrence of the expression in ver. 7 points to the retention of the present division of clauses, according to which the springing grass greets the eye at dawn, as if created by a night's rain. The word rendered "springs afresh" is taken in two opposite meanings, being by some rendered *passes away*, and by others as above. Both meanings come from the same radical notion of change, but the latter is evidently the more natural and picturesque here, as preserving, untroubled by any intrusion of an opposite thought, the cheerful picture of the pastures rejoicing in the morning sunshine, and so making more impressive the sudden, sad change wrought by evening, when all the fresh green blades and bright flowers lie turned already into brown hay by the mower's scythe and the fierce sunbeams.

"So passeth, in the passing of an hour,
Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower."

The central portion of the psalm (vv. 7-12) narrows the circle of the poet's vision to Israel, and brings out the connection between death and sin. The transition from truths of universal application is marked by the use of *we* and *us*, while the past tenses indicate that the psalm is recounting history. That transitoriness assumes a still more tragic aspect, when regarded as the result of the collision of God's "wrath" with frail man. How can such stubble but be wasted into ashes by such fire? And yet this is the same psalmist who has just discerned that the unchanging Lord is the dwelling-place of all generations. The change from the previous thought of the eternal God as the dwelling-place of frail men is very marked in this section, in which the destructive anger of God is in view. But the singer felt no contradiction between the two thoughts, and there is none. We do not understand the full blessedness of believing that God is our asylum, till we understand that He is our asylum from all that is destructive in Himself; nor do we know the significance of the universal experience of decay and death, till we learn that it is not the result of our finite being, but of sin.

That one note sounds on in solemn persistence through these verses, therein echoing the characteristic Mosaic lesson, and corresponding with the history of the people in the desert. In ver. 7 the cause of their wasting away is declared to be God's wrath, which has scattered them as in panic (Psalm xlviii. 5). The occasion of that

lightning flash of anger is confessed in ver. 8 to be the sins which, however hidden, stand revealed before God. The expression for "the light of Thy face" is slightly different from the usual one, a word being employed which means a luminary, and is used in Gen. i. for the heavenly bodies. The ordinary phrase is always used as expressing favour and blessing; but there is an illumination, as from an all-revealing light, which flashes into all dark corners of human experience, and "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." Sin smitten by that light must die. Therefore, in ver. 9, the consequence of its falling on Israel's transgressions is set forth. Their days vanish as mists before the sun, or as darkness glides out of the sky in the morning. Their noisy years are but as a murmur, scarce breaking the deep silence, and forgotten as soon as faintly heard. The psalmist sums up his sad contemplations in ver. 10, in which life is regarded as not only rigidly circumscribed within a poor seventy or, at most, eighty years, but as being, by reason of its transitoriness, unsatisfying and burdensome. The "pride" which is but trouble and vanity is that which John calls "the pride of life," the objects which, apart from God, men desire to win, and glory in possessing. The self-gratulation would be less ridiculous or tragic, if the things which evoke it lasted longer, or we lasted longer to possess them. But seeing that they swiftly pass and we fly too, surely it is but "trouble" to fight for what is "vanity" when won, and what melts away so surely and soon.

Plainly, then, things being so, man's wisdom is to seek to know two things—the power of God's anger, and the measure of his own days. But alas for human levity and bondage to sense, how few look beyond the external, or lay to heart the solemn truth that God's wrath is inevitably operative against sin, and how few have any such just conception of it as to lead to reverential awe, proportioned to the Divine character which should evoke it! Ignorance and inoperative knowledge divide mankind between them, and but a small remnant have let the truth plough deep into their inmost being and plant there holy fear of God. Therefore, the psalmist prays for himself and his people, as knowing the temptations to inconsiderate disregard and to inadequate feeling of God's opposition to sin, that His power would take untaught hearts in hand and teach them this—to count their days. Then we shall bring home, as from a ripened harvest field, the best fruit which life can yield, "a heart of wisdom," which, having learned the power of God's anger, and the number of our days, turns itself to the eternal dwelling-place, and no more is sad, when it sees life ebbing away, or the generations moving in unbroken succession into the darkness.

The third part (vv. 13-17) gathers all the previous meditations into a prayer, which is peculiarly appropriate to Israel in the wilderness, but has deep meaning for all God's servants. We note the invocation of God by the covenant name "Jehovah," as contrasted with the "Lord" of ver. 1. The psalmist draws nearer to God, and feels the closer bond of which that name is the pledge. His prayer is the more urgent, by reason of the brevity of life. So short is his time that he cannot afford to let God delay in coming to him and to his fellows. "How long?" comes pathetically from lips which have been declaring that their time of speech is so short. This is not impatience, but wistful yearning, which, even while it yearns,

leaves God to settle His own time, and, while it submits, still longs. Night has wrapped Israel, but the psalmist's faith "awakes the morning," and he prays that its beams may soon dawn and Israel be satisfied with the longed-for lovingkindness (compare Psalm xxx. 5); for life at its longest is but brief, and he would fain have what remains of it be lit with sunshine from God's face. The only thing that will secure life-long gladness is a heart satisfied with the experience of God's love. That will make morning in mirk midnight; that will take all the sorrow out of the transiency of life. The days which are filled with God are long enough to satisfy us; and they who have Him for their own will be "full of days," whatever the number of these may be.

The psalmist believes that God's justice has in store for His servants joys and blessings proportioned to the duration of their trials. He is not thinking of any future beyond the grave; but his prayer is a prophecy, which is often fulfilled even in this life and always hereafter. Sorrows rightly borne here are factors determining the glory that shall follow. There is a proportion between the years of affliction and the millenniums of glory. But the final prayer, based upon all these thoughts of God's eternity and man's transitoriness, is not for blessedness, but for vision and Divine favour on work done for Him. The deepest longing of the devout heart should be for the manifestation to itself and others of God's work. The psalmist is not only asking that God would put forth His acts in interposition for himself and his fellow-servants, but also that the full glory of these far-reaching deeds may be disclosed to their understandings as well as experienced in their lives. And since he knows that "through the ages an increasing purpose runs," he prays that coming generations may see even more glorious displays of Divine power than his contemporaries have done. How the sadness of the thought of fleeting generations succeeded by new ones vanishes when we think of them all as, in turn, spectators and possessors of God's "work"! But in that great work we are not to be mere spectators. Fleeting as our days are, they are ennobled by our being permitted to be God's tools; and if "the work of our hands" is the reflex or carrying on of His working, we can confidently ask that, though we the workers have to pass, it may be "established." "In our embers" may be "something that doth live," and that life will not all die which has done the will of God, but it and its doer will "endure for ever." Only there must be the descent upon us of "the graciousness" of God, before there can flow from us "deeds which breed not shame," but outlast the perishable earth and follow their doers into the eternal dwelling-place. The psalmist's closing prayer reaches further than he knew. Lives on which the favour of God has come down like a dove, and in which His will has been done, are not flooded away, nor do they die into silence like a whisper, but carry in themselves the seeds of immortality, and are akin to the eternity of God.

PSALM XCI.

- 1 He that sits in the secret place of the Most High,
In the shadow of the Almighty shall he lodge.
- 2 I will say to Jehovah, "My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I will trust."

- 3 For He, He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler
From the pestilence that destroys.
- 4 With His pinions shall He cover thee,
And under His wings shalt thou take refuge,
A shield and target is His Troth.
- 5 Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night,
Of the arrow [that] flies by day,
- 6 Of the pestilence [that] stalks in darkness,
Of the sickness [that] devastates at noonday.
- 7 A thousand may fall at thy side,
And a myriad at thy right hand,
To thee it shall not reach.
- 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou look on,
And see the recompense of the wicked.
- 9a "For Thou, Jehovah, art my refuge."
- 9b The Most High thou hast made thy dwelling-place.
- 10 No evil shall befall thee,
And no scourge shall come near thy tent.
- 11 For His angels will He command concerning thee,
To keep thee in all thy ways.
- 12 Upon [their] hands shall they bear thee,
Lest thou strike thy foot against a stone.
- 13 Upon lion and adder shalt thou tread,
Thou shalt trample upon young lion and dragon.
- 14 "Because to Me he clings, therefore will I deliver him
I will lift him high because he knows My name.
- 15 He shall call on Me, and I will answer him;
With him will I, even I, be in trouble,
I will rescue him and bring him to honour
- 16 [With] length of days will I satisfy him,
And give him to gaze on My salvation."

THE solemn sadness of Psalm xc. is set in strong relief by the sunny brightness of this song of happy, perfect trust in the Divine protection. The juxtaposition is, however, probably due to the verbal coincidence of the same expression being used in both psalms in reference to God. In Psalm xc. 1, and in xci. 9, the somewhat unusual designation "dwelling-place" is applied to Him, and the thought conveyed in it runs through the whole of this psalm.

An outstanding characteristic of it is its sudden changes of persons; "He," "I," and "thou" alternate in a bewildering fashion, which has led to many attempts at explanation. One point is clear—that, in vv. 14-16, God speaks, and that He speaks of, not to, the person who loves and clings to Him. At ver. 14, then, we must suppose a change of speaker, which is unmarked by any introductory formula. Looking back over the remainder of the psalm, we find that the bulk of it is addressed directly to a person who must be the same as is spoken of in the Divine promises. The "him" of the latter is the "thee" of the mass of the psalm. But this mass is broken at two points by clauses alike in meaning, and containing expressions of trust (vv. 2, 9 a). Obviously the unity of the psalm requires that the "I" of these two verses should be the "thou" of the great portion of the psalm, and the "he" of the last part. Each profession of trust will then be followed by assurances of safety thence resulting, ver. 2 having for pendant vv. 3-8, and ver. 9

being followed by vv. 9 b-13. The two utterances of personal faith are substantially identical, and the assurances which succeed them are also in effect the same. It is by some supposed that this alternation of persons is due simply to the poet expressing partly "his own feelings as from himself, and partly as if they were uttered by another" (Perowne after Ewald). But that is not an explanation of the structure; it is only a statement of the structure which requires to be explained. No doubt the poet is expressing his own feelings or convictions all through the psalm; but why does he express them in this singular fashion?

The explanation which is given by Delitzsch, Stier, Cheyne and many others takes the psalm to be antiphonal, and distributes the parts among the voices of a choir, with some variations in the allocation.

But ver. 1 still remains a difficulty. As it stands it sounds flat and tautological, and hence attempts have been made to amend it, which will presently be referred to. But it will fall into the general antiphonal scheme, if it is regarded as a prelude, sung by the same voice which twice answers the single singer with choral assurances that reward his trust. We, then, have this distribution of parts: ver. 1, the broad statement of the blessedness of dwelling with God; ver. 2, a solo, the voice of a heart encouraged thereby to exercise personal trust; vv. 3-8, answers, setting forth the security of such a refuge; ver. 9 a, solo, reiterating with sweet monotony the word of trust; vv. 9 b-13, the first voice or chorus repeating with some variation the assurances of vv. 3-8; and vv. 14-16, God's acceptance of the trust and confirmation of the assurances.

There is, no doubt, difficulty in ver. 1; for, if it is taken as an independent sentence, it sounds tautological, since there is no well-marked difference between "sitting" and "lodging," nor much between "secret place" and "shadow." But possibly the idea of safety is more strongly conveyed by "shadow" than by "secret place," and the meaning of the apparently identical assertion may be, that he who quietly enters into communion with God thereby passes into His protection; or, as Kay puts it, "Loving faith on man's part shall be met by faithful love on God's part." The LXX. changes the person of "will say" in ver. 2, and connects it with ver. 1 as its subject ("He that sits . . . that lodges . . . shall say"). Ewald, followed by Baethgen and others, regards ver. 1 as referring to the "I" of ver. 2, and translates "Sitting . . . I say." Hupfeld, whom Cheyne follows, cuts the knot by assuming that "Blessed is" has dropped out at the beginning of ver. 1, and so gets a smooth run of construction and thought ("Happy is he who sits . . . who lodges . . . who says"). It is suspiciously smooth, obliterates the characteristic change of persons, of which the psalm has other instances, and has no support except the thought that the psalmist would have saved us a great deal of trouble, if he had only been wise enough to have written so. The existing text is capable of a meaning in accordance with his general drift. A wide declaration like that of ver. 1 fittingly preludes the body of the song, and naturally evokes the pathetic profession of faith, which follows.

According to the accents, ver. 2 is to be read "I will say, 'To Jehovah [belongs] my refuge.'" etc. But it is better to divide as above. Jehovah is the refuge. The psalmist speaks to Him, with the exclamation of yearning trust. He can

only call Him by precious names, to use which, in however broken a fashion, is an appeal that goes straight to His heart, as it comes straight from the suppliant's. The singer lovingly accumulates the Divine names in these two first verses. He calls God "Most High," "Almighty," when he utters the general truth of the safety of souls that enter His secret place; but, when he speaks his own trust, he addresses Jehovah, and adds to the wide designation "God" the little word "my," which claims personal possession of His fulness of Deity. The solo voice does not say much, but it says enough. There has been much underground work before that clear jet of personal "appropriating faith" could spring into light.

We might have looked for a *Selah* here, if this psalm had stood in the earlier books, but we can feel the brief pause before the choral answer comes in vv. 3-8. It sets forth in lofty poetry the blessings that such a trust secures. Its central idea is that of safety. That safety is guaranteed in regard to two classes of dangers—those from enemies, and those from diseases. Both are conceived of as divided into secret and open perils. Ver. 3 proclaims the trustful soul's immunity, and ver. 4 beautifully describes the Divine protection which secures it. Vv. 5, 6, expand the general notion of safety, into defence against secret and open foes and secret and open pestilences; while vv. 7, 8, sum up the whole, in a vivid contrast between the multitude of victims and the man sheltered in God, and looking out from his refuge on the wide-rolling flood of destruction. As in Psalm xviii. 5, Death is represented as a "fowler" into whose snares men heedlessly flutter, unless held back by God's delivering hand. The mention of pestilence in ver. 3 somewhat anticipates the proper order, as the same idea recurs in its appropriate place in ver. 6. Hence the rendering "word," which requires no consonantal change is adopted from the LXX. by several moderns. But that is feeble, and the slight irregularity of a double mention of one form of peril, which is naturally suggested by the previous reference to Death, is not of much moment. The beautiful description of God sheltering the trustful man beneath his pinions recalls Deut. xxxii. 11 and Psalms xvii. 8, lxiii. 7. The mother eagle, spreading her dread wing over her eaglets, is a wonderful symbol of the union of power and gentleness. It would be a bold hand which would drag the fledglings from that warm hiding-place and dare the terrors of that beak and claws. But this pregnant verse (4) not only tells of the strong defence which God is, but also, in a word, sets in clear light man's way of reaching that asylum. "Thou shalt take refuge." It is the word which is often vaguely rendered "trust," but which, if we retain its original signification, becomes illuminative as to what that trust is. The flight of the soul, conscious of nakedness and peril, to the safe shelter of God's breast is a description of faith which, in practical value, surpasses much learned dissertation. And this verse adds yet another point to its comprehensive statements, when, changing the figure, it calls God's *Troth*, or faithful adherence to His promises and obligations, our "shield and target." We have not to fly to a dumb God for shelter, or to risk anything upon a Peradventure. He has spoken, and His word is inviolable. Therefore, trust is possible. And between ourselves and all evil we may lift the shield of His *Troth*. His faithfulness is our sure defence, and Faith is our shield only in a secondary sense, its office be-

ing but to grasp our true defence, and to keep us well behind that.

The assaults of enemies and the devastations of pestilence are taken in vv. 5, 6, as types of all perils. These evils speak of a less artificial stage of society than that in which our experience moves, but they serve us as symbols of more complex dangers besetting outward and inward life. "The terror of the night" seems best understood as parallel with the "arrow that flies by day," in so far as both refer to actual attacks by enemies. Nocturnal surprises were favourite methods of assault in early warfare. Such an explanation is worthier than the supposition that the psalmist means demons that haunt the night. In ver. 6 Pestilence is personified as stalking, shrouded in darkness, the more terrible because it strikes unseen. Ver. 6 *b* has been understood, as by the Targum and LXX., to refer to demons who exercise their power in noonday. But this explanation rests upon a misreading of the word rendered "devastates." The other translated "sickness" is only found, besides this place, in Deut. xxxii. 24 ("destruction") and Isa. xxviii. 2 ("a destroying storm," lit. a storm of destruction), and in somewhat different form in Hosea xiii. 14. It comes from a root meaning *to cut*, and seems here to be a synonym for pestilence. Baethgen sees in "the arrow by day" the fierce sunbeams, and in "the heat (as he renders) which rages at noon-day" the poisonous simoom. The trustful man, sheltered in God, looks on while thousands fall round him, as Israel looked from their homes on the Passover night, and sees that there is a God that judges and recompenses evil-doers by evil suffered.

Heartened by these great assurances, the single voice once more declares its trust. Ver. 9 *a* is best separated from *b*, though Hupfeld here again assumes that "thou hast said" has fallen out between "For" and "Thou."

This second utterance of trust is almost identical with the first. Faith has no need to vary its expression. "Thou, Jehovah, art my refuge" is enough for it. God's mighty name and its personal possession of all which that name means, as its own hiding-place, are its treasures which it does not weary of recounting. Love loves to repeat itself. The deepest emotions, like song-birds, have but two or three notes, which they sing over and over again all the long day through. He that can use this singer's words of trust has a vocabulary rich enough.

The responsive assurances (vv. 9 *b*-13) are, in like manner, substantially identical with the preceding ones, but differences may be discerned by which these are heightened in comparison with the former. The promise of immunity is more general. Instead of two typical forms of danger, the widest possible exemption from all forms of it is declared in ver. 10. *No* evil shall come near, *no* scourge approach, the "tent" of the man whose real and permanent "dwelling-place" is Jehovah. There are much beauty and significance in that contrast of the two homes in which a godly man lives, housing, as far as his outward life is concerned, in a transitory abode, which to-morrow may be rolled up and moved to another camping-place in the desert, but abiding in so far as his true being is concerned, in God, the permanent dwelling-place through all generations. The transitory outward life has reflected on it some light of peaceful security from that true home. It is further noteworthy that the second group of as-

surances is concerned with active life, while the first only represented a passive condition of safety beneath God's wing. In vv. 11, 12, His angels take the place of protectors, and the sphere in which they protect is "in all thy ways"—i.e., in the activities of ordinary life. The dangers *there* are of stumbling, whether that be construed as referring to outward difficulties or to temptations to sin.

The perils, further specified in ver. 13, correspond to those of the previous part in being open and secret: the lion with its roar and leap, the adder with its stealthy glide among the herbage and its unlooked-for bite. So, the two sets of assurances, taken together, cover the whole ground of life, both in its moments of hidden communion in the secret place of the Most High, and in its times of diligent discharge of duty on life's common way. Perils of communion and perils of work are equally real, and equally may we be sheltered from them. God Himself spreads His wing over the trustful man, and sends His messengers to keep him, in all the paths appointed for him by God. The angels have no charge to take stones out of the way. Hindrances are good for us. Smooth paths weary and make presumptuous. Rough ones bring out our best and drive us to look to God. But His messengers have for their task to lift us on their palms over difficulties, not so that we shall not feel them to be difficult, but so that we shall not strike our foot against them. Many a man remembers the elevation and buoyancy of spirit which strangely came to him when most pressed by work or trouble. God's angels were bearing him up. Active life is full of open and secret foes as well as of difficulties. He that keeps near to God will pass unharmed through them all, and, with a foot made strong and firm by God's own power infused into it, will be able to crush the life out of the most formidable and the most sly assailants. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Finally, God Himself speaks, and confirms and deepens the previous assurances. That He is represented as speaking *of*, not *to*, His servant increases the majesty of the utterance, by seeming to call the universe to hear, and converts promises to an individual into promises to every one who will fulfil the requisite conditions. These are threefold.

God desires that men should cling to Him, know His name, and call on Him. The word rendered "cling" includes more than "setting love upon" one. It means to bind or knit oneself to anything, and so embraces the cleaving of a fixed heart, of a "recollected" mind, and of an obedient will. Such clinging demands effort: for every hand relaxes its grasp, unless ever and again tightened. He who thus clings will come to "know" God's "name," with the knowledge which is born of experience, and is loving familiarity, not mere intellectual apprehension. Such clinging and knowledge will find utterance in continual converse with God, not only when needing deliverance, but in perpetual aspiration after Him.

The promises to such an one go very deep and stretch very far. "I will deliver him." So the previous assurance that no evil shall come nigh him is explained and brought into correspondence with the facts of life. Evil may be experienced. Sorrows will come. But they will not touch the central core of the true life, and from them God will deliver, not only by causing them

to cease, but by fitting us to bear. Clinging to Him, a man will be "drawn out of many waters," like Peter on the stormy lake. "I will set him on high" is more than a parallel promise to that of deliverance. It includes that; for a man lifted to a height is safe from the flood that sweeps through the valley, or from the enemies that ravage the plain. But that elevation, which comes from knowing God's name, brings more than safety, even a life lived in a higher region than that of things seen. "I will answer him." How can He fail to hear when they who trust Him cry? Promises, especially for the troubled, follow, which do not conflict with the earlier assurances, rightly understood. "I will be with him in trouble." God's presence is the answer to His servant's call. God comes nearer to devout and tried souls, as a mother presses herself caressingly closer to a weeping child. So, no man need add solitude to sadness, but may have God sitting with him, like Job's friends, waiting to comfort him with true comfort. And His presence delivers from, and glorifies after, trouble borne as becomes God's friend. The bit of dull steel might complain, if it could feel, of the pain of being polished, but the result is to make it a mirror fit to flash back the sunlight.

"With length of days will I satisfy him" is, no doubt, a promise belonging more especially to Old Testament times; but if we put emphasis on "satisfy," rather than on the extended duration, it may fairly suggest that, to the trustful soul, life is long enough, whatever its duration, and that the guest, who has sat at God's table here, is not unwilling to rise from it, when his time comes, being "satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord." The vision of God's salvation, which is set last, seems from its position in the series to point, however dimly, to a vision which comes after earth's troubles and length of days. The psalmist's language implies not a mere casual beholding, but a fixed gaze. Delitzsch renders "revel in My salvation" (English translation). Cheyne has "feast his eyes with." Such seeing is possession. The crown of God's promises to the man who makes God his dwelling-place is a full, rapturous experience of a full salvation, which follows on the troubles and deliverances of earth, and brings a more dazzling honour and a more perfect satisfaction.

PSALM XCII.

- 1 Good is it to give thanks to Jehovah,
And to harp to Thy name, Most High;
- 2 To declare in the morning Thy lovingkindness,
And thy faithfulness in the night seasons,
- 3 Upon a ten-stringed [instrument], even upon
the psaltery.
With skilful music on the lyre.
- 4 For Thou hast gladdened me, Jehovah, with
Thy working,
In the works of Thy hands will I shout aloud
my joy.
- 5 How great are Thy works, Jehovah,
Exceeding deep are Thy purposes!
- 6 A brutish man knows not,
And a fool understands not this.
- 7 When the wicked sprang like herbage,
And all the workers of iniquity blossomed,
[It was only] for their being destroyed for
ever.

- 8 But Thou art [enthroned] on high for ever-
more, Jehovah!
- 9 For behold Thy enemies, Jehovah,
For behold Thy enemies—shall perish,
All the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.
- 10 But Thou hast exalted my horn like a wild ox.
I am anointed with fresh oil (?).
- 11 My eye also gazed on my adversaries,
Of them that rose against me as evil-doers my
ear heard.
- 12 The righteous shall spring like the palm,
Like a cedar in Lebanon shall he grow.
- 13 Planted in the house of Jehovah,
They shall spring in the courts of our God.
- 14 Still shall they bear fruit in old age,
Full of sap and verdant shall they be:
- 15 To declare that Jehovah is upright,
My Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in
Him.

AUTHORITIES differ in their arrangement of this psalm. Clearly, the first three verses are a prelude; and if these are left out of account, the remainder of the psalm consists of twelve verses, which fall into two groups of six each, the former of which mainly deals with the brief prosperity and final overthrow of the wicked, while the latter paints the converse truth of the security and blessedness of the righteous. Both illustrate the depth of God's works and purposes, which is the psalmist's theme. A further division of each of these six verses into groups of three is adopted by Delitzsch, and may be accepted. There will then be five strophes of three verses each, of which the first is introductory; the second and third, a pair setting forth the aspect of Providence towards the wicked; and the fourth and fifth, another pair, magnifying its dealings with the righteous. Perowne takes the eighth verse, which is distinguished by containing only one clause, as the kernel of the psalm, which is preceded by seven verses, constituting the first division, and followed by seven, making the second. But this arrangement, though tempting, wrenches ver. 9 from its kindred ver. 7.

Vv. 1-3 are in any case introductory. In form they are addressed to Jehovah, in thankful acknowledgment of the privilege and joy of praise. In reality they are a summons to men to taste its gladness, and to fill each day and brighten every night by music of thanksgiving. The devout heart feels that worship is "good," not only as being acceptable to God and conformable to man's highest duty, but as being the source of delight to the worshipper. Nothing is more characteristic of the Psalter than the joy which often dances and sings through its strains. Nothing affords a surer test of the reality of worship than the worshipper's joy in it. With much significance and beauty, "Thy lovingkindness" is to be the theme of each morning, as we rise to a new day and find His mercy, radiant as the fresh sunshine, waiting to bless our eyes, and "Thy faithfulness" is to be sung in the night seasons, as we part from another day which has witnessed to His fulfilment of all His promises.

The second strophe contains the reason for praise—namely, the greatness and depth of the Divine works and purposes. The works meant are, as is obvious from the whole strain of the psalm, those of God's government of the world. The theme which exercised earlier psalmists reappears

here, but the struggles of faith with unbelief, which are so profoundly and pathetically recorded in Psalm lxxiii., are ended for this singer. He bows in trustful adoration before the greatness of the works and the unsearchable depth of the purpose of God which directs the works. The sequence of vv. 4-6 is noteworthy. The central place is occupied by ver. 5—a wondering and reverent exclamation, evoked by the very mysteries of Providence. On either side of it stand verses describing the contrasted impression made by these on devout and on gross minds. The psalmist and his fellows are “gladdened,” though he cannot see to the utmost verge or deepest abyss of Works or Plans. What he does see is good; and if sight does not go down to the depths, it is because eyes are weak, not because these are less pellucid than the sunlit shallows. What gladdens the trustful soul, which is in sympathy with God, only bewilders the “brutish man”—i.e., the man who by immersing his faculties in sense, has descended to the animal level; and it is too grave and weighty for the “fool,” the man of incurable levity and self-conceit, to trouble himself to ponder. The eye sees what it is capable of seeing. A man’s judgment of God’s dealings depends on his relation to God and on the dispositions of his soul.

The sterner aspect of Providence is dealt with in the next strophe (vv. 7-9). Some recent signal destruction of evil-doers seems to be referred to. It exemplifies once more the old truth which another psalmist has sung (Psalm xxxvii. 2), that the prosperity of evil-doers is short-lived, like the blossoming herbage, and not only short-lived, but itself the occasion of their destruction. The apparent success of the wicked is as a pleasant slope that leads downward. The quicker the blossoming, the sooner the petals fall. “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” As in the previous strophe the middle verse was central in idea as well as in place, so in this one. Ver. 8 states the great fact from which the overthrow of the wicked, which is declared in the verses before and after results. God’s eternal elevation above the Transitory and the Evil is not merely contrasted with these, but is assigned as the reason why what is evil is transitory. We might render “Thou, Jehovah, art high (lit. a height) for evermore,” as, in effect, the LXX. and other old versions do; but the application of such an epithet to God is unexampled, and the rendering above is preferable. God’s eternal exaltation “is the great pillar of the universe and of our faith” (Perowne). From it must one day result that all God’s enemies shall perish, as the psalmist reiterates, with triumphant reduplication of the designation of the foes, as if he would make plain that the very name “God’s enemies” contained a prophecy of their destruction. However closely banded, they “shall be scattered.” Evil may make conspiracies for a time, for common hatred of good brings discordant elements into strange fellowship, but in its real nature it is divisive, and, sooner or later, allies in wickedness become foes, and no two of them are left together. The only lasting human association is that which binds men to one another, because all are bound to God.

From the scattered fugitives the psalmist turns first to joyful contemplation of his own blessedness, and then to wider thoughts of the general well-being of all God’s friends. The more personal references are comprised in the fourth strophe (vv. 10-12). The metaphor of the exalted horn expresses, as in Psalms lxxv. 10, lxxxix. 17, tri-

umph or the vindication of the psalmist by his deliverance. Ver. 10 *b* is very doubtful. The word usually rendered “I am anointed” is peculiar. Another view of the word takes it for an infinitive used as a noun, with the meaning “growing old,” or, as Cheyne renders, “wasting strength.” This translation (“my wasting strength with rich oil”) is that of the LXX. and other ancient versions, and of Cheyne and Baethgen among moderns. If adopted, the verb must be understood as repeated from the preceding clause, and the slight incongruity thence arising can be lessened by giving a somewhat wider meaning to “exalted,” such as “strengthen” or the like. The psalmist would then represent his deliverance as being like refreshing a failing old age, by anointing with fresh oil.

Thus triumphant and quickened, he expects to gaze on the downfall of his foes. He uses the same expression as is found in Psalm xci. 8, with a similar connotation of calm security, and possibly of satisfaction. There is no need for heightening his feelings into “desire,” as in the Authorized and Revised Versions. The next clause (ver. 11 *b*) “seems to have been expressly framed to correspond with the other; it occurs nowhere else in this sense” (Perowne). A less personal verse (ver. 12) forms the transition to the last strophe, which is concerned with the community of the righteous. Here the singular number is retained. By “the righteous” the psalmist does not exactly mean himself, but he blends his own individuality with that of the ideal character, so that he is both speaking of his own future and declaring a general truth. The wicked “spring like herbage” (ver. 7), but the righteous “spring like the palm.” The point of comparison is apparently the gracefulness of the tree, which lifts its slender but upright stem, and is ever verdant and fruitful. The cedar in its massive strength, its undecaying vigour, and the broad shelves of its foliage, green among the snows of Lebanon, stands in strong contrast to the palm. Gracefulness is wedded to strength, and both are perennial in lives devoted to God and Right. Evil blooms quickly, and quickly dies. What is good lasts. One cedar outlives a hundred generations of the grass and flowers that encircle its steadfast feet.

The last part extends the thoughts of ver. 12 to all the righteous. It does not name them, for it is needless to do so. Imagery and reality are fused together in this strophe. It is questionable whether there are trees planted in the courts of the Temple; but the psalmist’s thought is that the righteous will surely be found there, and that it is their native soil, in which rooted, they are permanent. The facts underlying the somewhat violent metaphor are that true righteousness is found only in the dwellers with God, that they who anchor themselves in Him, as a tree in the earth, are both stayed on, and fed from Him. The law of physical decay does not enfeeble all the powers of devout men, even while they are subject to it. As aged palm trees bear the heaviest clusters, so lives which are planted in and nourished from God know no term of their fruitfulness, and are full of sap and verdant, when lives that have shut themselves off from Him are like an old stump, gaunt and dry, fit only for firewood. Such lives are prolonged and made fruitful, as standing proofs that Jehovah is upright, rewarding all cleaving to Him and doing of His will, with conservation of strength, and ever-growing power to do His will.

Ver. 15 is a reminiscence of Deut. xxxii. 4. The last clause is probably to be taken in connec-

tion with the preceding, as by Cheyne ("And that in my Rock there is no unrighteousness"). But it may also be regarded as a final avowal of the psalmist's faith, the last result of his contemplations of the mysteries of Providence. These but drive him to cling close to Jehovah, as his sole refuge and his sure shelter, and to ring out *this* as the end which shall one day be manifest as the net result of Providence—that there is no least trace of unrighteousness in Him.

PSALM XCIII.

- 1 Jehovah is King, with majesty has He clothed Himself,
Jehovah has clothed Himself, has girded Himself with strength,
Yea, the world is set fast [that] it cannot be moved.
- 2 Fast is set Thy throne from of yore.
From eternity art Thou.
- 3 The streams, Jehovah, have lifted up,
The streams have lifted up their voice,
The streams lift up their tumult.
- 4 Above the voices of many waters,
Mighty [waters], ocean breakers,
Mightier is Jehovah on high.
- 5 Thy testimonies are utterly to be trusted:
Holiness fits Thy house,
Jehovah, for length of days.

THIS is the first of a group of psalms celebrating Jehovah as King. It is followed by one which somewhat interrupts the unity of subject in the group, but may be brought into connection with them by being regarded as hymning Jehovah's kingly and judicial providence, as manifested in the subjugation of rebels against His throne. The remaining psalms of the group (xcv.-c.) rise to a height of lyric exultation in meditating on the reign of Jehovah. Psalms xciii. and xciv. are followed by two (xcv., vi.) beginning with ringing calls for new songs to hail the new manifestation of Himself, by which Jehovah has, as it were, inaugurated a new stage in His visible reign on earth. Psalm xcvi. again breaks out into the joyful proclamation "Jehovah is King," which is followed, as if by a chorus, with a repeated summons for a new song (Psalm xcvi.). Once more the proclamation "Jehovah is King" is sounded out in Psalm xcix., and then the group is closed by Psalm c., with its call to all lands to crowd round Jehovah's throne with "tumult of acclaim." Probably the historical fact underlying this new conviction of, and triumph in, the Kingdom of Jehovah is the return from exile. But the tone of prophetic anticipation in these exuberant hymns of confident joy can scarcely fail of recognition. The psalmists sang of an ideal state to which their most glorious experiences but remotely approximated. They saw "not yet all things put under Him," but they were sure that He is King, and they were as sure, though with the certitude of faith fixed on His word and not with that of sight, that His universal dominion would one day be universally recognised and rejoiced in.

This short psalm but strikes the keynote for the group. It is overture to the oratorio, prelude of the symphony. Jehovah's reign, the stability of His throne, the consequent fixity of the natural order, His supremacy over all noisy rage of op-

position and lawlessness, either in Nature or among men, are set forth with magnificent energy and brevity. But the King of the world is not a mere Nature-compelling Jove. He has spoken to men, and the stability of the natural order but faintly shadows the firmness of His "testimonies," which are worthy of absolute reliance, and which make the souls that do rely on them stable as the firm earth, and steadfast with a steadfastness derived from Jehovah's throne. He not only reigns over, but dwells among, men, and His power keeps His dwelling-place inviolate and lasting as His reign.

Ver. 1 describes an act rather than a state. "Jehovah has become King" by some specific manifestation of His sovereignty. Not as though He had not been King before, as ver. 2 immediately goes on to point out, but that He has shown the world, by a recent deed, the eternal truth that He reigns. His coronation has been by His own hands. No others have arrayed Him in His royal robes. The psalmist dwells with emphatic reiteration on the thought that Jehovah has clothed *Himself* with majesty and girded *Himself* with strength. All the stability of Nature is a consequence of His self-created and self-manifested power. That Strength holds a reeling world steady. The psalmist knew nothing about the fixity of natural law, but his thought goes down below that fixity, and finds its reason in the constant forth-putting of Divine power. Ver. 2 goes far back as well as deep down or high up, when it travels into the dim, unbounded past, and sees there, amidst its mists, one shining, solid substance, Jehovah's throne, which stood firm before every "then." The word rendered *from of yore* is literally "from then," as if to express the priority of that throne to every period of defined time. And even that grand thought can be capped by a grander climax: "From eternity art Thou." Therefore the world stands firm.

But there are things in the firm world that are not firm. There are "streams" or perhaps "floods," which seem to own no control, in their hoarse dash and devastating rush. The sea is ever the symbol of rebellious opposition and of ungoverned force. Here both the natural and symbolic meanings are present. And the picture is superbly painted. The sound of the blows of the breakers against the rocks, or as they clash with each other, is vividly repeated in the word rendered "tumult," which means rather a blow or collision, and here seems to express the thud of the waves against an obstacle.

Ver. 4 is difficult to construe. The word rendered "mighty" is according to the accentuation, attached to "breakers," but stands in an unusual position if it is to be so taken. It seems better to disregard the accents, and to take "mighty" as a second adjective belonging to "waters." These will then be described as both multitudinous and proud in their strength, while "ocean breakers" will stand in apposition to *waters*. Jehovah's might is compared with these. It would be but a poor measure of it to say that it was more than they; but the comparison means that He subdues the floods and proves His power by taming and calming them. Evidently we are to see shining through the nature-picture Jehovah's triumphant subjugation of rebellious men, which is one manifestation of His kingly power. That dominion is not such as to make opposition impossible. Antagonism of the wildest sort neither casts doubt on its reality nor impinges a hair's-breadth on its sover-

eignty. All such futile rebellion will be subdued. The shriek of the storm, the dash of the breakers, will be hushed when He says "Peace," and the highest toss of their spray does not wet, much less shake, His stable throne. Such was the psalmist's faith as he looked out over a revolted world. Such may well be ours, who "hear a deeper voice across the storm."

That sweet closing verse comes by its very abruptness with singular impressiveness. We pass from wild commotion into calm. Jehovah speaks, and His words are witnesses both of what He is and of what men should and may be. Power is not an object for trust to fasten on, unless it is gracious, and gives men account of its motives and ends. Words are not objects for trust to fasten on, unless they have power for fulfilment behind them. But if the King, who sets fast earth and bridles seas, speaks to us, we may utterly confide in His word, and, if we do, we shall share in His stable being, in so far as man is capable of resemblance to the changeless God. Trust in firm promises is the secret of firmness. Jehovah has not only given Israel His word, but His house, and His kingly power preserves His dwelling-place from wrong.

"Holiness" in ver. 5 expresses an attribute of Jehovah's house, not a quality of the worshippers therein. It cannot but be preserved from assault, since He dwells there. A king who cannot keep his own palace safe from invaders can have little power. If this psalm is, as it evidently is, post-exilic, how could the singer, remembering the destruction of the Temple, speak thus? Because he had learned the lesson of that destruction, that the earthly house in which Jehovah dwelt among men had ceased to be His, by reason of the sins of its frequenters. Therefore, it was "burned with fire." The profaned house is no longer Jehovah's but, as Jesus said with strong emphasis on the first word, "*Your* house is left unto you desolate." The Kingship of Jehovah is proclaimed eloquently and tragically by the desolated shrine.

PSALM XCIV.

- 1 God of vengeance, Jehovah,
God of vengeance, shine forth.
- 2 Lift up Thyself, Judge of the earth,
Return recompense to the proud.
- 3 For how long, Jehovah, shall the wicked,
For how long shall the wicked exult?
- 4 They well out, they speak—arrogance,
They give themselves airs like princes—all
these workers of iniquity.
- 5 Thy people, Jehovah, they crush in pieces,
And Thine inheritance they afflict.
- 6 Widow and stranger they kill,
And orphans they murder.
- 7 And they say, "Jah sees [it] not,
And the God of Jacob considers it not."
- 8 Consider, ye brutish among the people,
And ye fools, when will ye be wise?
- 9 The Planter of the ear, shall He not hear?
Or the Former of the eye, shall He not see?
- 10 The Instructor of the nations, shall He not
punish,—
The Teacher of knowledge to man?
- 11 Jehovah knows the thoughts of men,
For they are [but] a breath.

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- 12 Happy the man whom Thou instructest, Je-
hovah,
And teachest from Thy law,
- 13 To give him rest from the days of evil,
Till there be digged for the wicked a pit.
- 14 For Jehovah will not spurn away His people,
And His inheritance He will not forsake.
- 15 For to righteousness shall judgment return,
And after it shall all the upright in heart
[follow].
- 16 Who will rise up for me against the evil-
doers?
Who will set himself for me against the
workers of iniquity?
- 17 Unless Jehovah had been a help for me,
My soul had soon dwelt in silence.
- 18 When I say, "My foot slips,"
Thy lovingkindness, Jehovah, stays me.
- 19 In the multitude of my divided thoughts
within me,
Thy comforts delight my soul.
- 20 Can the throne of destruction be confederate
with Thee,
Which frameth mischief by statute?
- 21 They come in troops against the soul of the
righteous,
And innocent blood they condemn.
- 22 But Jehovah is to me a high tower,
And my God the rock of my refuge.
- 23 And He brings back upon them their in-
iquities,
And by their own evil will He root them out,
Jehovah our God will root them out.

THE theme of God the Judge is closely allied to that of God the King, as other psalms of this group show, in which His coming to judge the world is the subject of rapturous praise. This psalm hymns Jehovah's retributive sway, for which it passionately cries, and in which it confidently trusts. Israel is oppressed by insolent rulers, who have poisoned the fountains of justice, condemning the innocent, enacting unrighteous laws, and making a prey of all the helpless. These "judges of Sodom" are not foreign oppressors, for they are "among the people"; and even while they scoff at Jehovah's judgments they call Him by His covenant names of "Jah" and "God of Jacob." There is no need, therefore, to look beyond Israel for the originals of the dark picture, nor does it supply data for fixing the period of the psalm.

The structure and course of thought are transparent. First comes an invocation to God as the Judge of the earth (vv. 1, 2); then follow groups of four verses each, subdivided into pairs,—the first of these (vv. 3-6) pictures the doings of the oppressors; the second (vv. 7-11) quotes their delusion that their crimes are unseen by Jehovah, and refutes their dream of impunity, and it is closed by a verse in excess of the normal number, emphatically asserting the truth which the mockers denied. The third group declares the blessedness of the men whom God teaches, and the certainty of His retribution to vindicate the cause of the righteous (vv. 12-15). Then follow the singer's own cry for help in his own need, as one of the oppressed community, and a sweet reminiscence of former aid, which calms his present anxieties. The concluding group goes back to description of the lawless law-makers and their doings, and ends with trust that the retribution prayed for in the

first verses will verily be dealt out to them, and that thereby both the singer, as a member of the nation, and the community will find Jehovah, who is both "my God" and "our God," a high tower.

The reiterations in the first two verses are not oratorical embellishments, but reveal intense feeling and pressing need. It is a cold prayer which contents itself with one utterance. A man in straits continues to cry for help till it comes, or till he sees it coming. To this singer, the one aspect of Jehovah's reign which was forced on him by Israel's dismal circumstances was the judicial. There are times when no thought of God is so full of strength as that He is "the God of recompenses," as Jeremiah calls Him (li. 56), and when the longing of good men is that He would flash forth, and slay evil by the brightness of His coming. They who have no profound loathing of sin, or who have never felt the crushing weight of legalised wickedness, may shrink from such aspirations as the psalmist's, and brand them as ferocious; but hearts longing for the triumph of righteousness will not take offence at them.

The first group (vv. 3-6) lifts the cry of suffering Faith, which has almost become impatience, but turns to, not from, God, and so checks complaints of His delay, and converts them into prayer. "How long, O Lord?" is the burden of many a tried heart; and the Seer heard it from the souls beneath the altar. This psalm passes quickly to dilate on the crimes of the rulers which forced out that prayer. The portrait has many points of likeness to that drawn in Psalm lxxiii. Here, as there, boastful speech and haughty carriage are made prominent, being put before even cruelty and oppression. "They well out, they speak—arrogance": both verbs have the same object. Insolent self-exaltation pours from the fountain of their pride in copious jets. "They give themselves airs like princes." The verb in this clause may mean *to say among themselves* or *to boast*, but is now usually regarded as meaning *to behave like a prince—i.e., to carry oneself insolently*. Vain-glorious arrogance manifest in boasting speech and masterful demeanour characterises Eastern rulers, especially those who have risen from low origin. Every little village tyrant gave himself airs, as if he were a king; and the lower his rank, the greater his insolence. These oppressors were grinding the nation to powder, and what made their crime the darker was that it was Jehovah's people and inheritance which they thus harassed. Helplessness should be a passport to a ruler's care, but it had become a mark for murderous attack. Widow, stranger, and orphan are named as types of defencelessness.

Nothing in this strophe indicates that these oppressors are foreigners. Nor does the delusion that Jehovah neither saw nor cared for their doings, which the next strophe (vv. 7-11) states and confutes imply that they were so. Cheyne, indeed, adduces the name "God of Jacob," which is put into their mouths, as evidence that they are pictured as knowing Jehovah only as one among many tribal or national deities; but the name is too familiar upon the lips of Israelites, and its use by others is too conjectural, to allow of such a conclusion. Rather, the language derives its darkest shade from being used by Hebrews, who are thereby declaring themselves apostates from God as well as oppressors of His people. Their mad, practical atheism makes the psalmist blaze up in indignant rebuke and impetuous argumentation. He turns to them, and addresses them in

rough, plain words, strangely contrasted with their arrogant utterances regarding themselves. They are "brutish" (cf. Psalm lxxiii. 22) and "fools." The psalmist, in his height of moral indignation, towers above these petty tyrants, and tells them home truths very profitable for such people, however dangerous to their utterer. There is no obligation to speak smooth words to rulers whose rule is injustice and their religion impiety. Ahab had his Elijah, and Herod his John Baptist. The succession has been continued through the ages.

Delitzsch and others, who take the oppressors to be foreigners, are obliged to suppose that the psalmist turns in ver. 8 to those Israelites who had been led to doubt God by the prosperity of the wicked; but there is nothing, except the exigencies of that mistaken supposition, to show that any others than the deniers of God's providence who have just been quoted are addressed as "among the people." Their denial was the more inexcusable, because they belonged to the people whose history was one long proof that Jehovah did see and recompense evil. Two considerations are urged by the psalmist, who becomes for the moment a philosophical theologian, in confutation of the error in question. First, he argues that nothing can be in the effect which is not in the cause, that the Maker of men's eyes cannot be blind, nor the Planter of their ears deaf. The thought has wide applications. It hits the centre, in regard to many modern denials as well as in regard to these blunt, ancient ones. Can a universe plainly full of purpose have come from a purposeless source? Can finite persons have emerged from an impersonal Infinity? Have we not a right to argue upwards from man's make to God his maker, and to find in Him the archetype of all human capacity. We may mark that, as has been long ago observed, the psalm avoids gross anthropomorphism, and infers not that the Creator of the ear has ears, but that He hears. As Jerome (quoted by Delitzsch) says, "*Membra sustulit, efficientias dedit.*"

In ver. 10 a second argument is employed, which turns on the thought that God is the educator of mankind. That office of instructor cannot be carried out unless He is also their chastiser, when correction is needed. The psalmist looks beyond the bounds of Israel, the recipient of special revelation (cf. ver. 12), and recognises, what seldom appears in the Old Testament, but is unquestionably there, the great thought that He is teaching all mankind by manifold ways, and especially by the law written in their hearts. Jewish particularism, the exaggeration into a lie of the truth of God's special revelation to Israel, came to forget or deny God's education of mankind. Alas that the same mistake was inherited by so many epochs of the Church!

The teaching of the strophe is gathered up in ver. 11, which exceeds the normal number of four verses in each group, and asserts strongly the conclusion for which the psalmist has been arguing. The rendering of *b* is, "For (not That) they (*i.e.* men) are but a breath." "The ground of the Omniscience which sees the thoughts of men through and through is profoundly laid in the vanity, *i.e.* the finiteness, of men, as the correlative of the Infiniteness of God" (Hupfeld).

In the strophe vv. 12-15, the psalmist turns from the oppressors to their victims, the meek of the earth, and changes his tone from fiery remonstrance to gracious consolation. The true point of view from which to regard the oppressors' wrong

is to see in it part of God's educational processes. Jehovah, who "instructs" all men by conscience, "instructs" Israel, and by the Law "teaches" the right interpretation of such afflictive providences. Happy he who accepts that higher education! A further consolation lies in considering the purpose of the special revelation to Israel, which will be realised in patient hearts that are made wise thereby—namely, calm repose of submission and trust, which are not disturbed by any stormy weather. There is possible for the harassed man "peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation."

If we recognise that life is mainly educational, we shall neither be astonished nor disturbed by sorrows. It is not to be wondered at that the schoolmaster has a rod, and uses it sometimes. There is rest from evil even while in evil, if we understand the purpose of evil. Yet another consolation lies in the steadfast anticipation of its transiency and of the retribution measured to its doers. That is no unworthy source of comfort. And the ground on which it rests is the impossibility of God's forsaking His people, His inheritance. These designations of Israel look back to ver. 5, where the crushed and afflicted are designated by the same words. Israel's relation to Jehovah made the calamities more startling; but it also makes their cessation, and retribution for them on their inflictors more certain. It is the trial and triumph of Faith to be sure, while tyrants grind and crush, that Jehovah has not deserted their victims. He cannot change His purpose; therefore, sorrows and prosperity are but divergent methods, concurring in carrying out His unalterable design. The individual sufferer may take comfort from his belonging to the community to which the presence of Jehovah is guaranteed for ever. The singer puts his convictions as to what is to be the upshot of all the perplexed riddles of human affairs into epigrammatic form, in the obscure, gnome-like saying, "To righteousness shall judgment return," by which he seems to mean that the administration of justice, which at present was being trampled under foot, "shall come back to the eternal principle of all judicial action, namely, righteousness,"—in shorter words, there shall be no schism between the judgments of earthly tribunals and justice. The psalmist's hope is that of all good men and sufferers from unjust rulers. All the upright in heart long for such a state of things and follow after it, either in the sense of delight in it ("Dem Recht müssen alle frommen Herzen zufallen"—Luther), or of seeking to bring it about. The psalmist's hope is realised in the King of Men, whose own judgments are truth, and who infuses righteousness and the love of it into all who trust in Him.

The singer comes closer to his own experience in the next strophe (vv. 16-19), in which he claims his share in these general sources of rest and patience, and thankfully thinks of past times, when he found that they yielded him streams in the desert. He looks out upon the multitude of "evil-doers," and, for a moment, asks the question which faithless sense is ever suggesting and pronouncing unanswerable: "Where shall I find a champion?" As long as our eyes range along the level of earth, they see none such. But the empty earth should turn our gaze to the occupied throne. There sits the Answer to our almost despairing question. Rather, there He stands, as the proto-martyr saw Him, risen to His feet in swift readiness to help His servant. Experience confirms the hope of Je-

hovah's aid; for unless in the past He had been the singer's help, he could not have lived till this hour, but must have gone down into the silent land. No man who still draws breath is without tokens of God's sufficient care and ever-present help. The mystery of continued life is a witness for God. And not only does the past thus proclaim where a man's help is, but devout reflection on it will bring to light many times when doubts and tremors were disappointed. Conscious weakness appeals to confirming strength. If we feel our foot giving, and fling up our hands towards Him, He will grasp them and steady us in the most slippery places. Therefore, when divided thoughts (for so the picturesque word employed in ver. 19 means) hesitate between hope and fear. God's consolations steal into agitated minds, and there is a great calm.

The last strophe (vv. 20-23) weaves together in the finale, as a musician does in the last bars of his composition, the main themes of the psalm—the evil deeds of unjust rulers, the trust of the psalmist, his confidence in the final annihilation of the oppressors and the consequent manifestation of God as the God of Israel. The height of crime is reached when rulers use the forms of justice as masks for injustice, and give legal sanction to "mischief." The ancient world groaned under such travesties of the sanctity of Law; and the modern world is not free from them. The question often tortures faithful hearts, "Can such doings be sanctioned by God, or in any way be allied to Him?" To the psalmist the worst part of these rulers' wickedness was that, in his doubting moments, it raised the terrible suspicion that God was perhaps on the side of the oppressors. But when such thoughts came surging on him, he fell back, as we all have to do, on personal experience and on an act of renewed trust. He remembered what God had been to him in past moments of peril, and he claimed Him for the same now, his own refuge and fortress. Strong in that individual experience and conviction, he won the confidence that all which Jehovah had to do with the throne of destruction was, not to connive at its evil, but to overthrow it and root out the evil-doers, whose own sin will be their ruin. Then Jehovah will be known, not only for the God who belongs to, and works for, the single soul, but who is "our God," the refuge of the community, who will not forsake His inheritance.

PSALM XCV.

- 1 Come, let us raise shrill cries of joy to Jehovah,
Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us go to meet His face with thanksgiving,
With songs let us shout aloud to Him.
- 3 For Jehovah is a great God,
And a great King above all gods.
- 4 In whose hand are the deep places of the earth,
And the peaks of the mountains are His.
- 5 Whose is the sea, and He made it,
And the dry land His hands formed.
- 6 Come, let us worship and bow down,
Let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker,
- 7 For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

- To-day, if ye would listen to His voice,
 8 Harden not your hearts, as [at] Meribah,
 As [in] the day of Massah in the wilderness,
 9 Where your fathers tempted Me,
 Proved Me and saw My work.
 10 Forty years loathed I [that] generation,
 And said, "A people going astray in heart
 are they,
 And they know not My ways."
 11 So that I swear in My wrath,
 "Surely they shall not come into My rest."

THIS psalm is obviously divided into two parts, but there is no reason for seeing in these two originally unconnected fragments. Rather does each part derive force from the other; and nothing is more natural than that, after the congregation has spoken its joyful summons to itself to worship, Jehovah should speak warning words as to the requisite heart-preparation, without which worship is vain. The supposed fragments are fragmentary indeed, if considered apart. Surely a singer has the liberty of being abrupt and of suddenly changing his tone. Surely he may as well be credited with discerning the harmony of the change of key as some later compiler. There could be no more impressive way of teaching the conditions of acceptable worship than to set side by side a glad call to praise and a solemn warning against repeating the rebellions of the wilderness. These would be still more appropriate if this were a post-exilic hymn; for the second return from captivity would be felt to be the analogue of the first, and the dark story of former hard-heartedness would fit very close to present circumstances.

The invocation to praise in vv. 1, 2, gives a striking picture of the joyful tumult of the Temple worship. Shrill cries of gladness, loud shouts of praise, songs with musical accompaniments, rang simultaneously through the courts, and to Western ears would have sounded as din rather than as music, and as more exuberant than reverent. The spirit expressed is, alas! almost as strange to many moderns as the manner of its expression. That swelling joy which throbs in the summons, that consciousness that jubilation is a conspicuous element in worship, that effort to rise to a height of joyful emotion, are very foreign to much of our worship. And their absence, or presence only in minute amount, flattens much devotion, and robs the Church of one of its chief treasures. No doubt; there must often be sad strains blended with praise. But it is a part of Christian duty, and certainly of Christian wisdom, to try to catch that tone of joy in worship which rings in this psalm.

The three following verses (3-5) give Jehovah's creative and sustaining power, and His consequent ownership of this fair world, as the reasons for worship. He is King by right of creation. Surely it is forcing unnatural meanings on words to maintain that the psalmist believed in the real existence of the "gods" whom he disparagingly contrasts with Jehovah. The fact that these were worshipped sufficiently warrants the comparison. To treat it as in any degree inconsistent with Monotheism is unnecessary, and would scarcely have occurred to a reader but for the exigencies of a theory. The repeated reference to the "hand" of Jehovah is striking. In it are held the deeps; it is a plastic hand, "forming" the land, as a potter fashioning his clay; it is a shepherd's hand, protecting and feeding his flock (ver. 7). The same power created and sustains the physical

universe, and guides and guards Israel. The psalmist has no time for details; he can only single out extremes, and leave us to infer that what is true of these is true of all that is enclosed between them. The depths and the heights are Jehovah's. The word rendered "peaks" is doubtful. Etymologically it should mean "fatigue," but it is not found in that sense in any of the places where it occurs. The parallelism requires the meaning of *heights* to contrast with *depths*, and this rendering is found in the LXX., and is adopted by most moderns. The word is then taken to come from a root meaning "to be high." Some of those who adopt the translation *summits* attempt to get that meaning out of the root meaning *fatigue*, by supposing that the labour of getting to the top of the mountain is alluded to in the name. Thus Kay renders "the mountains' toilsome heights," and so also Hengstenberg. But it is simpler to trace the word to the other root, *to be high*. The ownerless sea is owned by Him; He made both its watery waste and the solid earth.

But that all-creating Hand has put forth more wondrous energies than those of which heights and depths, sea and land, witness. Therefore, the summons is again addressed to Israel to bow before "Jehovah our Maker." The creation of a people to serve Him is the work of His grace, and is a nobler effect of His power than material things. It is remarkable that the call to glad praise should be associated with thoughts of His greatness as shown in creation, while lowly reverence is enforced by remembrance of His special relation to Israel. We should have expected the converse. The revelation of God's love, in His work of creating a people for Himself, is most fittingly adored by spirits prostrate before Him. Another instance of apparent transposition of thoughts occurs in ver. 7 *b*, where we might have expected "people of His hand and sheep of His pasture." Hupfeld proposes to correct accordingly, and Cheyne follows him. But the correction buys prosaic accuracy at the cost of losing the forcible incorrectness which blends figure and fact, and by keeping sight of both enhances each. "The sheep of His hand" suggests not merely the creative but the sustaining and protecting power of God. It is hallowed for ever by our Lord's words, which may be an echo of it: "No man is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

The sudden turn from jubilant praise and recognition of Israel's prerogative as its occasion to grave warning is made more impressive by its occurring in the middle of a verse. God's voice breaks in upon the joyful acclamations with solemn effect. The shouts of the adoring multitude die on the poet's trembling ear, as that deeper Voice is heard. We cannot persuade ourselves that this magnificent transition, so weighty with instruction, so fine in poetic effect, is due to the after-thought of a compiler. Such an one would surely have stitched his fragments more neatly together than to make the seam run through the centre of a verse—an irregularity which would seem small to a singer in the heat of his inspiration. Ver. 7 *c* may be either a wish or the protasis to the apodosis in ver. 8. "If ye would but listen to His voice!" is an exclamation, made more forcible by the omission of what would happen then. But it is not necessary to regard the clause as optative. The conditional meaning, which connects it with what follows, is probably preferable, and is not set aside by the expression "His voice" instead of "My voice"; for "simi-

lar change of persons is very common in utterances of Jehovah, especially in the Prophets" (Hupfeld). "To-day" stands first with strong emphasis, to enforce the critical character of the present moment. It may be the last opportunity. At all events, it is an opportunity, and therefore to be grasped and used. A doleful history of unthankfulness lay behind; but still the Divine voice sounds, and still the fleeting moments offer space for softening of heart and docile hearkening. The madness of delay when time is hurrying on, and the long-suffering patience of God, are wonderfully proclaimed in that one word, which the Epistle to the Hebrews lays hold of, with so deep insight, as all-important.

The warning points Israel back to ancestral sins, the tempting of God in the second year of the Exodus, by the demand for water (Exod. xvii. 1-7). The scene of that murmuring received both names, Massah (temptation) and Meribah (strife). It is difficult to decide the exact force of ver. 9 *b*. "Saw My work" is most naturally taken as referring to the Divine acts of deliverance and protection seen by Israel in the desert, which aggravated the guilt of their faithlessness. But the word rendered "and" will, in that case, have to be taken as meaning "although"—a sense which cannot be established. It seems better, therefore, to take "work" in the unusual meaning of acts of judgment—His "strange work." Israel's tempting of God was the more indicative of hardheartedness that it was persisted in, in spite of chastisements. Possibly both thoughts are to be combined, and the whole varied stream of blessings and punishments is referred to in the wide expression. Both forms of God's work should have touched these hard hearts. It mattered not whether He blessed or punished. They were impervious to both. The awful issue of this obstinate rebellion is set forth in terrible words. The sensation of physical loathing followed by sickness is daringly ascribed to God. We cannot but remember what John heard in Patmos from the lips into which grace was poured: "I will spue thee out of My mouth."

But before He cast Israel out, He pled with them, as ver. 10 *b* goes on to tell: "He said, 'A people going astray in heart are they.'" He said so, by many a prophet and many a judgment, in order that they might come back to the true path. The desert-wanderings were but a symbol, as they were a consequence, of their wanderings in heart. They did not know His ways; therefore they chose their own. They strayed in heart; therefore they had an ever-increasing ignorance of the right road. For the averted heart and the blind understanding produce each other.

The issue of the long-protracted departure from the path which God had marked was, as it ever is, condemnation to continue in the pathless wilderness, and exclusion from the land of rest which God had promised them, and in which He Himself had said that He would make His resting-place in their midst. But what befell Israel in outward fact was symbolical of universal spiritual truth. The hearts that love devious ways can never be restful. The path which leads to calm is traced by God, and only those who tread it with softened hearts, earnestly listening to His voice, will find repose even on the road, and come at last to the land of peace. For others, they have chosen the desert, and in it they will wander wearily, "for ever roaming with a hungry heart."

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is laying hold of the very kernel of the psalm, when he

adduces the fact that, so many centuries after Moses, the warning was still addressed to Israel, and the possibility of entering the Rest of God, and the danger of missing it, still urged, as showing that the Rest of God remained to be won by later generations, and proclaiming the eternal truth that "we which have believed do enter into rest."

PSALM XCVI.

- 1ⁱ Sing to Jehovah a new song.
1ⁱ Sing to Jehovah, all the earth.
- 2ⁱ Sing to Jehovah, bless His name, 7
Publish the glad tidings of His salvation from day to day.
- 3 Recount among the nations His glory, 7
Among all peoples His wonders. 7
- 4 For great is Jehovah, and to be praised exceedingly,
Dread is He above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the people are Nothings,
And Jehovah made the heavens.
- 6 ~~Honour and majesty~~ are before Him,
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.
- 7ⁱ Give to Jehovah, ye families of the peoples,
1ⁱ Give to Jehovah glory and strength.
- 8ⁱ Give to Jehovah the glory of His name,
Take an offering and come into His courts.
- 9 Worship Jehovah in holy attire,
Tremble before Him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "Jehovah is King."
Yea, the world is set fast [that] it cannot be moved,
He shall deal judgment to the peoples in equity.
- 11ⁱ Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth exult,
1ⁱ Let the sea thunder and its fulness,
- 12ⁱ Let the plain rejoice and all that is in it,
Then shall all the trees of the forest ring out joyful cries,
- 13 Before Jehovah, for He comes, - 7
He comes to judge the earth,
He will judge the world in righteousness,
And peoples in His faithfulness.

THE praise of Jehovah as King has, in the preceding psalms, chiefly celebrated His reign over Israel. But this grand coronation anthem takes a wider sweep, and hymns that kingdom as extending to all nations, and as reaching beyond men, for the joy and blessing of a renovated earth. It falls into four strophes, of which the first three contain three verses each, while the last extends to four. These strophes are like concentric circles, drawn round that eternal throne. The first summons Israel to its high vocation of Jehovah's evangelist, the herald who proclaims the enthronement of the King. The second sets Him above all the "Nothings" which usurp the name of gods, and thus prepares the way for His sole monarchy. The third summons outlying nations to bring their homage, and flings open the Temple gates to all men, inviting them to put on priestly robes, and do priestly acts there. The fourth calls on Nature in its heights and depths, heaven and earth, sea, plain, and forest, to add their acclaim to the shouts which hail the establishment of Jehovah's visible dominion.

The song is to be new, because a new manifestation of Jehovah's Kingdom has awakened once more the long-silent harps, which had been hung on the willows of Babylon. The psalm is probably

a lyric echo of the Restoration, in which the prophet-singer sees the beginning of Jehovah's world-wide display of His dominion. He knew not how many weary years were to pass in a weary and God-defying world, before his raptures became facts. But though His vision tarries, His song is no over-heated imagining, which has been chilled down for succeeding generations into a baseless hope. The perspective of the world's chronology hid from him the deep valley between His standpoint and the fulfilment of his glowing words. Mankind still marches burdened, down among the mists, but it marches towards the sunlit heights. The call to sing a new song is quoted from Isa. xlii. 10. The word in ver. 2 *b* rendered "publish glad tidings" is also a favourite word with Isaiah II. (xl. 9, lii. 7, etc.). Ver. 3 *a* closely resembles Isa. lxvi. 10.

The second strophe is full of allusions to earlier psalms and prophets. The new manifestation of Jehovah's power has vindicated His supremacy above the vanities which the peoples call gods, and has thereby given new force to old triumphant words which magnified His exalted name. Long ago a psalmist had sung, after a signal defeat of assailants of Jerusalem, that God was "great and greatly to be praised" (Psalm xlviii. 1), and this psalmist makes the old words new. "Dread" reminds us of Psalm xlvii. 2. The contemptuous name of the nation's gods as "Nothings" is frequent in Isaiah. The heavens, which roof over all the earth, declare to every land Jehovah's creative power, and His supremacy above all gods. But the singer's eye pierces their abysses, and sees some gleams of that higher sanctuary of which they are but the floor. There stand Honour and Majesty. Strength and Beauty. The psalmist does not speak of "attributes." His vivid imagination conceives of these as servants, attending on Jehovah's royal state. Whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever are august, are at home in that sanctuary. Strength and beauty are often separated in a disordered world, and each is maimed thereby, but, in their perfection, they are indissolubly blended. Men call many things strong and fair which have no affinity with holiness; but the archetypes of both excellences are in the Holy Place, and any strength which has not its roots there is weakness, and any beauty which is not a reflection from "the beauty of the Lord our God" is but a mask concealing ugliness.

The third strophe builds on this supremacy of Jehovah, whose dwelling-place is the seat of all things worthy to be admired, the summons to all nations to render praise to Him. It is mainly a variation of Psalm xxix. 1, 2, where the summons is addressed to angels. Here "the families of the peoples" are called on to ascribe to Jehovah "glory and strength," or "the glory of His name," (i.e., of His character as revealed). The call presupposes a new manifestation of His Kingship, as conspicuous and earth-shaking as the thunder-storm of the original psalm. As in it the "sons of God" were called to worship in priestly garb, so here, still more emphatically, Gentile nations are invited to assume the priestly office, to "take an offering and come into His courts." The issue of Jehovah's manifestation of kingly sway will be that Israel's prerogative of priestly access to Him will be extended to all men, and that the lowly worship of earth will have characteristics which assimilate it to that of the elder brethren who ever stand before Him, and also characteristics which distinguish it from that, and are necessary while

the worshippers are housed in flesh. Material offerings and places consecrated to worship belong to earth. The "sons of God" above have them not, for they need them not.

The last strophe has four verses, instead of the normal three. The psalmist's chief purpose in it is to extend his summons for praise to the whole creation; but he cannot refrain from once more ringing out the glad tidings for which praise is to be rendered. He falls back in ver. 10 on Psalm xciii. 1, and Psalm ix. 8. In his quotation from the former psalm, he brings more closely together the thoughts of Jehovah's reign and the fixity of the world, whether that is taken with a material reference, or as predicting the calm perpetuity of the moral order established by His merciful rule and equitable judgment. The thought that inanimate nature will share in the joy of renovated humanity inspires many glowing prophetic utterances, eminently those of Isaiah—as, e.g., Isa. xxxv. The converse thought, that it shared in the consequences of man's sin, is deeply stamped on the Genesis narrative. The same note is struck with unhesitating force in Rom. viii., and elsewhere in the New Testament. A poet invests Nature with the hues of his own emotions, but this summons of the psalmist is more than poetry. How the transformation is to be effected is not revealed, but the consuming fires will refine, and at last man will have a dwelling-place where environment will correspond to character, where the external will image the inward state, where a new form of the material will be the perpetual ally of the spiritual, and perfected manhood will walk in a "new heaven and new earth, where dwelleth righteousness."

In the last verse of the psalm, the singer appears to extend his prophetic gaze from the immediate redeeming act by which Jehovah assumes royal majesty, to a still future "coming," in which He will judge the earth. "The accession is a single act; the judging is a continual process. Note that 'judging' has no terrible sound to a Hebrew" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Ver. 13 *c* is again a verbatim quotation from Psalm ix. 8.

PSALM XCVII.

- 1 Jehovah is King, let the earth exult,
Let many lands be glad.
- 2 Cloud and deep darkness are round Him,
Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.
- 3 Fire goes before Him,
And devours His enemies round about.
- 4 His lightnings lighted up the world,
The earth saw and trembled.
- 5 Mountains melted like wax, from before the
face of Jehovah,
From before the face of the Lord of the whole
earth.
- 6 The heavens declared His righteousness,
And all the peoples saw His glory.
- 7 Shamed are all they who serve graven images,
Who boast themselves of the Nothings;
Worship Him, all ye gods!
- 8 Zion heard and was glad,
And the daughters of Judah exulted,
Because of Thy judgments, Jehovah.
- 9 For Thou, Jehovah, art most high above all the
earth.
Thou art exceedingly exalted above all gods.

- 10 Ye who love Jehovah, hate evil;
He keeps the souls of His favoured ones,
From the hand of the wicked He delivers them.
- 11 Light is sown for the righteous man,
And for the upright-hearted, gladness.
- 12 Be glad, ye righteous, in Jehovah,
And give thanks to His holy memorial.

THE summons to praise the King with a new song (Psalm xcvi.) is followed by this psalm, which repeats the dominant idea of the group, "Jehovah is King," but from a fresh point of view. It represents His rule under the form of a theophany, which may possibly be regarded as the fuller description of that coming of Jehovah to judgment with which Psalm xcvi. closes. The structure of both psalms is the same, each being divided into four strophes, normally consisting of three verses each, though the last strophe of Psalm xcvi. runs over into four verses. In this psalm, the first group of verses celebrates the royal state of the King (vv. 1-3); the second describes His coming as a past fact (vv. 4-6); the third portrays the twofold effects of Jehovah's appearance on the heathen and on Zion (vv. 7-9); and the last applies the lessons of the whole to the righteous, in exhortation and encouragement (vv. 10-12). The same dependence on earlier psalms and prophets which marks others of this group is obvious here. The psalmist's mind is saturated with old sayings, which he finds flashed up into new meaning by recent experiences. He is not "original," and does not try to be so; but he has drunk in the spirit of his predecessors, and words which to others were antiquated and cold blaze with light for him, and seem made for his lips. He who reads aright the solemn significance of to-day will find it no less sacred than any past, and may transfer to it all which seers and singers have said and sung of Jehovah's presence of old.

The first strophe is mosaic-work. Ver. 1 (*lands=isles*) may be compared with Isa. xlii. 10, li. 5. Ver. 2 *a* is from Exod. xix. 9, 16, etc., and Psalm xviii. 9. Ver. 2 *b* is quoted from Psalm lxxxix. 14. Ver. 3 *a* recalls Psalms l. 3 and xviii. 8. The appearance of God on Sinai is the type of all later theophanies, and the reproduction of its principal features witnesses to the conviction that that transient manifestation was the unveiling of permanent reality. The veil had dropped again, but what had been once seen continued always, though unseen; and the veil could and would be drawn aside, and the long-hidden splendour blaze forth again. The combination of the pieces of mosaic in a new pattern here is striking. Three thoughts fill the singer's mind. God is King, and His reign gladdens the world, even away out to the dimly seen lands that are washed by the western ocean. "The islands" drew Isaiah's gaze. Prophecy began in him to look seawards and westwards, little knowing how the course of empire was to take its way thither, but feeling that whatever lands might lie towards the setting sun were ruled, and would be gladdened by Jehovah.

Gladness passes into awe in ver. 2 *a*, as the seer beholds the cloud and gloom which encircle the throne. The transcending infinitude of the Divine nature, the mystery of much of the Divine acts, are symbolised by these; but the curtain is the picture. To know that God cannot be known is a large part of the knowledge of Him. Faith, built on experience, enters into the cloud, and is not afraid, but confidently tells what it knows to be within the darkness. "Righteousness and judg-

ment"—the eternal principle and the activity thereof in the several acts of the King—are the bases of His throne, more solid than the covering cloud. Earth can rejoice in His reign, even though darkness may make parts of it painful riddles, if the assurance is held fast that absolute righteousness is at the centre, and that the solid core of all is judgment. Destructive power, symbolised in ver. 3 by fire which devours His adversaries, the fire which flashed first on Sinai, is part of the reason for the gladness of earth in His reign. For His foes are the world's foes too; and a God who could not smite into nothingness that which lifted itself against His dominion would be no God for whom the isles could wait. These three characteristics, mystery, righteousness, power to consume, attach to Jehovah's royalty, and should make every heart rejoice.

In the second strophe, the tenses suddenly change into pure narrative. The change may be simply due, as Cheyne suggests, to the influence of the earlier passages descriptive of theophanies, and in which the same tense occurs; but more probably it points to some event fresh in the experience of Israel, such as the return from Babylon. In this strophe again, we have mosaic. Ver. 4 *a* is quoted from Psalm lxxvii. 18. With ver. 4 *b* may be compared Psalm lxxvii. 16. Ver. 5 *a* is like Micah i. 4, and, in a less degree, Psalm lxviii. 2. "The Lord of the whole earth" is an unusual designation, first found in a significant connection in Josh. iii. 11, 13, as emphasising His triumph over heathen gods, in leading the people into Canaan, and afterwards found in Zech. iv. 14, vi. 5, and Micah iv. 13. Ver. 6 *a* comes from the theophany in Psalm l. 6; and ver. 6 *b* has parallels in both parts of Isaiah—e.g., Isa. xxxv. 2, xl. 5, lii. 10—passages which refer to the restoration from Babylon. The picture is grand as a piece of word-painting. The world lies wrapped in thunder-gloom, and is suddenly illumined by the fierce blaze of lightning. The awestruck silence of Nature is wonderfully given by ver. 4 *b*: "The earth saw and trembled." But the picture is symbol, and the lightning-flash is meant to set forth the sudden, swift forth-darting of God's delivering power, which awes a gazing world, while the hills melting like wax from before His face solemnly proclaim how terrible its radiance is, and how easily the mere showing of Himself annihilates all high things that oppose themselves. Solid-seeming and august powers, which tower above His people's ability to overcome them, vanish when He looks out from the deep darkness. The end of His appearance and of the consequent removal of obstacles is the manifestation of His righteousness and glory. The heavens are the scene of the Divine appearance, though earth is the theatre of its working. They "declare His righteousness," not because, as in Psalm xix., they are said to tell forth His glory by their myriad lights, but because in them He has shone forth, in His great act of deliverance of His oppressed people. Israel receives the primary blessing, but is blessed, not for itself alone, but that all peoples may see in it Jehovah's glory. Thus once more the psalm recognises the worldwide destination of national mercies, and Israel's place in the Divine economy as being of universal significance.

The third strophe (vv. 7-9) sets forth the results of the theophany on foes and friends. The worshippers of "the Nothings" (xcvi. 5) are put to confusion by the demonstration by fact of Je-

Jehovah's sovereignty over their helpless deities. Ver. 7 *a, b*, recall Isa. xlii. 17, xliv. 9. As the worshippers are ashamed, so the gods themselves are summoned to fall down before this triumphant Jehovah, as Dagon did before the Ark. Surely it is a piece of most prosaic pedantry to argue, from this lash of scorn, that the psalmist believed that the gods whom he had just called "Nothings" had a real existence, and that therefore he was not a pure Monotheist.

The shame of the idolaters and the prostration of their gods heighten the gladness of Zion, which the psalm describes in old words that had once celebrated another flashing forth of Jehovah's power (Psalm xlviii. 11). Hupfeld, whom Cheyne follows, would transpose vv. 7 and 8, on the grounds that "the transposition explains what Zion heard, and brings the summons to the false gods into connection with the emphatic claim on behalf of Jehovah in ver. 9." But there is no need for the change, since there is no ambiguity as to what Zion heard, if the existing order is retained, and her gladness is quite as worthy a consequence of the exaltation of Jehovah in ver. 9 as the subjugation of the false gods would be. With ver. 9 compare Psalm lxxxiii. 18, and Psalm xlvii. 2.

The last strophe (vv. 10-12) draws exhortation and promises from the preceding. There is a marked diminution of dependence on earlier passages in this strophe, in which the psalmist points for his own generation the lessons of the great deliverance which he has been celebrating. Ver. 12 *a* is like Psalm xxxii. 11; ver. 12 *b* is from Psalm xxx. 4; but the remainder is the psalmist's own earnest exhortation and firm faith cast into words which come warm from his own heart's depths. Love to Jehovah necessarily implies hatred of evil, which is His antagonist, and which He hates. That higher love will not be kept in energy, unless it is guarded by wholesome antipathy to everything foul. The capacity for love of the noble is maimed unless there is hearty hatred of the ignoble. Love to God is no idle affection, but withdraws a man from rival loves. The stronger the attraction, the stronger the recoil. The closer we cleave to God, the more decided our shrinking from all that would weaken our hold of Him. A specific reference in the exhortation to temptations to idolatry is possible, though not necessary. All times have their "evil," with which God's lovers are ever tempted to comply. The exhortation is never out of place, nor the encouragement which accompanies it ever illusory. In such firm adherence to Jehovah, many difficulties will rise, and foes be made; but those who obey it will not lack protection. Mark the alternation of names for such. They are first called "lovers of God"; they are then designated as His "favoured ones." That which is first in time is last in mention. The effect is in view before it is traced to its cause. "We love Him because He first loved us." Then follow names drawn from the moral perfecting which will ensue on recognition and reception of God's favour, and on the cherishing of the love which fulfills the law. They who love because they are loved, become righteous and upright-hearted because they love. For such the psalmist has promise as well as exhortation. Not only are they preserved in and from dangers, but "light is sown" for them. Many commentators think that the figure of light being sown, as seeds are buried in the ground to shoot up in beauty in a future spring-time, is too violent, and they propose to understand

"sown" in the sense of *scattered on*, not *deposited in*, the earth, "so that he, the righteous, goes forward step by step in the light" (Delitzsch). Others would correct into "is risen" or "arises." But one is reluctant to part with the figure, the violence of which is permissible in an Eastern singer. Darkness often wraps the righteous, and it is not true to experience to say that his way is always in the sunlight. But it is consolation to know that light is sown, invisible and buried, as it were, but sure to germinate and fruit. The metaphor mingles figures and offends purists, but it fits closer to fact than the weakening of it which fits the rules of composition. If we are God's lovers, present darkness may be quieted by hope, and we may have the "fruit of the light" in our lives now, and the expectation of a time when we shall possess in fulness and in perpetuity all that light of knowledge, purity, and gladness which Jesus the Sower went forth to sow, and which had been ripened by struggles and sorrows and hatred of evil while we were here.

Therefore, because of this magnificent theophany and because of its blessed consequences for loving souls, the psalmist ends with the exhortation to the righteous to rejoice. He began with bidding the world be glad. He now bids each of us concentrate that universal gladness in our own hearts. Whether earth obeys Him or not, it is for us to clasp firmly the great facts which will feed the lamp of our joy. God's holy memorial is His name, or His self-revealed character. He desires to be known and remembered by His acts. If we rightly retain and ponder His utterance of Himself, not in syllables, but in deeds, we shall not be silent in His praise. The righteous man should not be harsh and crabbed, but his soul should dwell in a serene atmosphere of joy in Jehovah, and his life be one thanksgiving to that mighty, never-to-be-forgotten Name.

PSALM XCVIII.

- 1 Sing to Jehovah a new song,
For wonders He has done,
His right hand has brought Him salvation,
and His holy arm.
- 2 Jehovah has made known His salvation,
To the eyes of the nations He has revealed
His righteousness.
- 3 He has remembered His lovingkindness and
His faithfulness to the house of Israel,
All the ends of the earth have seen the sal-
vation of our God.
- 4 Shout aloud to Jehovah, all the earth,
Break forth into shrill cries of joy and make
melody.
- 5 Make melody to Jehovah with the lyre.
With lyre and voice of melody.
- 6 With trumpets and blast of horn.
Shout aloud before Jehovah, the King.
- 7 Let the sea thunder and its fulness,
The world and the dwellers therein,
- 8 Let streams clap hands,
Together let mountains ring out joyful cries,
- 9 Before Jehovah, for He comes to judge the
earth,
He will judge the world in righteousness,
And peoples in equity.

THE two preceding psalms correspond in number and division of verses. The first begins with

a summons to sing to Jehovah; the second, with a proclamation that He is King. A precisely similar connection exists between this and the following psalm. Psalm xcvi. is an echo of Psalm xcvi., and Psalm xcix. of Psalm xcvi. The number of verses in each of the second pair is nine, and in each there is a threefold division. The general theme of both pairs is the same, but with considerable modifications. The abundant allusions to older passages continue here, and the second part of Isaiah is especially familiar to the singer.

The first strophe (vv. 1-3), though modelled on the first of Psalm xcvi., presents the theme in a different fashion. Instead of reiterating through three verses the summons to Israel to praise Jehovah, and declare His glory to the nations, this psalm passes at once from the summons to praise, in order to set forth the Divine deed which evokes the praise, and which the psalmist thinks, will shine by its own lustre to "the ends of the earth," whether it has human voices to celebrate it or not. This psalmist speaks more definitely of Jehovah's wonders of deliverance. Israel appears rather as the recipient than as the celebrator of God's lovingkindness. The sun shines to all nations, whether any voices say "Look," or no. Ver. 1 *a* is from Psalm xcvi. 1; vv. 1 *c*-3 weave together snatches of various passages in the second part of Isaiah, especially Isa. lii. 10, lix. 16, lxiii. 5. The remarkable expression "brought salvation to Him" (from the second passage in Isaiah) is rendered by many "helped Him," and that rendering gives the sense but obliterates the connection with "salvation," emphatically repeated in the two following verses. The return from Babylon is naturally suggested as best corresponding to the psalmist's words. That was "the salvation of our God," who seemed to have forgotten His people, as Isa. xlix. 2 represents Israel as complaining, but now, before "the eyes of all nations," has shown how well He remembers and faithfully keeps His covenant obligations. Israel is, indeed, Jehovah's witness, and should ring out her grateful joy; but Jehovah's deed speaks more loudly than Israel's proclamation of it can ever do.

The second strophe (vv. 4-6) corresponds to the third of Psalm xcvi.; but whereas there the Gentiles were summoned to bring offerings into the courts of Jehovah, here it is rather the glad tumult of vocal praise, mingled with the twang of harps, and the blare of trumpets and horns, which is present to the singer's imagination. He hears the swelling chorus echoing through the courts, which are conceived as wide enough to hold "all the earth." He has some inkling of the great thought that the upshot of God's redeeming self-manifestation will be glad music from a redeemed world. His call to mankind throbs with emotion, and sounds like a prelude to the melodious commingling of voice and instrument which he at once enjoins and foretells. His words are largely echoes of Isaiah. Compare Isa. xlv. 23, xlix. 13, lii. 9, for "break forth into," and li. 3 for "voice of melody."

The final strophe is almost identical with that of Psalm xcvi., but, in accordance with the variation found in vv. 1-3, omits the summons to Israel to proclaim God's Kingdom among the nations. It also inverts the order of clauses in ver. 7, and in ver. 7 *b* quotes from Psalm xxiv. 1, where also "the fulness of it" precedes, with the result of having no verb expressed which suits the nouns, since "the world and the dwellers therein" cannot well be called on to "thunder." Instead of the

"plain" and "trees of the forest" in the original, ver. 8 substitutes streams and mountains. The bold figure of the streams clapping hands, in token of homage to the King (2 Kings xi. 12; Psalm xlvii. 1) occurs in Isa. lv. 12. The meeting waves are conceived of as striking against each other, with a sound resembling that of applauding palms. Ver. 9 is quoted from Psalm xcvi., with the omission of the second "He cometh" (which many versions of the LXX. retain), and the substitution of "equity" for "His faithfulness."

PSALM XCIX.

- 1 Jehovah is King—the peoples tremble;
Throned [on] the cherubim—the earth totters.
- 2 Jehovah in Zion is great,
And exalted above all the peoples.
- 3 Let them praise Thy great and dread name,
Holy is He.
- 4 And the strength of the King loves judgment,
Thou, Thou hast established equity,
Judgment and righteousness in Jacob hast
Thou wrought.
- 5 Exalt Jehovah our God,
And prostrate yourselves at His footstool,
Holy is He.
- 6 Moses and Aaron among His priests,
And Samuel among them that call [on] His
name;
They called on Jehovah, and He, He answered them.
- 7 In a pillar of cloud He spoke to them,
They kept His testimonies,
And the statute [which] He gave them.
- 8 Jehovah our God! Thou, Thou didst answer them,
A forgiving God wast Thou unto them.
And executing retribution for their deeds.
- 9 Exalt Jehovah our God,
And prostrate yourselves at His holy mountain,
For holy is Jehovah our God.

DELITZSCH has well called this psalm "an earthly echo of the seraphic Trisagion," the threefold proclamation of the Divine holiness, which Isaiah heard (Isa. vi. 3). It is, as already noted, a pendant to Psalm xcvi., but is distinguished from the other psalms of this group by its greater originality, the absence of distinct allusion to the great act of deliverance celebrated in them, and its absorption in the one thought of the Divine holiness. Their theme is the event by which Jehovah manifested to the world His sovereign rule; this psalm passes beyond the event, and grasps the eternal central principle of that rule—namely, holiness. The same thought has been touched on in the other members of the group, but here it is the single subject of praise. Its exhibition in God's dealings with Israel is here traced in ancient examples, rather than in recent instances; but the viewpoint of the other psalms is retained, in so far as the Divine dealings with Israel are regarded as the occasion for the world's praise.

The first strophe (vv. 1-3) dwells in general terms on Jehovah's holiness, by which august conception is meant, not only moral purity, but separation from, by elevation above, the finite and imperfect. Ver. 1 vividly paints in each clause the glory reigning in heaven, and its effect on an awestruck world. We might render the verbs in

the second part of each clause as futures or as optatives (*shall tremble, shall totter, or Let peoples tremble, etc.*), but the thought is more animated if they are taken as describing the result of the theophany. The participial clause "throned on the cherubim" adds detail to the picture of Jehovah as King. It should not, strictly speaking, be rendered with a finite verb. When that vision of Him sitting in royal state is unveiled, all people are touched with reverence, and the solid earth staggers. But the glory which is made visible to all men has its earthly seat in Zion, and shines from thence into all lands. It is by His deeds in Israel that God's exaltation is made known. The psalmist does not call on men to bow before a veiled Majesty, of which they only know that it is free from all creatural limitations, lowliness and imperfections; but before a God, who has revealed Himself in acts, and has thereby made Himself a name. "Great and dread" is that name, but it is a sign of His lovingkindness that it is known by men, and thanksgiving, not dumb trembling, befits men who know it. The refrain might be rendered "It is holy," referring to the name, but vv. 5 and 9 make the rendering *Holy is He* more probable. The meaning is unaffected whichever translation is adopted.

Jehovah is holy, not only because lifted above and separated from creatural limitations, but because of His righteousness. The second strophe therefore proclaims that all His dominion is based on uprightness, and is a continual passing of that into acts of "judgment and righteousness." The "And" at the beginning of ver. 4, following the refrain, is singular, and has led many commentators to link the words with ver. 3 *a*, and, taking the refrain as parenthetical, to render, "Let them give thanks to Thy great and dread name, [for it is holy], and [to] the strength of the King [who] loveth," etc. But the presence of the refrain is an insuperable bar to this rendering. Others, as Delitzsch and Cheyne, regard "the strength of the king" as dependent on "established" in ver. 4 *b*, and suppose that the theocratic monarch of Israel is represented as under Jehovah's protection, if he reigns righteously. But surely one King only is spoken of in this psalm, and it is the inmost principle and outward acts of His rule which are stated as the psalmist's reason for summoning men to prostrate themselves at His footstool. The "And" at the beginning of the strophe links its whole thought with that of the preceding, and declares eloquently how closely knit together are Jehovah's exaltation and His righteousness. The singer is in haste to assert the essentially moral character of infinite power. Delitzsch thinks that love cannot be predicated of "strength," but only of the possessor of strength; but surely that is applying the measuring line of prosaic accuracy to lyric fervour. The intertwining of Divine power and righteousness could not be more strongly asserted than by that very intelligible attribution to His power of the emotion of love, impelling it ever to seek union with uprightness. He is no arbitrary ruler. His reign is for the furtherance of justice. Its basis is "equity," and its separate acts are "judgment and righteousness." These have been done in and for Jacob. Therefore the call to worship rings out again. It is addressed to an undefined multitude, which, as the tone of all this group of psalms leads us to suppose, includes the whole race of man. They are summoned to lift high the praise of Him who in Himself is so high, and to cast themselves low in pros-

trate adoration at His footstool—*i.e.*, at His sanctuary on Zion (ver. 9). Thus again, in the centre strophe of this psalm, as in Psalms xcvi. and xcvi., mankind are called to praise the God who has revealed Himself in Israel; but while in the former of these two psalms worship was represented as sacrificial, and in the second as loud music of voice and instrument, here silent prostration is the fitting praise of the holiness of the infinitely exalted Jehovah.

The third strophe turns to examples drawn from the great ones of old, which at once encourage to worship and teach the true nature of worship, while they also set in clear light Jehovah's holiness in dealing with His worshippers. Priestly functions were exercised by Moses, as in sprinkling the blood of the covenant (Exod. xxiv.), and in the ceremonial connected with the consecration of Aaron and his sons (Lev. viii.), as well as at the first celebration of worship in the Tabernacle (Exod. xl. 18 *sqq.*). In the wider sense of the word *priest*, he acted as mediator and intercessor, as in Exod. xvii. 12, in the fight against Amalek, and xxxii. 30-32, after the worship of the golden calf. Samuel, too, interceded for Israel after their seeking a king (1 Sam. xii. 19 *sqq.*), and offered sacrifices (1 Sam. vii. 9). Jeremiah couples them together as intercessors with God (xv. 1).

From these venerable examples the psalmist draws instruction as to the nature of the worship befitting the holiness of Jehovah. He goes deeper than all sacrifices, or than silent awe. To call on God is the best adoration. The cry of a soul, conscious of emptiness and need, and convinced of His fulness and of the love which is the soul of His power, is never in vain. "They called, and He"—even He in all the unreachable separation of His loftiness from their lowliness—"answered them." There is a commerce of desire and bestowal between the holy Jehovah and us. But these answers come on certain conditions, which are plain consequences of His holiness—namely, that His worshippers should keep His testimonies, by which He has witnessed both to His own character and to their duty. The psalmist seems to lose sight of his special examples, and to extend his view to the whole people, when he speaks of answers from the pillar of cloud, which cannot apply to Samuel's experience. The persons spoken of in ver. 8 as receiving answers may indeed be Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, all of whom were punished for evil deeds, as well as answered when they cried; but more probably they are the whole community. The great principle, firmly grasped and clearly proclaimed by the singer, is that a holy God is a forgiving God, willing to hearken to men's cry, and rich to answer with needed gifts, and that indissolubly interwoven with the pardon, which He in His holiness gives, is retribution for evil. God loves too well to grant impunity. Forgiveness is something far better than escape from penalties. It cannot be worthy of God to bestow or salutary for men to receive, unless it is accompanied with such retribution as may show the pardoned man how deadly his sin was. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" is a law not abrogated by forgiveness. The worst penalty of sin, indeed—namely, separation from God—is wholly turned aside by repentance and forgiveness; but for the most part the penalties which are inflicted on earth, and which are the natural results of sin, whether in character, memory, habit, or circumstances, are not removed by pardon. Their char-

acter is changed; they become loving chastisement for our profit.

Such, then, is the worship which all men are invited to render to the holy Jehovah. Prostrate awe should pass into the cry of need, desire, and aspiration. It will be heard, if it is verified as real by obedience to God's known will. The answers will be fresh witnesses of God's holiness, which declares itself equally in forgiveness and in retribution. Therefore, once more the clear summons to all mankind rings out, and once more the proclamation of His holiness is made.

There is joyful confidence of access to the Inaccessible in the reiteration in ver. 9 of *Jehovah our God*. "Holy is He," sang the psalmist at first, but all the gulf between Jehovah and us is bridged over when to the name which emphasises the eternal, self-existent being of the holy One we can add "our God." Then humble prostration is reconcilable with confident approach; and His worshippers have not only to lie lowly at His footstool, but to draw near with children's frankness, to His heart.

PSALM C.

- 1 Shout aloud to Jehovah, all the earth.
- 2 Serve Jehovah with gladness,
Come before His face with joyful cry.
- 3 Know ye that Jehovah He is God,
He, He has made us, and His are we,
His people and the sheep of His pasture.
- 4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
His courts with praise,
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
- 5 For Jehovah is good, for ever endures His
lovingkindness,
And to generation after generation His faithfulness.

THE Psalms of the King end with this full-toned call to all the earth to do Him homage. It differs from the others of the group, by making no distinct mention either of Jehovah's royal title or of the great act of deliverance which was His visible exercise of sovereignty. But it resembles them in its jubilant tone, its urgent invitation to all men to walk in the light which shone on Israel, and its conviction that the mercies shown to the nation had blessing in them for all the world. The structure is simple. A call to praise Jehovah is twice given, and each is followed by reasons for His praise, which is grounded, in the first instance (ver. 3), on His dealings with Israel, and, in the second, on His character as revealed by all His works.

Ver. 1 consists of but a single clause, and, as Delitzsch says, is like the signal-blast of a trumpet. It rings out a summons to "all the earth," as in Psalm xcvi. 4, which is expanded in ver. 2. The service there enjoined is that of worship in the Temple, as in ver. 4. Thus, the characteristic tone of this group of psalms echoes here, in its close, and all men are called and welcomed to the Sanctuary. There is no more a Court of the Gentiles. Not less striking than the universality of the psalm is its pulsating gladness. The depths of sorrow, both of that which springs from outward calamities and of that more heart-breaking sort which wells up from dark fountains in the soul, have been sounded in many a psalm. But the Psalter would not reflect all the moods of the devout soul, unless it had some strains of unmingled joy. The Christian Year has perfect days of sunlit splendour, when all the winds are still, and

no cloud darkens the unbroken blue. There is no music without passages in minor keys; but joy has its rights and place too, and they know but little of the highest kind of worship who do not sometimes feel their hearts swell with gladness more poignant and exuberant than earth can minister.

The reason for the world's gladness is given in ver. 3. It is Jehovah's special relation to Israel. So far as the language of the verse is concerned, it depends on Psalm xcvi. 7. "He hath made us" does not refer to creation, but to the constituting of Israel the people of God. "We are His" is the reading of the Hebrew margin, and is evidently to be preferred to that of the text, "Not we ourselves." The difference in Hebrew is only in one letter, and the pronunciation of both readings would be the same. Jewish text-critics count fifteen passages, in which a similar mistake has been made in the text. Here, the comparison of Psalm xcvi. and the connection with the next clause of ver. 3 are decidedly in favour of the amended reading. It is to be observed that this is the only place in the psalm in which "we" and "us" are used; and it is natural to lay stress on the opposition between "ye" in ver. 3 *a*, and "we" and "us" in *b*. The collective Israel speaks, and calls all men to rejoice in Jehovah, because of His grace to it. The psalm is, then, not, as Cheyne calls it, "a national song of thanksgiving, with which an universalistic element is not completely fused," but a song which starts from national blessings, and discerns in them a message of hope and joy for all men. Israel was meant to be a sacred hearth on which a fire was kindled, that was to warm all the house. God revealed Himself in Israel, but to the world.

The call to praise is repeated in ver. 4 with more distinct reference to the open Temple gates into which all the nations may now enter. The psalmist sees, in prophetic hope, crowds pouring in with glad alacrity through the portals, and then hears the joyful tumult of their many voices rising in a melodious surge of praise. His eager desire and large-hearted confidence that so it will one day be are vividly expressed by the fourfold call in ver. 4. And the reason which should draw all men to bless God's revealed character is that His self-revelation, whether to Israel or to others, shows that the basis of that character is goodness—i.e., kindness or love—and that, as older singers have sung, "His lovingkindness endures for ever," and, as a thousand generations in Israel and throughout the earth have proved, His faithful adherence to His word, and discharge of all obligations under which He has come to His creatures, give a basis for trust and a perpetual theme for joyful thanksgiving. Therefore, all the world has an interest in Jehovah's royalty, and should, and one day shall, compass His throne with joyful homage, and obey His behests with willing service.

PSALM CI.

- 1 Of lovingkindness and judgment will I sing,
To Thee, Jehovah, will I harp.
- 2 I will give heed to the way of perfectness,
When wilt Thou come to me?
I will walk with a perfect heart
Within my house.
- 3 I will not set before my eyes any villainous
thing,
The doing of transgressions do I hate,
It shall not cleave to me.

- 4 A perverse heart shall depart from me,
Evil will I not know.
- 5 The secret slanderer of his neighbour,
Him will I root out,
The lofty-eyed and proud-hearted,
Him will I not endure.
- 6 My eyes are on the faithful of the land,
That they may dwell with me,
He who walks in the way of perfectness,
He shall serve me.
- 7 He shall not dwell in my house
Who practises deceit,
He that speaks lies
Shall not be established before my eyes.
- 8 Every morning will I root out
All wicked of the land,
To cut off from the city of Jehovah
All workers of iniquity.

THE contents of this psalm go far towards confirming the correctness of the superscription in ascribing it to David, as Ewald acknowledges. To call it an ideal description of a Jewish king, dramatically put into such a ruler's mouth, does not do justice to the ring of earnestness in it. No doubt, subjective impressions are unreliable guides, but it is difficult to resist the impression that a kingly voice is audible here, speaking no ideal description, but his own stern resolves. It is a royal "proclamation against vice and immorality," appropriate to the beginning of a reign. If we accept the superscription, and interpret the abrupt question in ver. 2. "When wilt Thou come to me?" as the utterance of David's longing to see the Ark set in Jerusalem, we get a most fitting period for the psalm. He had but recently ascended the throne. The abuses and confusions of Saul's last troubled years had to be reformed. The new king felt that he was God's viceroy; and here declares what he will strive to make his monarchy—a copy of God's. He gives evildoers fair warning, and bids all true men be sure of his favour. But he will take heed to himself, before he seeks to purge his court. So the psalm, though it has no strophical arrangement, falls into two main parts, in the first of which the king lays down the rule of his own conduct, and, in the second, declares war against the vermin that infest especially an Eastern court—slanderers, arrogant upstarts, traffickers in lies. His ambition is to have Jehovah's city worthy of its true King, when He shall deign to come and dwell in it. Therefore his face will be gracious to all good men, and his hand heavy on evildoers. The psalm is "A mirror for Magistrates," to quote the title of an old English book.

The first words of the psalm seem at first sight incongruous with its contents, which are singularly devoid of praise. But they are not meant to refer to the psalm, but declare the singer's purpose for his whole life. If the speaker is a real character, he is a poet-king. Of whom is that singular combination of royalty and minstrelsy so true as of David? If the speaker is an ideal, is it not peculiar that the first qualification of the ideal king should be that he is a poet? The suggestion that "lovingkindness and judgment" are here the monarch's virtues, not Divine attributes, is negated by usage and by the following clause, "To Thee, Jehovah, will I sing." But it is as a king that the psalmist vows to praise these twin characteristics of the Divine rule; and his song is to be accompanied by melodious deeds, which shape themselves after that pattern for rulers and

all men. Earthly power is then strongest when, like God's, it is informed by lovingkindness and based on righteousness. In this connection, it is significant that this psalm, describing what a king should be, has been placed immediately after the series which tells who the true King of Israel and the world is, in whom these same attributes are ever linked together.

Vv. 2-4 outline the king's resolves for himself. With noble self-control, this ruler of men sets before himself the narrow, thorny way of perfectness, not the broad, flowery road of indulgence. He owns a law above himself and a far-off goal of moral completeness, which, he humbly feels, is yet unattained, but which he vows will never be hidden from his undazzled eyes, by the glitter of lower earthly good, or the rank mists of sensual pleasures. He had abundant facilities for reaching lower aims, but he turns from these to "give heed" to the way of perfectness. That resolve must be clearly and strongly made by every man, prince or peasant, who would attain to the dominion over self and externals, which is man's true royalty.

The suddenly interjected question of longing, "When wilt Thou come to me?" is best explained by connecting it with David's desire that the Ark should be permanently domiciled in Jerusalem—a desire which was checked by his reflections on his own unworthiness (2 Sam. vi. 9). Now he feels that, on the one hand, his whole-hearted desire after righteousness makes him capable of receiving such a guest; and that, on the other, his firmest resolves will be evanescent, without God's presence to confirm his wavering and to help him to make his resolves into acts. He longed for that "coming" of the symbol of God's dwelling with men, not with heathenish desire to have it as a magic-working charm against outward foes, but as helping his faith to grasp the fact that God was with him, as his ally in the nobler fight against his own baseness and his position's temptations. We dare not ask God to come to us, unless we are conscious of desire to be pure; we cannot hope to realise that desire, unless He is with us. So, the natural sequel of determination to give heed to the way of perfectness is petition to Him, to come very near and take up His abode with us.

After this most significant interruption, the stream of resolutions runs on again. In the comparative privacy of his house, he will "walk with a perfect heart," ever seeking to translate his convictions of right into practice, and regulating his activities by conscience. The recesses of an Eastern palace were often foul with lust, and hid extravagances of caprice and self-indulgence; but this ruler will behave there as one who has Jehovah for a guest. The language of ver. 3 is very energetic. "Any villainous thing" is literally "a thing of Belial"; "the doing of transgressions" is literally "doing deeds that turn aside," *i. e.*, from the course prescribed. He will not take the former as models for imitation or objects of desire. The latter kindle wholesome hatred; and if ever he is tempted to dally with sin, he will shake it off, as a venomous reptile that has fastened on him. "A perfect heart" will expel "a perverse heart," but neither will the one be gained nor the other banished without vehement and persistent effort. This man does not trust the improvement of his character to chance or expect it to come of itself. He means to bend his strength to effect it. He cannot but "know evil," in the sense of being aware of it and conscious of its seduc-

tions; but he will *not* "know" it, in the sense of letting it into his inner nature or with the knowledge which is experience and love.

From ver. 5 onwards, the king lays down the principles of his public action, and that mainly in reference to bad men. One verse suffices to tell of his fostering care of good men. The rest describes how he means to be a terror to evildoers. The vices against which he will implacably war are not gross crimes such as ordinarily bring down the sword of public justice. This monarch has regard to more subtle evils—slander, superciliousness, inflated vanity ("proud-hearted" in ver. 5 is literally wide in heart, *i. e.*, dilated with self-sufficiency or ambition). His eyes are quick to mark "the faithful in the land." He looks for those whose faithfulness to God guarantees their fidelity to men and general reliableness. His servants shall be like himself, followers of "the way of perfectness." In that court, dignity and office will go, not to talent, or to crafty arts of servility, or to birth, but to moral and religious qualities.

In the last two verses, the psalm returns to evildoers. The actors and speakers of lies shall be cleared out of the palace. Such base creatures crawl and sting about the purlieus of courts, but this prince will have his immediate *entourage* free from them. He longs to get rid of the stifling atmosphere of deceit, and to have honest men round him, as many a ruler before and since has longed. But not only palace, but city, has to be swept clean, and one cleansing at the beginning of a reign will not be enough. So "every morning" the work has to be done again. "Ill weeds grow apace," and the mower must not get weary of his scythe. God's city must be pure. "Without are . . . whatsoever worketh and maketh a lie."

The psalm is a God-given vision of what a king and kingdom might and should be. If David wrote it, his early resolves were sadly falsified. "I will set no villainous things before my eyes"—yet from his "house," where he vowed to "walk with a perfect heart," he looked on Bathsheba. "He that speaks lies shall not be established in my sight"—yet Absalom, Ahithophel, and the sons of Zeruiah stood round his throne. The shortcomings of the earthly shadows of God's rule force us to turn away to the only perfect King and Kingdom, Jesus Christ and His realm, and to the city "into which shall in nowise enter anything that defileth."

PSALM CII.

- 1 Jehovah, hear my prayer,
And let my cry come to Thee.
- 2 Hide not Thy face from me in the day of my trouble,
Bend to me Thine ear,
In the day that I call answer me speedily.
- 3 For my days are consumed in smoke,
And my bones are burned like a brand.
- 4 Smitten like herbage and dried up is my heart,
For I have forgotten to eat my bread.
- 5 Because of the noise of my groaning,
My bones stick to my flesh.
- 6 I am like a pelican of the desert,
I am become like an owl of the ruins.
- 7 I am sleepless,
And am become like a sparrow lonely on the roof.
- 8 All day long my enemies reproach me,
They that are mad at me curse by me.

- 9 For ashes like bread have I eaten,
And my drink with tears have I mingled.
- 10 Because of Thy indignation and Thy wrath,
For Thou hast caught me up and flung me away
- 11 My days are like a long-drawn-out shadow,
And I like herbage am dried up.
- 12 But Thou, Jehovah, sittest enthroned for ever,
And Thy memorial is to generation after generation.
- 13 Thou, Thou shalt arise, shalt pity Zion,
For it is time to show her favour,
For the appointed time is come.
- 14 For Thy servants delight in her stones,
And [to] her dust they show favour.
- 15 And the nations shall fear the name of Jehovah,
And all the kings of the earth His glory,
- 16 Because Jehovah has built up Zion,
He has been seen in His glory,
- 17 He has turned to the prayer of the destitute,
And has not despised their prayer.
- 18 This shall be written for the generation after.
And a people [yet] to be created shall praise Jah.
- 19 Because He has looked down from His holy height,
Jehovah has gazed from heaven upon the earth,
- 20 To hear the sighing of the captive,
To free the children of death.
- 21 That they may tell in Zion the name of Jehovah,
And His praise in Jerusalem,
- 22 When the peoples are assembled together,
And the kingdoms to serve Jehovah.
- 23 He has brought down my strength in the way,
He has cut short my days.
- 24 I said, "My God, take me not away at the half of my days."
[Since] Thy years endure through all generations.
- 25 Of old Thou didst found the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.
- 26 They, they shall perish, but Thou, Thou shalt continue,
And all of them like a garment shall wear out,
Like a robe shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed.
- 27 But Thou art He,
And Thy years shall never end.
- 28 The sons of Thy servants shall dwell,
And their seeds shall be established before Thee.

VERSES 13, 14, show that the psalm was written when Zion was in ruins and the time of her restoration at hand. Sadness shot with hope, as a cloud with sunlight, is the singer's mood. The pressure of present sorrows points to the time of the Exile; the lightening of these, by the expectation that the hour for their cessation has all but struck, points to the close of that period. There is a general consensus of opinion on this, though Baethgen is hesitatingly inclined to adopt the Maccabean date, and Cheyne prefers the time of Nehemiah, mainly because the references to the "stones" and "dust" recall to him "Nehemiah's lonely ride round the burned walls," and "Sanballat's mocking at the Jews for attempting to re-

vive the stones out of heaps of rubbish" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 70). These references would equally suit any period of desolation; but the point of time indicated by ver. 13 is more probably the eve of restoration than the completion of the begun and interrupted re-establishment of Israel in its land. Like many of the later psalms, this is largely coloured by earlier ones, as well as by Deuteronomy, Job, and the second half of Isaiah, while it has also reminiscences of Jeremiah. Some commentators have, indeed, supposed it to be his work.

The turns of thought are simple. While there is no clear strophical arrangement, there are four broadly distinguished parts: a prelude, invoking God to hearken (vv. 1, 2); a plaintive bemoaning of the psalmist's condition (vv. 3-11); a triumphant rising above his sorrows, and rejoicing in the fair vision of a restored Jerusalem, whose Temple-courts the nations tread (vv. 12-22); and a momentary glance at his sorrows and brief life, which but spurs him to lay hold the more joyously on God's eternity, wherein he finds the pledge of the fulfilment of his hopes and of God's promises (vv. 23-28).

The opening invocations in vv. 1, 2, are mostly found in other psalms. "Let my cry come unto Thee" recalls Psalm xviii. 6. "Hide not Thy face" is like Psalm xxvii. 9. "In the day of my straits" recurs in Psalm lix. 16. "Bend to me Thy ear" is in Psalm xxxi. 2. "In the day when I call" is as in Psalm lvi. 9. "Answer me speedily" is found in Psalm lxix. 17. But the psalmist is not a cold-blooded compiler, weaving a web from old threads, but a suffering man, fain to give his desires voice, in words which sufferers before him had hallowed, and securing a certain solace by reiterating familiar petitions. They are none the less his own, because they have been the cry of others. Some aroma of the answers that they drew down in the past clings to them still, and makes them fragrant to him.

Sorrow and pain are sometimes dumb, but, in Eastern natures, more often eloquent; finding ease in recounting their pangs. The psalmist's first words of self-lamentation echo familiar strains, as he bases his cry for speedy answer on the swiftness with which his days are being whirled away, and melting like smoke as it escapes from a chimney. The image suggests another. The fire that makes the smoke is that in which his very bones are smouldering like a brand. The word for *bones* is in the singular, the bony framework being thought of as articulated into a whole. "Brand" is a doubtful rendering of a word which the Authorised Version, following some ancient Jewish authorities, renders *hearth*, as do Delitzsch and Cheyne. It is used in Isa. xxxiii. 14 as—"burning," but "brand" is required to make out the metaphor. The same theme of physical decay is continued in ver. 4, with a new image struck out by the ingenuity of pain. His heart is "smitten" as by sunstroke (compare Psalm cxxi. 6, Isa. xlix. 10, and for still closer parallels Hosea ix. 16, Jonah iv. 7, in both of which the same effect of fierce sunshine is described as the sufferer here bewails). His heart withers like Jonah's gourd. The "For" in ver. 4 *b* can scarcely be taken as giving the reason for this withering. It must rather be taken as giving the proof that it was so withered as might be concluded by beholders from the fact that he refused his food (Baethgen). The psalmist apparently intends in ver. 5 to describe himself as worn to a skeleton by long-continued

and passionate lamentations. But his phrase is singular. One can understand that emaciation should be described by saying that the bones adhered to the skin, the flesh having wasted away, but that they stick to the flesh can only describe it, by giving a wide meaning to "flesh," as including the whole outward part of the frame in contrast with the internal framework. Lam. iv. 8 gives the more natural expression. The psalmist has groaned himself into emaciation. Sadness and solitude go well together. We plunge into lonely places when we would give voice to our grief. The poet's imagination sees his own likeness in solitude-loving creatures. The pelican is never now seen in Palestine but on Lake Huleh. Thomson ("Land and Book," p. 260: London, 1861) speaks of having found it there only, and describes it as "the most sombre, austere bird I ever saw." "The owl of the ruins" is identified by Tristram ("Land of Israel," p. 67) with the small owl *Athene meridionalis*, the emblem of Minerva, which "is very characteristic of all the hilly and rocky portions of Syria." The *sparrow* may be here a generic term for any small song-bird, but there is no need for departing from the narrower meaning. Thomson (p. 43) says: "When one of them has lost his mate—an every-day occurrence—he will sit on the housetop alone and lament by the hour."

The division of ver. 7 is singular, as the main pause in it falls on "am become," to the disruption of the logical continuity. The difficulty is removed by Wickes ("Accentuation of the Poetical Books," p. 29), who gives several instances which seem to establish the law that, in the musical accentuation, there is "an apparent reluctance to place the main dividing accent after the first, or before the last, word of the verse." The division is not logical, and we may venture to neglect it, and arrange as above, restoring the dividing accent to its place after the first word. Others turn the flank of the difficulty by altering the text to read, "I am sleepless and must moan aloud" (so Cheyne, following Olshausen).

Yet another drop of bitterness in the psalmist's cup is the frantic hatred which pours itself out in voluble mockery all day long, making a running accompaniment to his wail. Solitary as he is, he cannot get beyond hearing of shrill insults. So miserable does he seem, that enemies take him and his distresses for a formula of imprecation, and can find no blacker curse to launch at other foes than to wish that they may be like him. So ashes, the token of mourning, are his food, instead of the bread which he had forgotten to eat, and there are more tears than wine in the cup he drinks.

But all this only tells how sad he is. A deeper depth opens when he remembers why he is sad. The bitterest thought to a sufferer is that his sufferings indicate God's displeasure; but it may be wholesome bitterness, which, leading to the recognition of the sin which evokes the wrath, may change into a solemn thankfulness for sorrows which are discerned to be chastisements, inflicted by that Love of which indignation is one form. The psalmist confesses sin in the act of bewailing sorrow, and sees behind all his pains the working of that hand whose interposition for him he ventures to implore. The tremendous metaphor of ver. 10 *b* pictures it as thrust forth from heaven to grasp the feeble sufferer, as an eagle stoops to plunge its talons into a lamb. It lifts him high, only to give more destructive impetus to

the force with which it flings him down, to the place where he lies, a huddled heap of broken bones and wounds. His plaint returns to its beginning, lamenting the brief life which is being wasted away by sore distress. Lengthening shadows tell of approaching night. His day is nearing sunset. It will be dark soon, and, as he has said (ver. 4), his very self is withering and becoming like dried-up herbage.

One can scarcely miss the tone of individual sorrow in the preceding verses; but national restoration, not personal deliverance, is the theme of the triumphant central part of the psalm. That is no reason for flattening the previous verses into the voice of the personified Israel, but rather for hearing in them the sighing of one exile, on whom the general burden weighed sorely. He lifts his tear-laden eyes to heaven, and catches a vision there which changes, as by magic, the key of his song—Jehovah sitting in royal state (compare Psalms ix. 7, xxix. 10) for ever. That silences complaints, breathes courage into the feeble and hope into the despairing. In another mood the thought of the eternal rule of God might make man's mortality more bitter, but Faith grasps it, as enfolding assurances which turn groaning into ringing praise. For the vision is not only of an everlasting Some One who works a sovereign will, but of the age-long dominion of Him whose name is Jehovah; and since that name is the revelation of His nature, it, too, endures for ever. It is the name of Israel's covenant-making and keeping God. Therefore, ancient promises have not gone to water, though Israel is an exile, and all the old comfort and confidence are still welling up from the Name. Zion cannot die while Zion's God lives. Lam. v. 19 is probably the original of this verse, but the psalmist has changed "throne" into "memorial," *i.e.* name, and thereby deepened the thought. The assurance that God will restore Zion rests not only on His faithfulness, but on signs which show that the sky is reddening towards the day of redemption. The singer sees the indication that the hour fixed in God's eternal counsels is at hand, because he sees how God's servants, who have a claim on Him and are in sympathy with His purposes, yearn lovingly after the sad ruins and dust of the forlorn city. Some new access of such feelings must have been stirring among the devouter part of the exiles. Many large truths are wrapped in the psalmist's words. The desolations of Zion knit true hearts to her more closely. The more the Church or any good cause is depressed, the more need for its friends to cling to it. God's servants should see that their sympathies go toward the same objects as God's do. They are proved to be His servants, because they favour what He favours. Their regards, turned to existing evils, are the precursors of Divine intervention for the remedy of these. When good men begin to lay the Church's or the world's miseries to heart, it is a sign that God is beginning to heal them. The cry of God's servants can "hasten the day of the Lord," and preludes His appearance like the keen morning air stirring the sleeping flowers before sunrise.

The psalmist anticipates that a rebuilt Zion will ensure a worshipping world. He expresses that confidence, which he shares with Isa. xl.-lxvi., in vv. 15-18. The name and glory of Jehovah will become objects of reverence to all the earth, because of the manifestation of them by the rebuilding of Zion, which is a witness to all men of His power and tender regard to His people's cry. The past tenses of vv. 16, 17, do not indicate that

the psalm is later than the Restoration. It is contemplated as already accomplished, because it is the occasion of the "fear" prophesied in ver. 15, and consequently prior in time to it. "Destitute," in ver. 17, is literally *naked* or *stript*. It is used in Jer. xvii. 6 as the name of a desert plant, probably a dwarf juniper, stunted and dry, but seems to be employed here as simply designating utter destitution. Israel had been stripped of every beauty and made naked before her enemies. Despised, she had cried to God, and now is clothed again with the garments of salvation, "as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

A wondering world will adore her delivering God. The glowing hopes of psalmist and prophet seem to be dreams, since the restored Israel attracted no such observance and wrought no such convictions. But the singer was not wrong in believing that the coming of Jehovah in His glory for the rebuilding of Zion would sway the world to homage. His facts were right, but he did not know their perspective, nor could he understand how many weary years lay, like a deep gorge hidden from the eye of one who looks over a wide prospect, between the rebuilding of which he was thinking, and that truer establishment of the city of God, which is again parted from the period of universal recognition of Jehovah's glory by so many sad and stormy generations. But the vision is true. The coming of Jehovah in His glory will be followed by a world's recognition of its light.

That praise accruing to Jehovah shall be not only universal, but shall go on sounding, with increasing volume in its tone, through coming generations. This expectation is set forth in vv. 18-22, which substantially reiterate the thought of the preceding, with the addition that there is to be a new Israel, a people yet to be created (Psalm xxii. 31). The psalmist did not know "the deep things he spoke." He did know that Israel was immortal, and that the seed of life was in the tree that had cast its leaves and stood bare and apparently dead. But he did not know the process by which that new Israel was to be created, nor the new elements of which it was to consist. His confidence teaches us never to despair of the future of God's Church, however low its present state, but to look down the ages, in calm certainty that, however externals may change, the succession of God's children will never fail, nor the voice of their praise ever fall silent.

The course of God's intervention for Israel is described in vv. 19, 20. His looking down from heaven is equivalent to His observance, as the all-seeing Witness and Judge (compare Psalms xiv. 2, xxxiii. 13, 14, etc.), and is preparatory to His hearing the sighing of the captive Israel, doomed to death. The language of ver. 20 is apparently drawn from Psalm lxxix. 11. The thought corresponds to that of ver. 17. The purpose of His intervention is set forth in vv. 21, 22, as being the declaration of Jehovah's name and praise in Jerusalem before a gathered world. The aim of Jehovah's dealings is that all men, through all generations, may know and praise Him. That is but another way of saying that He infinitely desires, and perpetually works for, men's highest good. For our sakes, He desires so much that we should know Him, since the knowledge is life eternal. He is not greedy of adulation nor dependent on recognition, but He loves men too well not to rejoice in being understood and loved by them, since Love ever hungers for return. The psalmist saw what shall one day be, when, far down the ages, he beheld the world gathered in the temple-courts, and

heard the shout of their praise borne to him up the stream of time. He penetrated to the inmost meaning of the Divine acts, when he proclaimed that they were all done for the manifestation of the Name, which cannot but be praised when it is known.

If the poet was one of the exiles, on whom the burden of the general calamity weighed as a personal sorrow, it is very natural that his glowing anticipations of national restoration should be, as in this psalm, enclosed in a setting of more individual complaint and petition. The transition from these to the purely impersonal centre of the psalm, and the recurrence to them in vv. 23-28, are inexplicable, if the "I" of the first and last parts is Israel, but perfectly intelligible if it is one Israelite. For a moment the tone of sadness is heard in ver. 23; but the thought of his own afflicted and brief life is but a stimulus to the psalmist to lay hold of God's immutability and to find rest there. The Hebrew text reads "*His strength*," and is followed by the LXX., Vulgate, Hengstenberg, and Kay ("He afflicted on the way with His power"); but the reading of the Hebrew margin, adopted above and by most commentators, is preferable, as supplying an object for the verb, which is lacking in the former reading, and as corresponding to "*my days*" in *b*.

The psalmist has felt the exhaustion of long sorrow and the shortness of his term. Will God do all these glorious things of which he has been singing, and he, the singer, not be there to see? That would mingle bitterness in his triumphant anticipations; for it would be little to him, lying in his grave, that Zion should be built again. The hopes with which some would console us for the loss of the Christian assurance of immortality, that the race shall march on to new power and nobleness, are poor substitutes for continuance of our own lives and for our own participation in the glories of the future. The psalmist's prayer, which takes God's eternity as its reason for deprecating his own premature death, echoes the inextinguishable confidence of the devout heart, that somehow even its fleeting being has a claim to be assimilated in duration to its Eternal Object of trust and aspiration. The contrast between God's years and man's days may be brooded on in bitterness or in hope. They who are driven by thinking of their own mortality to clutch, with prayerful faith, God's eternity, use the one aright, and will not be deprived of the other.

The solemn grandeur of vv. 25, 26, needs little commentary, but it may be noted that a reminiscence of Isaiah II. runs through them both in the description of the act of creation of heaven and earth (Isa. xlviii. 13, xlv. 24), and in that of their decaying like a garment (Isa. li. 6, liv. 10). That which has been created can be removed. The creatural is necessarily the transient. Possibly, too, the remarkable expression "changed," as applied to the visible creation, may imply the thought which had already been expressed in Isaiah, and was destined to receive such deepening by the Christian truth of the new heavens and new earth—a truth the contents of which are dim to us until it is fulfilled. But whatever may be the fate of creatures, He who receives no accession to His stable being by originating suffers no diminution by extinguishing them. Man's days, the earth's ages, and the æons of the heavens pass, and still "Thou art He," the same Unchanging Author of change. Measures of time fail when applied to His being, whose years have not that

which all divisions of time have—an end. An unending year is a paradox, which, in relation to God, is a truth.

It is remarkable that the psalmist does not draw the conclusion that he himself shall receive an answer to his prayer, but that "the children of Thy servants shall dwell" *i. e.*, in the land, and that there will always be an Israel "established before Thee." He contemplates successive generations as in turn dwelling in the promised land (and perhaps in the ancient "dwelling-place to all generations," even in God); but of his own continuance he is silent. Was he not assured of that? or was he so certain of the answer to his prayer that he had forgotten himself in the vision of the eternal God and the abiding Israel? Having regard to the late date of the psalm, it is hard to believe that silence meant ignorance, while it may well be that it means a less vivid and assured hope of immortality, and a smaller space occupied by that hope than with us. But the other explanation is not to be left out of view, and the psalmist's oblivion of self in rapt gazing on God's eternal being—the pledge of His servant's perpetuity—may teach us that we reach the summit of Faith when we lose ourselves in God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews quotes vv. 25-27 as spoken of "the Son." Such an application of the words rests on the fact that the psalm speaks of the coming of Jehovah for redemption, who is none other than Jehovah manifested fully in the Messiah. But Jehovah whose coming brings redemption and His recognition by the world is also Creator. Since, then, the Incarnation is, in truth, the coming of Jehovah, which the psalmist, like all the prophets, looked for as the consummation, He in whom the redeeming Jehovah was manifested is He in whom Jehovah the Creator "made the worlds." The writer of the Epistle is not asserting that the psalmist consciously spoke of the Messiah, but he is declaring that his words, read in the light of history, point to Jesus as the crowning manifestation of the redeeming, and therefore necessarily of the creating, God.

PSALM CIII.

- 1 Bless Jehovah, my soul,
And all within me [bless] His holy name!
- 2 Bless Jehovah, my soul!
And forget not all His benefits,
- 3 Who forgives all thy iniquity,
Who heals all thy diseases,
- 4 Who redeems thy life from the pit,
Who crowns thee [with] lovingkindness and
compassions,
- 5 Who satisfies thy mouth (?) with good,
[So that] thy youth is renewed like the eagle.
- 6 Jehovah executes righteousness
And judgments for all the oppressed.
- 7 He made known His ways to Moses,
To the children of Israel His great deeds.
- 8 Full of compassion and gracious is Jehovah,
Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkind-
ness.
- 9 He will not continually contend,
And will not keep His anger for ever.
- 10 Not according to our sins has He dealt with us,
And not according to our iniquities has He
recompensed us.
- 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
[So] great is His lovingkindness to them that
fear Him.

- 12 As far as sunrise is from sunset,
[So] far has He put our transgressions from
us.
- 13 As a father has compassion on his children,
Jehovah has compassion on them that fear
Him.
- 14 For He—He knows our frame,
Being mindful that we are dust.
- 15 Frail man—like grass are his days,
Like a flower of the field, so he flowers.
- 16 For a wind passes over him and he is not,
And his place knows him no more.
- 17 But the lovingkindness of Jehovah is from
everlasting even to everlasting upon
them that fear Him,
And His righteousness is to children's chil-
dren;
- 18 To those who keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His statutes to do
them.
- 19 Jehovah has established His throne in the
heavens,
And His kingdom rules over all.
- 20 Bless Jehovah, ye His angels,
Ye mighty in strength, who perform His word,
Harkening to the voice of His word!
- 21 Bless Jehovah, all His hosts,
Ye His ministers, who perform His will!
- 22 Bless Jehovah, all His works,
In all places of His dominion!
Bless Jehovah, my soul!

THERE are no clouds in the horizon, nor notes of sadness in the music, of this psalm. No purer outburst of thankfulness enriches the Church. It is well that, amid the many psalms which give voice to mingled pain and trust, there should be one of unalloyed gladness, as untouched by sorrow as if sung by spirits in heaven. Because it is thus purely an outburst of thankful joy, it is the more fit to be pondered in times of sorrow.

The psalmist's praise flows in one unbroken stream. There are no clear marks of division, but the river broadens as it runs, and personal benefits and individual praise open out into gifts which are seen to fill the universe, and thanksgiving which is heard from every extremity of His wide dominion of lovingkindness.

In ver. 1-5 the psalmist sings of his own experience. His *spirit*, or *ruling self*, calls on his "soul," the weaker and more feminine part, which may be cast down (Psalms xlii., xliii.) by sorrow, and needs stimulus and control, to contemplate God's gifts and to praise Him. A good man will rouse himself to such exercise, and coerce his more sensuous and sluggish faculties to their noblest use. Especially must memory be directed, for it keeps woefully short-lived records of mercies, especially of continuous ones. God's gifts are all "benefits," whether they are bright or dark. The catalogue of blessings lavished on the singer's soul begins with forgiveness and ends with immortal youth. The profound consciousness of sin, which it was one aim of the Law to evoke, underlies the psalmist's praise; and he who does not feel that no blessings could come from heaven, unless forgiveness cleared the way for them, has yet to learn the deepest music of thankfulness. It is followed by "healing" of "all thy diseases," which is no cure of merely bodily ailments, any more than redeeming of life "from the pit" is simply preservation of physical existence. In both there is at least included, even if we do not say that it only is in view, the operation of the pardoning

God in delivering from the sicknesses and death of the spirit.

The soul thus forgiven and healed is crowned with "lovingkindness and compassions," wreathed into a garland for a festive brow, and its adornment is not only a result of these Divine attributes, but the very things themselves, so that an effluence from God beautifies the soul. Nor is even this all, for the same gifts which are beauty are also sustenance, and God satisfies the soul with good, especially with the only real good, Himself. The word rendered above "mouth" is extremely difficult. It is found in Psalm xxxii. 9, where it seems best taken in the meaning of *trappings* or *harness*. That meaning is inappropriate here, though Hupfeld tries to retain it. The LXX. renders "desire," which fits well, but can scarcely be established. Other renderings, such as "age" or "duration"—*i.e.*, the whole extent of life—have been suggested. Hengstenberg and others regard the word as a designation of the soul, somewhat resembling the other term applied to it, "glory"; but the fact that it is the soul which is addressed negatives that explanation. Graetz and others resort to a slight textual alteration, resulting in the reading "thy misery." Delitzsch, in his latest editions, adopts this emendation doubtfully, and supposes that with the word *misery* or *affliction* there is associated the idea "of beseeching and therefore of longing," whence the LXX. rendering would originate. "Mouth" is the most natural word in such connection, and its retention here is sanctioned by "the interpretation of the older versions in Psalm xxxii. 9 and the Arabic cognate" (Perowne). It is therefore retained above, though with some reluctance.

How should a man thus dealt with grow old? The body may, but not the soul. Rather it will drop powers that can decay, and for each thus lost will gain a stronger—moulting, and not being stripped of its wings, though it changes their feathers. There is no need to make the psalmist responsible for the fables of the eagle's renewal of its youth. The comparison with the monarch of the air does not refer to the process by which the soul's wings are made strong, but to the result in wings that never tire, but bear their possessor far up in the blue and towards the throne.

In vv. 6-18 the psalmist sweeps a greater circle, and deals with God's blessings to mankind. He has Israel specifically in view in the earlier verses, but passes beyond Israel to all "who fear Him." It is very instructive that he begins with the definite fact of God's revelation through Moses. He is not spinning a filmy idea of a God out of his own consciousness, but he has learned all that he knows of Him from His historical self-revelation. A hymn of praise which has not revelation for its basis will have many a quaver of doubt. The God of men's imaginations, consciences, or yearnings is a dim shadow. The God to whom love turns undoubting and praise rises without one note of discord is the God who has spoken His own name by deeds which have entered into the history of the world. And what has He revealed Himself to be? The psalmist answers almost in the words of the proclamation made to Moses (vv. 8, 9). The lawgiver had prayed, "I beseech Thee . . . show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee"; and the prayer had been granted, when "the Lord passed by before him," and proclaimed His name as "full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth." That proclamation fills the singer's heart, and his whole

soul leaps up in him, as he meditates on its depth and sweetness. Now, after so many centuries of experience, Israel can repeat with full assurance the ancient self-revelation, which has been proved true by many "mighty deeds."

The psalmist's thoughts are still circling round the idea of forgiveness, with which he began his contemplations. He and his people equally need it; and all that revelation of God's character bears directly on His relation to sin. Jehovah is "long of anger"—*i.e.*, slow to allow it to flash out in punishment—and as lavish of lovingkindness as sparing of wrath. That character is disclosed by deeds. Jehovah's graciousness forces Him to "contend" against a man's sins for the man's sake. But it forbids Him to be perpetually chastising and condemning, like a harsh taskmaster. Nor does He keep His anger ever burning, though He does keep His lovingkindness aflame for a thousand generations. Lightning is transitory; sunshine, constant. Whatever His chastisements, they have been less than our sins. The heaviest is "light," and "for a moment," when compared with the "exceeding weight of" our guilt.

The glorious metaphors in vv. 11, 12, traverse heaven to the zenith, and from sunrise to sunset, to find distances distant enough to express the towering height of God's mercy and the completeness of His removal from us of our sins. That pure arch, the topstone of which nor wings nor thoughts can reach, sheds down all light and heat which make growth and cherish life. It is high above us, but it pours blessings on us, and it bends down all round the horizon to kiss the low, dark earth. The lovingkindness of Jehovah is similarly lofty, boundless, all-fructifying. In ver. 11 *b* the parallelism would be more complete if a small textual alteration were adopted, which would give "high" instead of "great"; but the slight departure which the existing text makes from precise correspondence with *a* is of little moment, and the thought is sufficiently intelligible as the words stand. Between East and West all distances lie. To the eye they bound the world. So far does God's mercy bear away our sins. Forgiveness and cleansing are inseparably united.

But the song drops—or shall we say rises?—from these magnificent measures of the immeasurable to the homely image of a father's pity. We may lose ourselves amid the amplitudes of the lofty, wide-stretching sky, but this emblem of paternal love goes straight to our hearts. A pitying God! What can be added to that? But that fatherly pity is decisively limited to "them that fear Him." It is possible, then, to put oneself outside the range of that abundant dew, and the universality of God's blessings does not hinder self-exclusion from them.

In vv. 14-16 man's brief life is brought in, not as a sorrow or as a cloud darkening the sunny joy of the song, but as one reason for the Divine compassion. "He, He knows our frame." The word rendered "frame" is literally "formation" or "fashioning," and comes from the same root as the verb employed in Gen. ii. 7 to describe man's creation, "The Lord God *formed* man of the dust of the ground." It is also used for the potter's action in moulding earthen vessels (Isa. xxix. 16, etc.). So, in the next clause, "dust" carries on the allusion to Genesis, and the general idea conveyed is that of frailty. Made from dust and fragile as an earthen vessel, man by his weakness appeals to Jehovah's compassion. A blow, delivered with the full force of that almighty hand,

would "break him as a potter's vessel is broken." Therefore God handles us tenderly, as mindful of the brittle material with which He has to deal. The familiar figure of fading vegetation, so dear to the psalmists, recurs here; but it is touched with peculiar delicacy, and there is something very sweet and uncomplaining in the singer's tone. The image of the fading flower, burned up by the simoom, and leaving one little spot in the desert robbed of its beauty, veils much of the terror of death, and expresses no shrinking, though great pathos. Ver. 16 may either describe the withering of the flower, or the passing away of frail man. In the former case, the pronouns would be rendered by "it" and "its"; in the latter, by "he," "him," and "his." The latter seems the preferable explanation. Ver. 16 *b* is verbally the same as Job vii. 10. The contemplation of mortality tinges the song with a momentary sadness, which melts into the pensive, yet cheerful, assurance that mortality has an accompanying blessing, in that it makes a plea for pity from a Father's heart.

But another, more triumphant thought springs up. A devout soul, full-charged with thankfulness based on faith in God's name and ways, cannot but be led by remembering man's brief life to think of God's eternal years. So, the key changes at ver. 17 from plaintive minors to jubilant notes. The psalmist pulls out all the stops of his organ, and rolls along his music in a great *crescendo* to the close. The contrast of God's eternity with man's transitoriness is like the similar trend of thought in Psalms xc., cii. The extension of His lovingkindness to children's children and its limitation to those who fear Him and keep His covenant in obedience, rest upon Exod. xx. 6, xxxiv. 7; Deut. vii. 9. That limitation has been laid down twice already (vv. 11-13). All men share in that lovingkindness and receive the best gifts from it of which they are capable; but those who cling to God in loving reverence, and who are moved by that blissful "fear" which has no torment, to yield their wills to Him in inward submission and outward obedience, do enter into the inner recesses of that lovingkindness, and are replenished with good, of which others are incapable.

If God's lovingkindness is "from everlasting to everlasting," will not His children share in it for as long? The psalm has no articulate doctrine of a future life; but is there not in that thought of an eternal outgoing of God's heart to its objects some (perhaps half-conscious) implication that these will continue to exist? May not the psalmist have felt that, though the flower of earthly life "passed in the passing of an hour," the root would be somehow transplanted to the higher "house of the Lord," and "flourish in the courts of our God," as long as His everlasting mercy poured its sunshine? We, at all events, know that His eternity is the pledge of ours. "Because I live, ye shall live also."

From ver. 19 to the end, the psalm takes a still wider sweep. It now embraces the universe. But it is noticeable that there is no more about "lovingkindness" in these verses. Man's sin and frailty make him a fit recipient of it, but we do not know that in all creation another being, capable of and needing it, is found. Amid starry distances, amid heights and depths, far beyond sunrise and sunset, God's all-including kingdom stretches and blesses all. Therefore, all creatures are called on to Bless Him, since all are blessed by Him, each according to its nature and need. If they

have consciousness, they owe Him praise. If they have not, they praise Him by being. The angels, "heroes of strength," as the words literally read, are "His," and they not only execute His behests, but stand attent before Him, listening to catch the first whispered indication of His will. "His hosts" are by some taken to mean the stars; but surely it is more congruous to suppose that beings who are His "ministers" and perform His "will" are intelligent beings. Their praise consists in hearkening to and doing His word. But obedience is not all their praise; for they too, bring Him tribute of conscious adoration in more melodious music than ever sounded on earth. That "choir invisible" praises the King of heaven; but later revelation has taught us that men shall teach a new song to "principalities and powers in heavenly places," because men only can praise Him whose lovingkindness to them, sinful and dying, redeemed them by His blood.

Therefore, it is no drop from these heavenly anthems, when the psalm circles round at last to its beginning, and the singer calls on his soul to add its "little human praise" to the thunderous chorus. The rest of the universe praises the mighty Ruler; he blesses the forgiving, pitying Jehovah. Nature and angels, stars and suns, seas and forests, magnify their Maker and Sustainer; we can bless the God who pardons iniquities and heals diseases which our fellow-choristers never knew.

PSALM CIV.

- 1 My soul, bless Jehovah,
Jehovah my God, Thou art exceeding great,
Thou hast clothed Thyself with honour and
majesty;
- 2 Covering Thyself with light as with a garment,
Stretching out the heavens like a curtain.
- 3 Who lays the beams of His chambers in the
waters,
Who makes clouds His chariot,
Who walks on the wings of the wind,
- 4 Making winds His messengers,
Flaming fire His servants.
- 5 He sets fast the earth upon its foundations,
[That] it should not be moved for ever and
aye.
- 6 [With] the deep as [with] a garment Thou
didst cover it,
Above the mountains stood the waters.
- 7 At Thy rebuke they fled,
At the voice of Thy thunder they were scared
away.
- 8 —Up rose the mountains, down sank the val-
leys—
To the place which Thou hadst founded for
them.
- 9 A bound hast Thou set [that] they should not
pass over,
Nor return to cover the earth.
- 10 He sends forth springs into the glens,
Between the hills they take their way.
- 11 They give drink to every beast of the field,
The wild asses slake their thirst.
- 12 Above them dwell the birds of heaven,
From between the branches do they give their
note.
- 13 He waters the mountains from His chambers,
With the fruit of Thy works the earth is satis-
fied.
- 14 He makes grass to spring for the cattle,
And the green herb for the service of men,
To bring forth bread from the earth,
- 15 And that wine may gladden the heart of feeble
man;
To cause his face to shine with oil,
And that bread may sustain the heart of feeble
man
- 16 The trees of Jehovah are satisfied,
The cedars of Lebanon which He has planted,
- 17 Wherein the birds nest;
The stork—the cypresses are her house.
- 18 The high mountains are for the wild goats,
The rocks are a refuge for the conies.
- 19 He has made the moon for (*i.e.*, to measure)
seasons,
The sun knows its going down.
- 20 Thou appointest darkness and it is night,
Wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth.
- 21 The young lions roar for their prey,
And to seek from God their meat.
- 22 The sun rises—they steal away,
And lay them down in their dens.
- 23 Forth goes man to his work
And to his labour till evening.
- 24 How manifold are Thy works, Jehovah!
In wisdom hast Thou made them all,
The earth is full of Thy possessions.
- 25 Yonder [is] the sea, great and spread on either
hand,
There are creeping things without number,
Living creatures small and great.
- 26 There the ships go on,
[There is] that Leviathan whom Thou hast
formed to sport in it.
- 27 All these look to Thee,
To give their food in its season.
- 28 Thou givest to them—they gather;
Thou openest Thy hand—they are filled [with]
good.
- 29 Thou hidest Thy face—they are panic-struck;
Thou withdrawest their breath—they expire,
And return to their dust.
- 30 Thou sendest forth Thy breath—they are cre-
ated,
And Thou renewest the face of the earth.
- 31 Let the glory of Jehovah endure for ever,
Let Jehovah rejoice in His works.
- 32 Who looks on the earth and it trembles,
He touches the mountains and they smoke.
- 33 Let me sing to Jehovah while I live,
Let me harp to my God while I have being.
- 34 Be my meditation sweet to Him!
I, I will rejoice in Jehovah.
- 35 Be sinners consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more!
Bless Jehovah, my soul!

Hallelujah!

Like the preceding psalm, this one begins and ends with the psalmist's call to his soul to bless Jehovah. The inference has been drawn that both psalms have the same author, but that is much too large a conclusion from such a fact. The true lesson from it is that Nature, when looked at by an eye that sees it to be full of God, yields material for devout gratitude no less than do His fatherly "mercies to them that fear Him." The key-note of the psalm is struck in ver. 24, which breaks into an exclamation concerning the manifoldness of God's works and the wisdom that has shaped them all. The psalm is a gallery of vivid

Nature-pictures, touched with wonderful grace and sureness of hand. Clearness of vision and sympathy with every living thing make the swift outlines inimitably firm and lovely. The poet's mind is like a crystal mirror, in which the Cosmos is reflected. He is true to the uniform Old Testament point of view, and regards Nature neither from the scientific nor æsthetic standpoint. To him it is the garment of God, the apocalypse of a present Deity, whose sustaining energy is but the prolongation of His creative act. All creatures depend on Him; His continuous action is their life. He rejoices in His works. The Creation narrative in Genesis underlies the psalm, and is in the main followed, though not slavishly.

Ver. 1 would be normal in structure if the initial invocation were omitted, and as ver. 35 would also be complete without it, the suggestion that it is, in both verses, a liturgical addition is plausible. The verse sums up the whole of the creative act in one grand thought. In that act the invisible God has arrayed Himself in splendour and glory, making visible these inherent attributes. That is the deepest meaning of Creation. The Universe is the garment of God.

This general idea lays the foundation for the following picture of the process of creation which is coloured by reminiscences of Genesis. Here, as there, Light is the first-born of Heaven; but the influence of the preceding thought shapes the language, and Light is regarded as God's vesture. The Uncreated Light, who is darkness to our eyes, arrays Himself in created light, which reveals while it veils Him. Everywhere diffused, all-penetrating, all-gladdening, it tells of the Presence in which all creatures live. This clause is the poetic rendering of the work of the first creative day. The next clause in like manner deals with that of the second. The mighty arch of heaven is lifted and expanded over earth as easily as a man draws the cloth or skin sides and canopy of his circular tent over its framework. But our roof is His floor; and, according to Genesis, the firmament (lit. expanse) separates the waters above from those beneath. So the psalm pictures the Divine Architect as laying the beams of His *upper chambers* (for so the word means) in these waters, above the tent roof. The fluid is solid at His will, and the most mobile becomes fixed enough to be the foundation of His royal abode. The custom of having chambers on the roof, for privacy and freshness, suggests the image.

In these introductory verses the poet is dealing with the grander instances of creative power, especially as realised in the heavens. Not till ver. 5 does he drop to earth. His first theme is God's dominion over the elemental forces, and so he goes on to represent the clouds as His chariot, the wind as bearing Him on its swift pinions, and, as the parallelism requires, the winds as His messengers, and devouring fire as His servants. The rendering of ver. 4 adopted in Hebrews from the LXX, is less relevant to the psalmist's purpose of gathering all the forces which sweep through the wide heavens into one company of obedient servants of God, than that adopted above, and now generally recognised. It is to be observed that the verbs in vv. 2-4 are participles, which express continuous action. These creative acts were not done once for all, but are going on still and always. Preservation is continued creation.

With ver. 6 we pass to the work of the third of the Genesis days, and the verb is in the form which

describes a historical fact. The earth is conceived of as formed, and already moulded into mountains and valleys, but all covered with "the deep" like a vesture—a sadly different one from the robe of Light which He wears. That weltering deep is bidden back to its future appointed bounds; and the process is grandly described, as if the waters were sentient, and, panic-struck at God's voice, took to flight. Ver. 8 *a* throws in a vivid touch, to the disturbance of grammatical smoothness. The poet has the scene before his eye, and as the waters flee he sees the earth emerging, the mountains scaring, and the vales sinking, and he breaks his sentence, as if in wonder at the lovely apparition, but returns, in ver. 8 *b*, to tell whither the fugitive waters fled—namely, to the ocean-depths. There they are hemmed in by God's will, and, as was promised to Noah, shall not again run wasting over a drowned world.

The picture of the emerging earth, with its variations of valleys and mountains, remains before the psalmist's eye throughout vv. 10-18, which describe how it is clothed and peopled. These effects are due to the beneficent ministry of the same element, when guided and restrained by God, which swathed the world with desolation. Water runs through the vales, and rain falls on the mountains. Therefore the former bear herbs and corn, vines and olives, and the latter are clothed with trees not planted by human hand, the mighty cedars which spread their broad shelves of steadfast green high up among the clouds. "Everything lives whithersoever water cometh," as Easterns know. Therefore round the drinking-places in the vales thirsty creatures gather, birds flit and sing; up among the cedars are peaceful nests, and inaccessible cliffs have their sure-footed inhabitants. All depend on water, and water is God's gift. The psalmist's view of Nature is characteristic in the direct ascription of all its processes to God. He makes the springs flow, and sends rain on the peaks. Equally characteristic is the absence of any expression of a sense of beauty in the sparkling streams tinkling down the gloomy wadies, or in the rainstorms darkening the hills, or in the green mantle of earth, or in the bright creatures. The psalmist is thinking of use, not of beauty. And yet it is a poet's clear and kindly eye which looks upon all, and sees the central characteristic of each,—the eager drinking of the wild ass; the music of the birds blending with the brawling of the stream, and sweeter because the singers are hidden among the branches; the freshly watered earth, "satisfied" with "the fruit of Thy works" (i.e., the rain which God has sent from His "upper chambers"), the manifold gifts which by His wondrous alchemy are produced from the ground by help of one agency, water; the forest trees with their foliage glistening, as if glad for the rain; the stork on her nest; the goats on the mountains; the "conies" (for which we have no popular name) hurrying to their holes in the cliffs. Man appears as depending, like the lower creatures, on the fruit of the ground; but he has more varied supplies, bread and wine and oil, and these not only satisfy material wants, but "gladden" and "strengthen" the heart. According to some, the word rendered "service" in ver. 14 means "tillage," a meaning which is supported by ver. 23, where the same word is rendered "labour," and which fits in well with the next clause of ver. 14, "to bring forth bread from the earth," which would describe the purpose of the tillage. His prerogative of labour is man's special differentia

in creation. It is a token of his superiority to the happy, careless creatures who toil not nor spin. Earth does not yield him its best products without his co-operation. There would thus be an allusion to him as the only worker in creation similar to that in ver. 23, and to the reference to the "ships" in ver. 26. But probably the meaning of "service," which is suggested by the parallelism, and does not introduce the new thought of co-operation with Nature or God, is to be preferred. The construction is somewhat difficult, but the rendering of vv. 14, 15, given above seems best. The two clauses with infinitive verbs (*to bring forth* and *to cause to shine*) are each followed by a clause in which the construction is varied into that with a finite verb, the meaning remaining the same; and all four clauses express the Divine purpose in causing vegetation to spring. Then the psalmist looks up once more to the hills. "The trees of Jehovah" are so called, not so much because they are great, as because, unlike vines and olives, they have not been planted or tended by man, nor belong to him. Far above the valleys, where men and the cattle dependent on him live on earth's cultivated bounties, the unowned woods stand and drink God's gift of rain, while wild creatures lead free lives amid mountains and rocks.

With ver. 19 the psalmist passes to the fourth day, but thinks of moon and sun only in relation to the alternation of day and night as affecting creatural life on earth. The moon is named first, because the Hebrew day began with the evening. It is the *measurer*, by whose phases seasons (or, according to some, *festivals*) are reckoned. The sun is a punctual servant, knowing the hour to set and duly keeping it. "Thou appointest darkness and it is night." God wills, and His will effects material changes. He says to His servant Night, "Come," and she "comes." The psalmist had peopled the vales and mountains of his picture. Everywhere he had seen life fitted to its environment; and night is populous too. He had outlined swift sketches of tame and wild creatures, and now he half shows us beasts of prey stealing through the gloom. He puts his finger on two characteristics—their stealthy motions, and their cries which made night hideous. Even their roar was a kind of prayer, though they knew it not; it was God from whom they sought their food. It would not have answered the purpose to have spoken of "all the loves, Now sleeping in those quiet groves." The poet desired to show how there were creatures that found possibilities of happy life in all the variety of conditions fashioned by the creative Hand, which was thus shown to be moved by Wisdom and Love. The sunrise sends these nocturnal animals back to their dens, and the world is ready for man. "The sun looked over the mountain's rim," and the beasts of prey slunk to their lairs, and man's day of toil began—the mark of his pre-eminence, God's gift for his good, by which he uses creation for its highest end and fulfils God's purpose. Grateful is the evening rest when the day has been filled with strenuous toil.

The picture of earth and its inhabitants is now complete, and the dominant thought which it leaves on the psalmist's heart is cast into the exultant and wondering exclamation of ver. 24. The variety as well as multitude of the forms in which God's creative idea is embodied, the Wisdom which shapes all, His ownership of all, are the impressions made by the devout contemplation of Nature. The scientist and the artist are left free

to pursue their respective lines of investigation and impression, but scientist and artist must rise to the psalmist's point of view, if they are to learn the deepest lesson from the ordered kingdoms of Nature and from the beauty which floods the world.

With the exclamation in ver. 24 the psalmist has finished his picture of the earth, which he had seen as if emerging from the abyss, and watched as it was gradually clothed with fertility and peopled with happy life. He turns, in vv. 25, 26, to the other half of his Vision of Creation, and portrays the gathered and curbed waters which he now calls the "sea." As always in Scripture, it is described as it looks to a landsman, gazing out on it from the safe shore. The characteristics specified betray unfamiliarity with maritime pursuits. The far-stretching roll of the waters away out to the horizon, the mystery veiling the strange lives swarming in its depths, the extreme contrasts in the magnitude of its inhabitants, strike the poet. He sees "the stately ships go on." The introduction of these into the picture is unexpected. We should have looked for an instance of the "small" creatures, to pair off with the "great" one, Leviathan, in the next words. "A modern poet," says Cheyne, *in loc.*, "would have joined the mighty whale to the fairy nautilus." It has been suggested that "ship" here is a name for the nautilus, which is common in the Eastern Mediterranean. The suggestion is a tempting one, as fitting in more smoothly with the antithesis of *small* and *great* in the previous clause. But, in the absence of any proof that the word has any other meaning than "ship," the suggestion cannot be taken as more than a probable conjecture. The introduction of "ships" into the picture is quite in harmony with the allusions to man's works in the former parts of the psalm, such as ver. 23, and possibly ver. 14. The psalmist seems to intend to insert such reference to man, the only toiler, in all his pictures. "Leviathan" is probably here the whale. Ewald, Hitzig, Baethgen, Kay, and Cheyne follow the LXX. and Vulgate in reading "Leviathan whom Thou hast formed to sport with him," and take the words to refer to Job xli. 5. The thought would then be that God's power can control the mightiest creature's plunges; but "the two preceding 'there's' are in favour of the usual interpretation, 'there-in'" (Hupfeld), and consequently of taking the "sporting" to be that of the unwieldy gambols of the sea-monster.

Verses 27-30 mass all creatures of earth and sea, including man, as alike dependent on God for sustenance and for life. Dumbly these look expectant to Him, though man only knows to whom all living eyes are directed. The swift clauses in vv. 28-30, without connecting particles, vividly represent the Divine acts as immediately followed by the creatural consequences. To this psalmist the links in the chain were of little consequence. His thoughts were fixed on its two ends—the Hand that sent its power thrilling through the links, and the result realised in the creature's life. All natural phenomena are issues of God's present will. Preservation is as much His act, as inexplicable without Him, as creation. There would be nothing to "gather" unless He "gave." All sorts of supplies, which make the "good" of physical life, are in His hand, whether they be the food of the wild asses by the streams, or of the conies among the cliffs, or of the young lions in the night, or of Leviathan tumbling amidst the waves, or

of toiling man. Nor is it only the nourishment of life which comes straight from God to all, but life itself depends on His continual inbreathing. His face is creation's light; breath from Him is its life. The withdrawal of it is death. Every change in creatural condition is wrought by Him. He is the only Fountain of Life, and the reservoir of all the forces that minister to life or to inanimate being. But the psalmist will not end his contemplations with the thought of the fair creation returning to nothingness. Therefore he adds another verse (30); which tells of "life re-orient out of dust." Individuals pass; the type remains. New generations spring. The yearly miracle of Spring brings greenness over the snow-covered or brown pastures and green shoots from stiffened boughs. Many of last year's birds are dead, but there are nests in the cypresses, and twitterings among the branches in the wadies. Life, not death, prevails in God's world.

So the psalmist gathers all up into a burst of praise. He desires that the glory of God, which accrues to Him from His works, may ever be rendered through devout recognition of Him as working them all by man, the only creature who can be the spokesman of creation. He further desires that, as God at first saw that all was "very good," He may ever continue thus to rejoice in His works, or, in other words, that these may fulfil His purpose. Possibly His rejoicing in His works is regarded as following upon man's giving glory to Him for them. That rejoicing, which is the manifestation both of His love and of His satisfaction, is all the more desired, because, if His works do *not* please Him, there lies in Him a dread abyss of destructive power, which could sweep them into nothingness. Superficial readers may feel that the tone of ver. 32 strikes a discord, but it is a discord which can be resolved into deeper harmony. One frown from God, and the solid earth trembles, as conscious to its depths of His displeasure. One touch of the hand that is filled with good, and the mountains smoke. Creation perishes if He is displeased. Well then may the psalmist pray that He may for ever rejoice in His works, and make them live by His smile.

Very beautifully and profoundly does the psalmist ask, in vv. 33, 34, that some echo of the Divine joy may gladden his own heart, and that his praise may be coeval with God's glory and his own life. This is the Divine purpose in creation—that God may rejoice in it and chiefly in man its crown, and that man may rejoice in Him. Such sweet commerce is possible between heaven and earth; and they have learned the lesson of creative power and love aright who by it have been led to share in the joy of God. The psalm has been shaped in part by reminiscences of the creative days of creation. It ends with the Divine Sabbath, and with the prayer, which is also a hope, that man may enter into God's rest.

But there is one discordant note in creation's full-toned hymn, "the fair music that all creatures made." There are sinners on earth; and the last prayer of the psalmist is that that blot may be removed, and so nothing may mar the realisation of God's ideal, nor be left to lessen the completeness of His delight in His work. And so the psalm ends, as it began, with the singer's call to his own soul to bless Jehovah.

This is the first psalm which closes with Hallelujah (Praise Jehovah). It is appended to the two following psalms, which close Book IV., and is again found in Book V., in Psalms cxi.-cxiii.,

cxv.-cxvii., and in the final group, Psalms cxlvi.-cl. It is probably a liturgical addition.

PSALM CV.

- 1 Give thanks to Jehovah, call on His name,
Make known among the peoples His deeds.
- 2 Sing to Him, harp to Him,
Speak musingly of all His wonders.
- 3 Glory in His holy name,
Glad be the heart of them that seek Jehovah!
- 4 Inquire after Jehovah and His strength,
Seek His face continually.
- 5 Remember His wonders which He has done,
His marvels and the judgments of His mouth.
- 6 O seed of Abraham His servant,
Sons of Jacob, His chosen ones.
- 7 He, Jehovah, is our God,
In all the earth are His judgments.
- 8 He remembers His covenant for ever,
The word which He commanded for a thousand generations;
- 9 Which He made with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac.
- 10 And he established it with Jacob for a statute,
To Israel for an everlasting covenant,
- 11 Saying, "To thee will I give the land of Canaan,
[As] your measured allotment;"
- 12 Whilst they were easily counted,
Very few, and but sojourners therein;
- 13 And they went about from nation to nation,
From [one] kingdom to another people.
- 14 He suffered no man to oppress them,
And reprov'd kings for their sakes;
- 15 [Saying], "Touch not Mine anointed ones,
And to My prophets do no harm."
- 16 And He called for a famine on the land,
Every staff of bread He broke.
- 17 He sent before them a man,
For a slave was Joseph sold.
- 18 They afflicted his feet with the fetter,
He was put in irons.
- 19 Till the time [when] his word came [to pass],
The promise of Jehovah tested him.
- 20 The king sent and loosed him,
The ruler of peoples, and let him go.
- 21 He made him lord over his house,
And ruler over all his substance;
- 22 To bind princes at his pleasure,
And to make his elders wise.
- 23 So Israel came to Egypt,
And Jacob sojourn'd in the land of Ham.
- 24 And He made his people fruitful exceedingly,
And made them stronger than their foes.
- 25 He turned their heart to hate His people,
To deal craftily with His servants.
- 26 He sent Moses His servant,
[And] Aaron whom He had chosen.
- 27 They set [torth] among them His signs,
And wonders in the land of Ham.
- 28 He sent darkness, and made it dark,
And they rebelled not against His words.
- 29 He turned their waters to blood,
And slew their fish.
- 30 Their land swarmed [with] frogs,
In the chambers of their kings.

- 31 He spake and the gad-fly came,
Gnats in all their borders.
32 He gave hail [for] their rains,
Flaming fire in their land.
33 And He smote their vine and their fig-tree,
And broke the trees of their borders.
34 He spoke and the locust came,
And caterpillar-locusts without number,
35 And ate up every herb in their land,
And ate up the fruit of their ground.
36 And he smote every first-born in their land.
The firstlings of all their strength.
37 And He brought them out with silver and
gold,
And there was not one among His tribes who
stumbled.
38 Glad was Egypt at their departure,
For the fear of them had fallen upon them.
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
And fire to light the night.
40 They asked and He brought quails,
And [with] bread from heaven He satisfied
them.
41 He opened the rock and forth gushed waters,
They flowed through the deserts, a river.
42 For He remembered His holy word,
[And] Abraham His servant;
43 And He brought out His people [with] joy,
With glad cries His chosen [ones];
44 And He gave them the lands of the nations,
And they took possession of the toil of the
peoples,
45 To the end that they might observe His stat-
utes,
And keep His laws.

Hallelujah!

It is a reasonable conjecture that the Hallelujah at the end of Psalm civ., where it is superfluous, properly belongs to this psalm, which would then be assimilated to Psalm cvi., which is obviously a companion psalm. Both are retrospective and didactic; but Psalm cv. deals entirely with God's unfailing faithfulness to Israel, while Psalm cvi. sets forth the sad contrast presented by Israel's continual faithlessness to God. Each theme is made more impressive by being pursued separately, and then set over against the other. The long series of God's mercies massed together here confronts the dark uniformity of Israel's unworthy requital of them there. Half of the sky is pure blue and radiant sunshine; half is piled with unbroken clouds. Nothing drives home the consciousness of sin so surely as contemplation of God's loving acts. Probably this psalm, like others of similar contents, is of late date. The habit of historical retrospect for religious purposes is likely to belong to times remote from the events recorded. Vv. 1-15 are found in 1 Chron. xvi. as part of the hymn at David's setting up of the Ark on Zion. But that hymn is unmistakably a compilation from extant psalms, and cannot be taken as decidedly the Davidic authorship of the psalm.

Vv. 1-6 are a ringing summons to extol and contemplate God's great deeds for Israel. They are full of exultation, and, in their reiterated short clauses, are like the joyful cries of a herald bringing good tidings to Zion. There is a beautiful progress of thought in these verses. They begin with the call to thank and praise Jehovah and to proclaim His doings among the people. That recognition of Israel's office as the world's evangelist does not require the supposition that the nation was dispersed in captivity, but simply shows that

the singer understood the reason for the long series of mercies heaped on it. It is significant that God's "deeds" are Israel's message to the world. By such deeds His "name" is spoken. What God has done is the best revelation of what God is. His messengers are not to speak their own thoughts about Him, but to tell the story of His acts and let these speak for Him. Revelation is not a set of propositions, but a history of Divine facts. The foundation of audible praise and proclamation is contemplation. Therefore the exhortation in ver. 2 *b* follows, which means not merely "speak," but may be translated, as in margin of the Revised Version, "meditate," and is probably best rendered so as to combine both ideas, "musingly speak." Let not the words be mere words, but feel the great deeds which you proclaim. In like manner, ver. 3 calls upon the heralds to "glory" for themselves in the name of Jehovah, and to make efforts to possess Him more fully and to rejoice in finding Him. Aspiration after clearer and closer knowledge and experience of God should ever underlie glad pealing forth of His name. If it does not, eloquent tongues will fall silent, and Israel's proclamation will be cold and powerless. To seek Jehovah is to find His strength investing our feebleness. To turn our faces towards His in devout desire is to have our faces made bright by reflected light. And one chief way of seeking Jehovah is the remembrance of His merciful wonders of old, "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered" (Psalm cxi. 4), and His design in them is that men should have solid basis for their hopes, and be thereby encouraged to seek Him, as well as be taught what He is. Thus the psalmist reaches his main theme, which is to build a memorial of these deeds for an everlasting possession. The "wonders" referred to in ver. 5 are chiefly those wrought in Egypt, as the subsequent verses show.

Ver. 6 contains, in the names given to Israel, the reason for their obeying the preceding summonses. Their hereditary relation to God gives them the material, and imposes on them the obligation and the honour of being "secretaries of God's praise." In ver. 6 *a* "His servant" may be intended to designate the nation, as it often does in Isa. xl.-lxvi. "His chosen ones" in ver. 6 *b* would then be an exact parallel; but the recurrence of the expression in ver. 42, with the individual reference, makes that reference more probable here.

The fundamental fact underlying all Israel's experience of God's care is His own loving will, which, self-moved, entered into covenant obligations, so that thereafter His mercies are ensured by His veracity, no less than by His kindness. Hence the psalm begins its proper theme by hymning the faithfulness of God to His oath, and painting the insignificance of the beginnings of the nation, as showing that the ground of God's covenant relation was laid in Himself, not in them. Israel's consciousness of holding a special relation to God never obscured, in the minds of psalmists and prophets, the twin truth that all the earth waited on Him, and was the theatre of His manifestations. Baser souls might hug themselves on their prerogative. The nobler spirits ever confessed that it laid on them duties to the world, and that God had not left Himself without witness in any land. These two truths have often been rent asunder, both in Israel and in Christendom, but each needs the other for its full comprehension. "Jehovah is our God" may become the war-cry of bitter hostility to them that are with-

out, or of contempt, which is quite as irreligious. "In all the earth are His judgments" may lead to a vague theism, incredulous of special revelation. He who is most truly penetrated with the first will be most joyfully ready to proclaim the second of these sister-thoughts, and will neither shut up all God's mercies within the circle of revelation, nor lose sight of His clearest utterances while looking on His more diffused and less perfect ones.

The obligations under which God has come to Israel are represented as a covenant, a word and an oath. In all the general idea of explicit declaration of Divine purpose, which henceforth becomes binding on God by reason of His faithfulness, is contained; but the conception of a *covenant* implies mutual obligation, failure to discharge which on one side relieves the other contracting party from his promise, while that of a *word* simply includes the notion of articulate utterance, and that of an *oath* adds the thought of a solemn sanction and a pledge given. God swears by Himself—that is, His own character is the guarantee of His promise. These various designations are thus heaped together, in order to heighten the thought of the firmness of His promise. It stands "for ever," "to a thousand generations"; it is an "everlasting covenant." The psalmist triumphs, as it were, in the manifold repetition of it. Each of the fathers of the nation had it confirmed to himself,—Abraham; Isaac when, ready to flee from the land in famine, he had renewed to him (Gen. xxvi. 3) the oath which he had first heard as he stood, trembling but unharmed, by the rude altar where the ram lay in his stead (Gen. xxii. 16); Jacob as he lay beneath the stars of Bethel. With Jacob (Israel) the singer passes from the individuals to the nation, as is shown by the alternation of "thee" and "you" in ver. 11.

The lowly condition of the recipients of the promise not only exalts the love which chose them, but the power which preserved them and fulfilled it. And if, as may be the case, the psalm is exilic or post-exilic, its picture of ancient days is like a mirror, reflecting present depression and bidding the downcast be of good cheer. He who made a strong nation out of that little horde of wanderers must have been moved by His own heart, not by anything in them; and what He did long ago He can do to-day. God's past is the prophecy of God's future. Literally rendered, ver. 12 *a* runs "Whilst they were men of number," *i.e.*, easily numbered (Gen. xxxiv. 30, where Jacob uses the same phrase). "Very few" in *b* is literally "like a little," and may either apply to number or to worth. It is used in the latter sense, in reference to "the heart of the wicked," in Prov. x. 20, and may have the same meaning here. That little band of wanderers, who went about as sojourners among the kinglets of Canaan and Philistia, with occasional visits to Egypt, seemed very vulnerable; but God was, as He had promised to the first of them at a moment of extreme peril, their "shield," and in their lives there were instances of strange protection afforded them, which curbed kings, as in the case of Abram in Egypt (Gen. xii.) and Gerar (Gen. xx.), and of Isaac in the latter place (Gen. xxvi.). The patriarchs were not, technically speaking, "anointed," but they had that of which anointing was but a symbol. They were Divinely set apart and endowed for their tasks, and, as consecrated to God's service, their persons were inviolable. In a very profound sense all God's

servants are thus anointed, and are "immortal till their work is done." "Prophets" in the narrower sense of the word the patriarchs were not, but Abraham is called so by God in one of the places already referred to (Gen. xx. 7). Prior to prophetic utterance is prophetic inspiration: and these men received Divine communications, and were, in a special degree, possessed of the counsels of Heaven. The designation is equivalent to Abraham's name of the "friend of God." Thus both titles, which guaranteed a charmed, invulnerable life to their bearers, go deep into the permanent privileges of God-trusting souls. All such "have an anointing from the Holy One," and receive whispers from His lips. They are all under the ægis of His protection, and for their sakes kings of many a dynasty and age have been rebuked.

In vv. 16-22 the history of Joseph is poetically and summarily treated, as a link in the chain of providences which brought about the fulfilment of the Covenant. Possibly the singer is thinking about a captive Israel in the present, while speaking about a captive Joseph in the past. In God's dealings humiliation and affliction are often, he thinks, the precursors of glory and triumph. Calamities prepare the way for prosperity. So it was in that old time; and so it is still. In this *résumé* of the history of Joseph, the points signalised are God's direct agency in the whole—the errand on which Joseph was sent ("before them") as a forerunner to "prepare a place for them," the severity of his sufferings, the trial of his faith by the contrast which his condition presented to what God had promised, and his final exaltation. The description of Joseph's imprisonment adds some dark touches to the account in Genesis, whether these are due to poetic idealising or to tradition. In ver. 18 *b* some would translate "Iron came over his soul." So Delitzsch, following the Vulgate ("Ferrum pertransiit animam ejus"), and the picturesque Prayer-Book Version, "The iron entered into his soul." But the original is against this, as the word for *iron* is masculine and the verb is feminine, agreeing with the feminine noun *soul*. The clause is simply a parallel to the preceding. "His soul" is best taken as a mere periphrasis for *he*, though it may be used emphatically to suggest that "his soul entered, whole and entire, in its resolve to obey God, into the cruel torture" (Kay). The meaning is conveyed by the free rendering above.

Ver. 19 is also ambiguous, from the uncertainty as to whose word is intended in *a*. It may be either God's or Joseph's. The latter is the more probable, as there appears to be an intentional contrast between "His word," in *a*, and "the promise of Jehovah" in *b*. If this explanation is adopted, a choice is still possible between Joseph's interpretation of his fellow-prisoners' dreams, the fulfilment of which led to his liberation, and his earlier word recounting his own dreams, which led to his being sold by his brethren. In any case, the thought of the verse is a great and ever true one, that God's promise, while it remains unfulfilled, and seems contradicted by present facts, serves as a test of the genuineness and firmness of a man's reliance on Him and it. That promise is by the psalmist almost personified, as putting Joseph to the test. Such testing is the deepest meaning of all afflictions. Fire will burn off a thin plating of silver from a copper coin and reveal the base metal beneath, but it will only brighten into a glow the one which is all silver.

There is a ring of triumph in the singer's voice

as he tells of the honour and power heaped on the captive, and of how the king and many nations "sent," as the mightier King in heaven had done (vv. 20 and 17), and not only liberated but exalted him, giving him, whose soul had been bound in fetters, power to "bind princes according to his soul," and to instruct and command the elders of Egypt.

Vv. 23-27 carry on the story to the next step in the evolution of God's purposes. The long years of the sojourn in Egypt are summarily dealt with, as they are in the narrative in Genesis and Exodus, and the salient points of its close alone are touched—the numerical growth of the people, the consequent hostility of the Egyptians, and the mission of Moses and Aaron. The direct ascription to God of all the incidents mentioned is to be noted. The psalmist sees only one hand moving, and has no hesitation in tracing to God the turning of the Egyptians' hearts to hatred. Many commentators, both old and new, try to weaken the expression, by the explanation that the hatred was "indirectly the work of God, inasmuch as He lent increasing might to the people" (Delitzsch). But the psalmist means much more than this, just as Exodus does in attributing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart to God.

Ver. 27, according to the existing text, breaks the series of verses beginning with a singular verb of which God is the subject, which stretch with only one other interruption from ver. 24 to ver. 37. It seems most probable, therefore, that the LXX. is right in reading *He* instead of *They*. The change is but the omission of one letter, and the error supposed is a frequent one. The word literally means *set* or *planted*, and *did* is an explanation rather than a rendering. The whole expression is remarkable. Literally, we should translate "He" (or "They") "set among them words" (or "matters") "of His signs"; but this would be unintelligible, and we must have recourse to reproduction of the meaning rather than of the words.

If "words of His signs" is not merely pleonastic, it may be rendered as by Kay, "His long record of signs," or as by Cheyne, "His varied signs." But it is better to take the expression as suggesting that the *miracles* were indeed *words*, as being declarations of God's will and commands to let His people go. The phrase in ver. 5, "the judgments of His mouth," would then be roughly parallel. God's deeds are words. His signs have tongues. "He speaks and it is done"; but also, "He does and it is spoken." The expression, however, may be like Psalm lxxv. 4, where the same form of phrase is applied to sins, and where it seems to mean "deeds of iniquity." It would then mean here "His works which were signs."

The following enumeration of the "signs" does not follow the order in Exodus, but begins with the ninth plague, perhaps because of its severity, and then in the main adheres to the original sequence, though it inverts the order of the third and fourth plagues (flies and gnats or mosquitoes, not "lice") and omits the fifth and sixth. The reason for this divergence is far from clear, but it may be noted that the first two in the psalmist's order attack the elements; the next three (frogs, flies, gnats) have to do with animal life; and the next two (hail and locusts), which embrace both these categories, are considered chiefly as affecting vegetable products. The emphasis is laid in all on God's direct act. *He* sends darkness. *He* turns the waters into blood, and so on. The only other

point needing notice in these verses is the statement in ver. 28 b. "They rebelled not against His word," which obviously is true only in reference to Moses and Aaron, who shrank not from their perilous embassy.

The tenth plague is briefly told for the psalm is hurrying on to the triumphant climax of the Exodus, when, enriched with silver and gold, the tribes went forth, strong for their desert march, and Egypt rejoiced to see the last of them, "for they said, We be all dead men" (Exod. xii. 33). There may be a veiled hope in this exultant picture of the Exodus, that present oppression will end in like manner. The wilderness sojourn is so treated in ver. 39 *sqq.* as to bring into sight only the leading instances, sung in many psalms, of God's protection, without one disturbing reference to the sins and failures which darkened the forty years. These are spread out at length, without flattery or minimising, in the next psalm; but here the theme is God's wonders. Therefore, the pillar of cloud which guided, covered, and illumined the camp, the miracles which provided food and water, are touched on in vv. 39-41, and then the psalmist gathers up the lessons which he would teach in three great thoughts. The reason for God's merciful dealings with His people is His remembrance of His covenant, and of His servant Abraham, whose faith made a claim on God, for the fulfilment which would vindicate it. That covenant has been amply fulfilled, for Israel came forth with ringing songs, and took possession of lands which they had not tilled, and houses which they had not built. The purpose of covenant and fulfilment is that the nation, thus admitted into special relations with God, should by His mercies be drawn to keep His commandments, and in obedience find rest and closer fellowship with its God. The psalmist had learned that God gives before He demands or commands, and that "Love," springing from grateful reception of His benefits, "is the fulfilling of the Law." He anticipates the full Christian exhortation, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice."

PSALM CVI.

- 1 Hallelujah!
Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness [endures] for ever.
- 2 Who can speak forth the mighty deeds of
Jehovah?
[Who] can cause all His praise to be heard?
- 3 Blessed are they who observe right,
He who does righteousness at all times.
- 4 Remember me, Jehovah, with the favour
which Thou bearest to Thy people,
Visit me with Thy salvation;
- 5 That I may look on the prosperity of Thy
chosen ones,
That I may joy in the joy of Thy nation,
That I may triumph with Thine inheritance.
- 6 We have sinned with our fathers,
We have done perversely, have done wickedly.
- 7 Our fathers in Egypt considered not Thy
wonders,
They remembered not the multitude of Thy
lovingkindnesses.
And rebelled at the Sea, by the Red Sea.

- 8 And He saved them for His name's sake,
To make known His might;
9 And He rebuked the Red Sea and it was
dried up,
And He led them in the depths as in a wil-
derness;
10 And He saved them from the hand of the
hater,
And redeemed them from the hand of the
enemy;
11 And the waters covered their oppressors,
Not one of them was left;
12 And they believed on His words.
They sang His praise.
- 13 They hasted [and] forgot His works,
They waited not for His counsel;
14 And they lusted a lust in the wilderness,
And tempted God in the desert;
15 And He gave them what they asked for,
And sent wasting sickness into their soul.
16 They were jealous against Moses in the
camp,
Against Aaron, the holy one of Jehovah.
17 The earth opened and swallowed Dathan,
And covered the company of Abiram;
18 And fire blazed out on their company,
Flame consumed the wicked ones.
- 19 They made a calf in Horeb,
And bowed down to a molten image;
20 And they changed their Glory
For the likeness of a grass-eating ox.
21 They forgot God their Saviour,
Who did great things in Egypt,
22 Wonders in the land of Ham,
Dread things by the Red Sea.
23 And He said that He would annihilate them,
Had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the
breach confronting Him
To turn His anger from destroying.
- 24 And they despised the delightful land,
They trusted not to His word;
25 And they murmured in their tents,
They hearkened not to the voice of Jehovah;
26 And He lifted up His hand to them, [swear-
ing]
That He would make them fall in the wil-
derness.
27 And that He would make their seed fall
among the nations,
And scatter them in the lands.
- 28 And they yoked themselves to Baal-Peor,
And ate the sacrifices of dead [gods];
29 And they provoked Him by their doings,
And a plague broke in upon them;
30 And Phinehas stood up and did judgment,
And the plague was stayed;
31 And it was reckoned to him for righteous-
ness,
To generation after generation, for ever.
- 32 And they moved indignation at the waters of
Meribah,
And it fared ill with Moses on their account.
33 For they rebelled against [His] Spirit,
And he spoke rashly with his lips.
34 They destroyed not the peoples
[Of] whom Jehovah spoke to them;
35 And they mixed themselves with the nations
And learned their works;
36 And they served their idols,
And they became to them a snare;
- 37 And they sacrificed their sons
And their daughters to demons;
38 And they shed innocent blood, the blood of
their sons and daughters,
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
And the land was profaned by bloodshed.
39 And they became unclean through their
works,
And committed whoredom through their
doings.
- 40 And the anger of Jehovah kindled on His
people,
And He abhorred His inheritance;
41 And He gave them into the hand of the na-
tions,
And their haters lorded it over them;
42 And their enemies oppressed them,
And they were bowed down under their hand.
43 Many times did He deliver them,
And they—they rebelliously followed their
own counsel,
And were brought low through their iniquity;
44 And He looked on their distress
When He heard their cry;
45 And He remembered for them His covenant,
And repented according to the multitude of
His lovingkindness.
46 And caused them to find compassion,
In the presence of all their captors.
- 47 Save us, Jehovah, our God,
And gather us from among the nations,
That we may thank Thy holy name,
That we may make our boast in Thy praise.
- 48 Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel,
From everlasting and to everlasting,
And let all the people say Amen.
Hallelujah!

THE history of God's past is a record of continuous mercies, the history of man's, one of as continuous sin. The memory of the former quickened the psalmist into his sunny song of thankfulness in the previous psalm. That of the latter moves him to the confessions in this one. They are complements of each other, and are connected not only as being both retrospective, but by the identity of their beginnings and the difference of their points of view. The parts of the early history dealt with in the one are lightly touched or altogether omitted in the other. The key-note of Psalm cv. is, "Remember His mighty deeds"; that of Psalm cvi. is, "They forgot His mighty deeds."

Surely never but in Israel has patriotism chosen a nation's sins for the themes of song, or, in celebrating its victories, written but one name, the name of Jehovah, on its trophies. But in the Psalter we have several instances of such hymns of national confession; and, in other books, there are the formulæ at the presentation of the first-fruits (Deut. xxvi.), Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings viii.), Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. ix.), and Daniel's (Dan. ix.).

An exilic date is implied by the prayer of ver. 47, for the gathering of the people from among the nations. The occurrence of vv. 1 and 47, 48, in the compilation in 1 Chron. xvi. shows that this psalm, which marks the close of the Fourth Book, was in existence prior to the date of 1 Chronicles.

No trace of strophical arrangement is discernible. But, after an introduction in some measure like that in Psalm cv., the psalmist plunges into

his theme, and draws out the long, sad story of Israel's faithlessness. He recounts seven instances during the wilderness sojourn (vv. 7-33), and then passes to those occurring in the Land (vv. 34-39), with which he connects the alternations of punishment and relenting on God's part and the obstinacy of transgression on Israel's, even down to the moment in which he speaks (vv. 40-46). The whole closes with a prayer for restoration to the Land (ver. 47); to which is appended the doxology (ver. 48), the mark of the end of Book IV., and not a part of the psalm.

The psalmist precludes his confession and contemplation of his people's sins by a glad remembrance of God's goodness and enduring loving-kindness and by a prayer for himself. Some commentators regard these introductory verses as incongruous with the tone of the psalm, and as mere liturgical commonplace, which has been tacked on without much heed to fitness. But surely the thought of God's unspeakable goodness most appropriately precedes the psalmist's confession, for nothing so melts a heart in penitence as the remembrance of God's love, and nothing so heightens the evil of sin as the consideration of the patient goodness which it has long flouted. The blessing pronounced in ver. 3 on those who "do righteousness" and keep the law is not less natural, before a psalm which sets forth in melancholy detail the converse truth of the misery that dogs breaking the law.

In vv. 4, 5, the psalmist interjects a prayer for himself, the abruptness of which strongly reminds us of similar jets of personal supplication in Nehemiah. The determination to make the "I" of the Psalter the nation perversely insists on that personification here, in spite of the clear distinction thrice drawn in ver. 5 between the psalmist and his people. The "salvation" in which he desires to share is the deliverance from exile for which he prays in the closing verse of the psalm. There is something very pathetic in this momentary thought of self. It breathes wistful yearning, absolute confidence in the unrealised deliverance, lowly humility which bases its claim with God on that of the nation. Such a prayer stands in the closest relation to the theme of the psalm, which draws out the dark record of national sin, in order to lead to that national repentance which, as all the history shows, is the necessary condition of "the prosperity of Thy chosen ones." Precisely because the hope of restoration is strong, the delineation of sin is unsparing.

With ver. 6 the theme of the psalm is given forth, in language which recalls Solomon's and Daniel's similar confessions (1 Kings viii. 47; Dan. ix. 5). The accumulation of synonyms for sin witnesses at once to the gravity and manifoldness of the offences, and to the earnestness and comprehensiveness of the acknowledgment. The remarkable expression "We have sinned *with* our fathers" is not to be weakened to mean merely that the present generation had sinned like their ancestors, but gives expression to the profound sense of national solidarity, which speaks in many other places of Scripture, and rests on very deep facts in the life of nations and their individual members. The enumeration of ancestral sin begins with the murmurings of the faint-hearted fugitives by the Red Sea. In Psalm cv. the wonders in Egypt were dilated on and the events at the Red Sea unmentioned. Here the signs in Egypt are barely referred to and treated as past at the point where the psalm begins, while the incidents

by the Red Sea fill a large space in the song. Clearly, the two psalms supplement each other. The reason given for Israel's rebellion in Psalm cvi. is its forgetfulness of God's mighty deeds (ver. 7 *a, b*), while in Psalm cv. the remembrance of these is urgently enjoined. Thus, again, the connection of thought in the pair of psalms is evident. Every man has experiences enough of God's goodness stored away in the chambers of his memory to cure him of distrust, if he would only look at them. But they lie unnoticed, and so fear has sway over him. No small part of the discipline needed for vigorous hope lies in vigorous exercise of remembrance. The drying up of the Red Sea is here poetically represented, with omission of Moses' outstretched rod and the strong east wind, as the immediate consequence of God's omnipotent rebuke. Ver. 9 *b* is from Isa. lxiii. 13, and picturesquely describes the march through that terrible gorge of heaped-up waters as being easy and safe, as if it had been across some wide-stretching plain, with springy turf to tread on. The triumphant description of the completeness of the enemies' destruction in ver. 11 *b* is from Exod. xiv. 28, and "they believed on His words" is in part quoted from Exod. xiv. 31, while Miriam's song is referred to in ver. 12 *b*.

The next instance of departure is the lusting for food (vv. 13-15). Again the evil is traced to forgetfulness of God's doings, to which in ver. 13 *b* is added impatient disinclination to wait the unfolding of His counsel or plan. These evils cropped up with strange celerity. The memory of benefits was transient, as if they had been written on the blown sands of the desert. "They hasted, they forgot His works." Of how many of us that has to be said! We remember pain and sorrow longer than joy and pleasure. It is always difficult to bridle desires and be still until God discloses His purposes. We are all apt to try to force His hand open, and to impose our wishes on Him, rather than to let His will mould us. So, on forgetfulness and impatience there followed then, as there follow still, eager longings after material good and a tempting of God. "They lusted a lust" is from Num. xi. 4. "Tempted God" is found in reference to the same incident in the other psalm of historical retrospect (lxxviii. 18). He is "tempted" when unbelief demands proofs of His power, instead of waiting patiently for Him. In Num. xi. 33 Jehovah is said to have smitten the people "with a very great plague." The psalm specifies more particularly the nature of the stroke by calling it "wasting sickness," which invaded the life of the sinners. The words are true in a deeper sense, though not so meant. For whoever sets his hot desires in self-willed fashion on material good, and succeeds in securing their gratification, gains with the satiety of his lower sense the loss of a shrivelled spiritual nature. Full-fed flesh makes starved souls.

The third instance is the revolt headed by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against the exclusive Aaronic priesthood (vv. 16-18). It was rebellion against God, for He had set apart Aaron as His own, and therefore the unusual title of "the holy one of Jehovah" is here given to the high priest. The expression recalls the fierce protest of the mutineers, addressed to Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy" (Num. xvi. 3); and also Moses' answer, "Jehovah will show . . . who is holy." Envy often masquerades as the champion of the rights of the community, when it only wishes to grasp

these for itself. These aristocratic democrats cared nothing for the prerogatives of the nation, though they talked about them. They wanted to pull down Aaron, not to lift up Israel. Their end is described with stern brevity, in language coloured by the narrative in Numbers, from which the phrases "opened" (*i.e.*, her mouth) and "covered" are drawn. Korah is not mentioned here, in which the psalm follows Num. xvi. and Deut. xi. 6, whereas Num. xxvi. 10 includes Korah in the destruction. The difficulty does not seem to have received any satisfactory solution. But Cheyne is too peremptory when he undertakes to divine the reason for the omission of Korah here and in Deut. xi. 6, "because he was a Levite and his name was dear to temple-poets." Such clairvoyance as to motives is beyond ordinary vision. In ver. 18 the fate of the two hundred and fifty "princes of Israel" who took part in the revolt is recorded as in Num. xvi. 35.

The worship of the calf is the fourth instance (vv. 19-23) in the narrative of which the psalmist follows Exod. xxxii., but seems also to have Deut. ix. 8-12 floating in his mind, as appears from the use of the name "Horeb," which is rare in Exodus and frequent in Deuteronomy. Ver. 20 is apparently modelled on Jer. ii. 11: "My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." Compare also Paul's "*changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness,*" etc. (Rom. i. 23). "His glory" is read instead "their glory" by Noldeke, Graetz, and Cheyne, following an old Jewish authority. The LXX., in Codd. Alex. and Sin. (second hand), has this reading, and Paul seems to follow it in the passage just quoted. It yields a worthy meaning, but the existing text is quite appropriate. It scarcely means that God was the source of Israel's glory or their boast, for the word is not found in that sense. It is much rather the name for the collective attributes of the revealed Godhead, and is here substantially equivalent to "their God," that lustrous Light which, in a special manner, belonged to the people of revelation, on whom its first and brightest beams shone. The strange perverseness which turned away from such a radiance of glory to bow down before an idol is strikingly set forth by the figure of bartering it for an image and that of an ox that ate grass. The one true Substance given away for a shadow! The lofty Being whose light filled space surrendered: and for what? A brute that had to feed, and that on herbage! Men usually make a profit, or think they do, on their barter: but what do they gain by exchanging God for anything? Yet *we* keep making the same mistake of parting with Substance for shadows. And the reason which moved Israel is still operative. As before, the psalmist traces their mad apostasy to forgetfulness of God's deeds. The list of these is now increased by the addition of those at the Red Sea. With every step new links were added to the chain that should have bound the recipients of so many mercies to God. Therefore each new act of departure was of a darker hue of guilt, and drew on the apostates severer punishment, which also, rightly understood, was greater mercy.

"He said that He would annihilate them" is quoted from Deut. ix. 25. Moses' intercession for the people is here most vividly represented under the figure of a champion, who rushes into the breach by which the enemy is about to pour into some beleaguered town, and with his own body closes the gap and arrests the assault (cf. Ezek. xxii. 30).

The fifth instance is the refusal to go up to the land, which followed on the report of the spies (vv. 24-27). These verses are full of reminiscences of the Pentateuch and other parts of Scripture. "The delightful land" (lit. "land of desire") is found in Jer. iii. 19 and Zech. vii. 14. "They despised" is from Num. xiv. 31. "They murmured in their tents" is from Deut. i. 27 (the only other place in which the word for murmuring occurs in this form). Lifting up the hand is used, as here, not in the usual sense of threatening to strike, but in that of swearing, in Exod. vi. 8, and the oath itself is given in Num. xiv. 28 *sqq.*, while the expression "lifted up My hand" occurs in that context, in reference to God's original oath to the patriarch. The threat of exile (ver. 27) does not occur in Numbers, but is found as the punishment of apostasy in Lev. xxvi. 33 and Deut. xxviii. 64. The verse, however, is found almost exactly in Ezek. xx. 23, with the exception that there "scatter" stands in *a* instead of *make to fall*. The difference in the Hebrew is only in the final letter of the words, and the reading in Ezekiel should probably be adopted here. So the LXX. and other ancient authorities and many of the moderns.

The sixth instance is the participation in the abominable Moabitish worship of "Baal-Peor," recorded in Num. xxv. The peculiar phrase "yoked themselves to" is taken from that chapter, and seems to refer to "the mystic, quasi-physical union supposed to exist between a god and his worshippers, and to be kept up by sacrificial meals" (Cheyne). These are called sacrifices of the dead, inasmuch as idols are dead in contrast with the living God. The judicial retribution inflicted according to Divine command by the judges of Israel slaying "every one his man" is here called a "plague," as in the foundation passage, Num. xxv. 9. The word (lit. "a stroke," *i. e.*, from God) is usually applied to punitive sickness; but God smites when He bids men smite. Both the narrative in Numbers and the psalm bring out vividly the picture of the indignant Phinehas springing to his feet from the midst of the passive crowd. He "rose up," says the former; he "stood up," says the latter. And his deed is described in the psalm in relation to its solemn judicial character, without particularising its details. The psalmist would partially veil both the sin and the horror of its punishment. Phinehas' javelin was a minister of God's justice, and the death of the two culprits satisfied that justice and stayed the plague. The word rendered "did judgment" has that meaning only, and such renderings as *mediated* or *appeased* give the effect of the deed and not the description of it contained in the word. "It was reckoned to him for righteousness," as Abraham's faith was (Gen. xv. 6). It was indeed an act which had its origin "In the faithfulness that had its root in faith, and which, for the sake of this its ultimate ground, gained him the acceptance of a righteous man, inasmuch as it proved him to be such" (Delitzsch, Eng. Trans.). He showed himself a true son of Abraham in the midst of these degenerate descendants, and it was the same impulse of faith which drove his spear, and which filled the patriarch's heart when he gazed into the silent sky and saw in its numberless lights the promise of his seed. Phinehas' reward was the permanence of the priesthood in his family.

The seventh instance is the rebellion at the waters of Meribah (Strife), in the fortieth year

(Num. xx. 2-13). The chronological order is here set aside, for the events recorded in vv. 28-31 followed those dealt with in vv. 32, 33. The reason is probably that here Moses himself is hurried into sin, through the people's faithlessness, and so a climax is reached. The leader, long-tried, fell at last, and was shut out from entering the land. That was in some aspects the master-piece and triumph of the nation's sin. "It fared ill with Moses on their account," as in Deut. i. 37, iii. 26, "Jehovah was angry with me for your sakes." "His Spirit," in ver. 33, is best taken as meaning the Spirit of God. The people's sin is repeatedly specified in the psalm as being rebellion against God, and the absence of a more distinct definition of the person referred to is like the expression in ver. 32, where "indignation" is that of God, though His name is not mentioned. Isa. lxiii. 10 is a parallel to this clause, as other parts of the same chapter are to other parts of the psalm. The question which has been often raised, as to what was Moses' sin, is solved in ver. 33 *b*, which makes his passionate words, wherein he lost his temper and arrogated to himself the power of fetching water from the rock, the head and front of his offending. The psalmist has finished his melancholy catalogue of sins in the wilderness with this picture of the great leader dragged down by the prevailing tone, and he next turns to the sins done in the land.

Two flagrant instances are given—disobedience to the command to exterminate the inhabitants, and the adoption of their bloody worship. The conquest of Canaan was partial; and, as often is the case, the conquerors were conquered and the invaders caught the manners of the invaded. Intermarriage poured a large infusion of alien blood into Israel; and the Canaanitish strain is perceptible to-day in the fellahin of the Holy Land. The proclivity to idolatry, which was natural in that stage of the world's history, and was intensified by universal example, became more irresistible, when reinforced by kinship and neighbourhood, and the result foretold was realised—the idols "became a snare" (Judg. ii. 1-3). The poet dwells with special abhorrence on the hideous practice of human sacrifices, which exercised so strong and horrible a fascination over the inhabitants of Canaan. The word in ver. 37 *demons* is found only here and in Deut. xxxii. 17. The above rendering is that of the LXX. Its literal meaning seems to be "lords." It is thus a synonym for "Baalim." The epithet "Shaddai" exclusively applied to Jehovah may be compared.

In vv. 40-46 the whole history of Israel is summed up as alternating periods of sin, punishment, deliverance, recurring in constantly repeated cycles, in which the mystery of human obstinacy is set over against that of Divine long-suffering, and one knows not whether to wonder most at the incurable levity which learned nothing from experience, or the inexhaustible long-suffering which wearied not in giving wasted gifts. Chastisement and mercies were equally in vain. The outcome of God's many deliverances was, "they rebelled in their counsel"—i.e., went on their own stiff-necked way, instead of waiting for and following God's merciful plan, which would have made them secure and blessed. The end of such obstinacy of disobedience can only be, "they were brought low through their iniquity." The psalmist appears to be quoting Lev. xxvi. 39, "they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity"; but he intentionally slightly alters the word, substituting

one of nearly the same sound, but with the meaning of *being brought low* instead of *fading away*. To follow one's own will is to secure humiliation and degradation. Sin weakens the true strength and darkens the true glory of men.

In vv. 44-46 the singer rises from these sad and stern thoughts to recreate his spirit with the contemplation of the patient lovingkindness of God. It persists through all man's sin and God's anger. The multitude of its manifestations far outnumbered those of our sins. His eye looks on Israel's distress with pity, and every sorrow on which He looks He desires to remove. Calamities melt away beneath His gaze, like damp-stains in sunlight. His merciful "look" swiftly follows the afflicted man's cry. No voice acknowledges sin and calls for help in vain. The covenant forgotten by men is none the less remembered by Him. The numberless number of His lovingkindnesses, greater than that of all men's sins, secures forgiveness after the most repeated transgressions. The law and measure of His "repenting" lie in the endless depths of His own heart. As the psalmist had sung at the beginning, that lovingkindness endures for ever; therefore none of Israel's many sins went unchastised, and no chastisement outlasted their repentance. Solomon had prayed that God would "give them compassion before those who carried them captive" (1 Kings viii. 50); and thus has it been, as the psalmist joyfully sees. He may have written when the Babylonian captivity was near an end, and such instances as those of Daniel or Nehemiah may have been in his mind. In any case, it is beautifully significant that a psalm, which tells the doleful story of centuries of faithlessness, should end with God's faithfulness to His promises, His inexhaustible forgiveness, and the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. Such will be the last result of the world's history no less than of Israel's.

The psalm closes with the prayer in ver. 47, which shows that it was written in exile. It corresponds in part with the closing words of Psalm cv. Just as there the purpose of God's mercies to Israel was said to be that they might be thereby moved to keep His statutes, so here the psalmist hopes and vows that the issue of his people's restoration will be thankfulness to God's holy name, and triumphant pealing forth from ransomed lips of His high praises.

Ver. 48 is the concluding doxology of the Fourth Book. Some commentators suppose it an integral part of the psalm, but it is more probably an editorial addition.

PSALM CVII.

- 1 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness [endures] for ever.
- 2 Let the redeemed of Jehovah say [thus],
Whom He has redeemed from the gripe of distress,
- 3 And gathered them from the lands,
From east and west,
From north and from [the] sea.
- 4 They wandered in the wilderness, in a waste
of a way,
An inhabited city they found not.
- 5 Hungry and thirsty,
Their soul languished within them,
- 6 And they cried to Jehovah, in their distress,
From their troubles He delivered them,

- 7 And He led them by a straight way,
To go to an inhabited city.
- 8 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His
lovingkindness,
And His wonders to the sons of men.
- 9 For He satisfies the longing soul,
And the hungry soul He fills with good.
- 10 Those who sat in darkness and in deepest
gloom,
Bound in affliction and iron,
- 11 Because they rebelled against the words of
God,
And the counsel of the Most High they re-
jected.
- 12 And He brought down their heart with sor-
row,
They stumbled, and helper there was none,
- 13 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their troubles He saved them.
- 14 He brought them out from darkness and deep-
est gloom,
And broke their bonds [asunder].
- 15 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His lov-
ingkindness,
And His wonders to the sons of men.
- 16 For He broke the doors of brass,
And the bars of iron He hewed in pieces.
- 17 Foolish men, because of the course of their
transgressions,
And because of their iniquities, brought on
themselves affliction.
- 18 All food their soul loathed,
And they drew near to the gates of death.
- 19 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their troubles He saved them.
- 20 He sent His word and healed them,
And rescued them from their graves.
- 21 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His
lovingkindness
And His wonders to the sons of men.
- 22 And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
And tell His works with joyful joy.
- 23 They who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on the great waters,
- 24 They see the works of Jehovah,
And His wonders in the foaming deep.
- 25 And He spoke and raised a stormy wind,
Which rolled high the waves thereof.
- 26 They went up to the sky, they went down to
the depths,
Their soul melted in trouble.
- 27 They went round and round and staggered like
one drunk,
And all their wisdom forsook them [was swal-
lowed up].
- 28 And they cried to Jehovah in their distress,
From their trouble He brought them out.
- 29 He stilled the storm into a light air,
And hushed were their waves.
- 30 And they were glad because these were quieted,
And He brought them to the haven of their de-
sire.
- 31 Let them give thanks to Jehovah [for] His lov-
ingkindness
And His wonders to the sons of men.
- 32 And let them exalt Him in the assembly of the
people,
And praise Him in the session of the elders.
- 33 He turned rivers into a wilderness,
And water-springs into thirsty ground,
- 34 A land of fruit into a salt desert,
For the wickedness of the dwellers in it.
- 35 He turned a wilderness into a pool of water,
And a dry land into water-springs.
- 36 And He made the hungry to dwell there,
And they found an inhabited city.
- 37 And they sowed fields and planted vineyards,
And these yielded fruits of increase.
- 38 And He blessed them and they multiplied ex-
ceedingly,
And their cattle He diminished not.
- 39 And they were diminished and brought low,
By the pressure of ill and sorrow.
- 40 "He pours contempt on princes,
And makes them wander in a pathless waste."
- 41 He lifted the needy out of affliction,
And made families like a flock.
- 42 The upright see it and rejoice,
And all perverseness stops its mouth.
- 43 Whoso is wise, let him observe these things,
And let them understand the lovingkindnesses
of Jehovah.

NOTWITHSTANDING the division of Books which separates Psalm cvii. from the two preceding, it is a pendant to these. The "gathering from among the heathen" prayed for in Psalm cvi. 41 has here come to pass (ver. 3). The thanksgiving which there is regarded as the purpose of that restoration is here rendered for it. Psalm cv. had for theme God's mercies to the fathers. Psalm cvi. confessed the hereditary faithlessness of Israel and its chastisement by calamity and exile. Psalm cvii. begins with summoning Israel as "the redeemed of Jehovah," to praise Him for His enduring lovingkindness in bringing them back from bondage, and then takes a wider flight, and celebrates the loving Providence which delivers, in all varieties of peril and calamity, those who cry to God. Its vivid pictures of distress and rescue begin, indeed, with one which may fairly be supposed to have been suggested by the incidents of the return from exile; and the second of these, that of the liberated prisoners, is possibly coloured by similar reminiscences; but the great restoration is only the starting-point, and the bulk of the psalm goes further afield. Its instances of Divine deliverance, though cast into narrative form, describe not specific acts, but God's uniform way of working. Wherever there are trouble and trust, there will be triumph and praise. The psalmist is propounding a partial solution of the old problem—the existence of pain and sorrow. They come as chastisements. If terror or misery drive men to God, God answers, and deliverance is assured, from which fuller-toned praise should spring. It is by no means a complete vindication of Providence, and experience does not bear out the assumption of uniform answers to prayers for deliverance from external calamities, which was more warranted before Christ than it is now; but the essence of the psalmist's faith is ever true—that God hears the cry of a man driven to cry by crushing burdens, and will give him strength to bear and profit by them, even if He does not take them away.

The psalm passes before us a series of pictures, all alike in the disposition of their parts, and selected from the sad abundance of troubles which attack humanity. Travellers who have lost their way, captives, sick men, storm-tossed sailors, make a strangely miscellaneous company, the very unlikenesses of which suggest the width of the ocean of human misery. The artistic regularity

of structure in all the four strophes relating to these cannot escape notice. But it is more than artistic. Whatever be a man's trouble, there is but one way out of it—to cry to God. That way is never vain. Always deliverance comes, and always the obligation of praise lies on the "redeemed of Jehovah."

With ver. 33 the psalm changes its structure. The refrains, which came in so strikingly in the preceding strophes, are dropped. The complete pictures give place to mere outline sketches. These diversities have suggested to some that vv. 33-43 are an excrescence; but they have some points of connection with the preceding, such as the peculiar phrase for "inhabited city" (vv. 4, 5, 36), "hungry" (vv. 5, 36), and the fondness for references to Isaiah and Job. In these latter verses the psalmist does not describe deliverances from peril or pain, but the sudden alternations effected by Providence on lands and men, which pass from fertility and prosperity to barrenness and trouble, and again from these to their opposites. Lovingkindness, which hears and rescues, is the theme of the first part; lovingkindness, which "changes all things and is itself unchanged," is the theme of the second. Both converge on the final thought (ver. 43), that the observance of God's ways is the part of true wisdom, and will win the clear perception of the all-embracing "lovingkindness of Jehovah."

New mercies give new meaning to old praises. Fresh outpourings of thankfulness willingly run in well-worn channels. The children can repeat the fathers' doxology, and words hallowed by having borne the gratitude of many generations are the best vehicles for to-day's praise. Therefore, the psalm begins with venerable words, which it bids the recipients of God's last great mercy ring out once more. They who have yesterday been "redeemed from captivity" have proof that "His lovingkindness endures for ever," since it has come down to them through centuries. The characteristic fondness for quotations, which marks the psalm, is in full force in the three introductory verses. Ver. 1 is, of course, quoted from several psalms. "The redeemed of Jehovah" is from Isa. lxii. 12. "Gathered out of the lands" looks back to Psalm cvi. 47, and to many prophetic passages. The word rendered above "distress" may mean *oppressor*, and is frequently rendered so here, which rendering fits better the preceding word "hand." But the recurrence of the same word in the subsequent refrains (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28) makes the rendering *distress* preferable here. To ascribe to *distress* a "hand" is poetical personification, or the latter word may be taken in a somewhat wider sense as equivalent to a grasp or grip, as above. The return from Babylon is evidently in the poet's thoughts, but he widens it out into a restoration from every quarter. His enumeration of the points from which the exiles flock is irregular, in that he says "from north and from the sea," which always means the Mediterranean, and stands for the west. That quarter has, however, already been mentioned, and, therefore, it has been supposed that sea here means, abnormally, the Red Sea, or "the southern portion of the Mediterranean." A textual alteration has also been proposed, which, by the addition of two letters to the word for *sea*, gives that for *south*. This reading would complete the enumeration of cardinal points; but possibly the psalmist is quoting Isa. xlix. 12, where the same phrase occurs, and the *north* is set over against the sea—*i.e.*,

the west. The slight irregularity does not interfere with the picture of the streams of returning exiles from every quarter.

The first scene, that of a caravan lost in a desert, is probably suggested by the previous reference to the return of the "redeemed of Jehovah," but is not to be taken as referring only to that. It is a perfectly general sketch of a frequent incident of travel. It is a remarkable trace of a state of society very unlike modern life, that two of the four instances of "distress" are due to the perils of journeying. By land and by sea men took their lives in their hands, when they left their homes. Two points are signalled in this description,—the first, the loss of the track; the second, the wanderers' hunger and thirst. "A waste of a way" is a singular expression, which has suggested various unnecessary textual emendations. It is like "a wild ass of a man" (Gen. xvi. 12), which several commentators quote as a parallel, and means a way which is desert (compare Acts viii. 26). The bewildered, devious march leads nowhither. Vainly the travellers look for some elevation,

"From whence the lightened spirit sees
That shady city of Palm Trees."

No place where men dwell appears in the wide expanse of pathless wilderness. The psalmist does not think of a particular city, but of any inhabited spot, where rest and shelter might be found. The water-skins are empty; food is finished; hopelessness follows physical exhaustion, and gloom wraps their souls; for ver. 5 *b*, literally translated, is, "Their soul covered itself"—*i.e.*, with despondency (Psalm lxxvii. 3).

The picture is not an allegory or a parable, but a transcript of a common fact. Still, one can scarcely help seeing in it a vivid representation of the inmost reality of a life apart from God. Such a life ever strays from the right road. "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to come to the city." The deepest needs of the soul are unsatisfied; and however outward good abounds, gnawing hunger and fierce thirst torment at times; and however mirth and success seem to smile, joys are superficial, and but mask a central sadness, as vineyards which clothe the outside of a volcano and lie above sulphurous fires.

The travellers are driven to God by their "distress." Happy they who, when lost in a desert, bethink themselves of the only Guide. He does not reject the cry which is forced out by the pressure of calamity; but, as the structure of vv. 6, 7, shows, His answer is simultaneous with the appeal to Him, and it is complete, as well as immediate. The track appears as suddenly as it had faded. God Himself goes at the head of the march. The path is straight as an arrow's flight, and soon they are in the city.

Ver. 6 is the first instance of the refrain, which, in each of the four pictures, is followed by a verse (or, in the last of the four, by two verses) descriptive of the act of deliverance, which again is followed by the second refrain, calling on those who have experienced such a mercy to thank Jehovah. This is followed in the first two groups by a verse reiterating the reason for praise—namely, the deliverance just granted; and, in the last two, by a verse expanding the summons. Various may be the forms of need. But the supply of them all is one, and the way to get it is one,

and one is the experience of the suppliants, and one should be their praise. Life's diversities have underlying them identity of soul's wants. Waiters on God have very different outward fortunes, but the broad outlines of their inward history are identical. This is the law of His providence—they cry, He delivers. This should be the harvest from His sowing of benefits—"Let them give thanks to Jehovah." Some would translate ver. 8. "Let them thankfully confess to Jehovah His lovingkindness, and to the children of men [confess] His wonders"; but the usual rendering as above is better, as not introducing a thought which, however important, is scarcely in the psalmist's view here, and as preserving the great thought of the psalm—namely, that of God's providence to all mankind.

The second scene, that of captives, probably retains some allusion to Babylon, though an even fainter one than in the preceding strophe. It has several quotations and references to Isaiah, especially to the latter half (Isa. xl.-lxvi.). The deliverance is described in ver. 16 in words borrowed from the prophecy as to Cyrus, the instrument of Israel's restoration (Isa. xlv. 2). The gloom of the prison-house is described in language closely resembling Isa. xlii. 7, xlix. 9. The combination of "darkness and the shade of deepest gloom" is found in Isa. ix. 2. The cause of the captivity described is rebellion against God's counsel and word. These things point to Israel's Babylonian bondage; but the picture in the psalm draws its colour rather than its subject from that event, and is quite general. The psalmist thinks that such bondage, and deliverance on repentance and prayer, are standing facts in Providence, both as regards nations and individuals. One may see, too, a certain parabolic aspect hinted at, as if the poet would have us catch a half-revealed intention to present calamity of any kind under this image of captivity. We note the slipping in of words that are not required for the picture, as when the fetters are said to be "affliction" as well as "iron." Ver. 12, too, is not specially appropriate to the condition of prisoners; persons in fetters and gloom do not *stumble*, for they do not move. There may, therefore, be a half-glance at the parabolic aspect of captivity, such as poetic imagination, and especially Oriental poetry, loves. At most it is a delicate suggestion, shyly hiding while it shows itself, and made too much of if drawn out in prosaic exposition.

We may perceive also the allegorical pertinence of this second picture, though we do not suppose that the singer intended such a use. For is not godless life ever bondage? and is not rebellion against God the sure cause of falling under a harsher dominion? and does He not listen to the cry of a soul that feels the slavery of subjection to self and sin? and is not true enlargement found in His free service? and does He not give power to break the strongest chains of habit? The synagogue at Nazareth, where the carpenter's Son stood up to read and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. . . . He hath sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives," warrants the symbolical use of the psalmist's imagery, which is, as we have seen, largely influenced by the prophet whose words Jesus quoted. The first scene taught that devout hearts never lack guidance from God. The second adds to their blessings freedom, the true liberty which comes with submission and acceptance of His law.

Sickness, which yields the third type of suffering, is a commoner experience than the two preceding. The picture is lightly sketched, emphasis being laid on the cause of the sickness, which is sin, in accordance with the prevailing view in the Old Testament. The psalmist introduces the persons of whom he is to speak by the strongly condemnatory term "foolish ones," which refers not to intellectual feebleness, but to moral perversity. All sin is folly. Nothing is so insane as to do wrong. An ingenious correction has been suggested and is accepted by Cheyne in the wake of Dyserinck, Graetz, and others, by which "sick men" is read for "foolish men." But it does not appear to the present writer to be so impossible as Cheyne thinks to "conceive the psalmist introducing a fresh tableau by an ethical term such as fools." The whole verse (17) lays more stress on the sin than on the sickness, and the initial designation of the sufferers as "fools" is quite in harmony with its tone. They are habitual evildoers, as is expressed by the weighty expression "the way (or course) of their transgression." Not by one or two breaches of moral law, but by inveterate, customary sins, men ruin their physical health. So the psalmist uses a form of the verb in ver. 17 *b* which expresses that the sinner drags down his punishment with his own hands. That is, of course, eminently true in such gross forms of sin as sow to the flesh, and of the flesh reap corruption. But it is no less really true of all transgression, since all brings sickness to the soul. Ver. 18 is apparently quoted from Job xxxiii. 20-22. It paints with impressive simplicity the failing appetite and consequent ebbing strength. The grim portals, of which Death keeps the keys, have all but received the sick men; but, before they pass into their shadow, they cry to Jehovah, and, like the other men in distress, they too are heard, feeble as their sick voice may be. The manner of their deliverance is strikingly portrayed. "He sent His word and healed them." As in Psalm cv. 19, God's word is almost personified. It is the channel of the Divine power. God's uttered will has power on material things. It is the same great thought as is expressed in "He spake and it was done." The psalmist did not know the Christian teaching that the personal Word of God is the agent of all the Divine energy in the realm of nature and of history, and that a far deeper sense than that which he attached to them would one day be found in his words, when the Incarnate Word was manifested, as Himself bearing and bearing away the sicknesses of humanity, and rescuing not only the dying from going down to the grave, but bringing up the dead who had long lain there. God, who is Guide and Emancipator, is also Healer and Life-giver, and He is all these in the Word, which has become flesh, and dwelt and dwells among men.

Another travel-scene follows. The storm at sea is painted as a landsman would do it; but a landsman who had seen, from a safe shore, what he so vividly describes. He is impressed with the strange things that the bold men who venture to sea must meet, away out there beyond the point where sea and sky touch. With sure poetic instinct, he spends no time on trivial details, but dashes on his canvas the salient features of the tempest,—the sudden springing up of the gale; the swift response of the waves rolling high, with new force in their mass and a new voice in their breaking; the pitching craft, now on the crest,

now in the trough; the terror of the helpless crew; the loss of steering power; the heavy rolling of the unmanageable, clumsy ship; and the desperation of the sailors, whose wisdom or skill was "swallowed up," or came to nothing.

Their cry to Jehovah was heard above the shriek of the storm, and the tempest fell as suddenly as it rose. The description of the deliverance is extended beyond the normal single verse, just as that of the peril had been prolonged. It comes like a benediction after the hurly-burly of the gale. How gently the words echo the softness of the light air into which it has died down, and the music which the wavelets make as they lap against the ship's sides! With what sympathy the poet thinks of the glad hearts on board, and of their reaching the safe harbour, for which they had longed when they thought they would never see it more! Surely it is a permissible application of these lovely words to read into them the Christian hope of preservation amid life's tempests,—

"Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last."

God the guide, the emancipator, the healer, is also the stiller of the storm, and they who cry to Him from the unquiet sea will reach the stable shore. "And so it came to pass, they all came safe to land."

As already observed, the tone changes with ver. 33, from which point onwards the psalmist adduces instances of Providential working of a different kind from those in the four vivid pictures preceding, and drops the refrains. In vv. 33-38 he describes a double change wrought on a land. The barrenness which blasts fertile soil is painted in language largely borrowed from Isaiah. "Ver. 33 *a* recalls Isa. l. 2 *b*; ver. 33 *b* is like Isa. xxxv. 7 *a*" (Delitzsch). The opposite change of desert into fertile ground is pictured as in Isa. xli. 18. The references in ver. 36 to "the hungry" and to "an inhabited city" connect with the previous part of the psalm, and are against the supposition that the latter half is not originally part of it. The incidents described refer to no particular instance, but are as general as those of the former part. Many a land, which has been blasted by the vices of its inhabitants, has been transformed into a garden by new settlers. "Where the Turk's horse has trod, no grass will grow."

Ver. 39 introduces the reverse, which often befalls prosperous communities, especially in times when it is dangerous to seem rich for fear of rapacious rulers. "The pressure" referred to in ver. 39 is the oppression of such. If so, ver. 40, which is quoted from Job xii. 21, 24, though introduced abruptly, does not disturb the sequence of thought. It grandly paints the judgment of God on such robber-princes, who are hunted from their seats by popular execration, and have to hide themselves in the pathless waste, from which those who cry to God were delivered (vv. 41 *b* and 4 *a*). On the other hand, the oppressed are lifted, as by His strong arm, out of the depths and set on high, like a man perched safely on some crag above high-water mark. Prosperity returning is followed by large increase and happy, peaceful family life, the chief good of man on earth. The outcome of the various methods of God's unvarying purpose is that all which is good is glad, and all which is evil is struck dumb. The two clauses of ver. 42, which describe this double

fact, are quoted from two passages in Job—*a* from xxii. 19, and *b* from v. 16.

The psalm began with hymning the enduring lovingkindness of Jehovah. It ends with a call to all who would be wise to give heed to the various dealings of God, as exemplified in the specimens chosen in it, that they may comprehend how in all these one purpose rules, and all are examples of the manifold lovingkindnesses of Jehovah. This closing note is an echo of the last words of Hosea's prophecy. It is the broad truth which all thoughtful observance of Providence brings home to a man, notwithstanding many mysteries and apparent contradictions. "All things work together for good to them that love God"; and the more they love Him, the more clearly will they see, and the more happily will they feel, that so it is. How can a man contemplate the painful riddle of the world, and keep his sanity, without that faith? He who has it for his faith will have it for his experience.

PSALM CVIII.

- 1 Steadfast is my heart, O God,
I will sing and harp, yea, my glory [shall sing].
- 2 Awake, harp and lute,
I will wake the dawn.
- 3 I will give Thee thanks among the peoples, Jehovah,
And I will harp to Thee among the nations.
- 4 For great above the heavens is Thy lovingkindness,
And to the clouds Thy troth.
- 5 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
And above all the earth Thy glory.
- 6 That Thy beloved ones may be delivered,
Save with Thy right hand and answer me.
- 7 God has spoken in His holiness,
I will divide Shechem and measure out the valley of Succoth.
- 8 Mine is Gilead, mine Manasseh,
And Ephraim is the strength of my head,
Judah my baton of command.
- 9 Moab is my wash-basin,
Upon Edom will I throw my shoe,
Over Philistia will I shout aloud.
- 10 Who will bring me into the fortified city?
Who has guided me into Edom?
- 11 Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off,
And goest not out, O God, with our hosts?
- 12 Give us help from trouble,
For vain is help of man.
- 13 In God we shall do prowess,
And He, He will tread down our oppressors.

Two fragments of Davidic psalms are here tacked together with slight variations. Vv. 1-5 are from Psalm lvii. 7-11; and vv. 6-13 from Psalm lx. 5-12. The return from Babylon would be an appropriate occasion for thus revivifying ancient words. We have seen in preceding psalms that Israel's past drew the thoughts of the singers of that period, and the conjecture may be hazarded that the recent deliverance suggested to some devout man, whose mind was steeped in the songs of former days, the closeness with which old strains suited new joys. If so, there is pathetic meaning in the summons to the "psaltery and harp," which had hung silent on the willows of Babylon so long, to wake their ancient minstrelsy once more, as well as exultant confidence that the God who had led David to victory still leads

His people. The hopes of conquest in the second part, the consciousness that while much has been achieved by God's help, much still remains to be won before Israel can sit secure, the bar or two in the minor key in ver. 11, which heighten the exultation of the rest of the song, and the cry for help against adversaries too strong for Israel's unassisted might, are all appropriate to the early stages of the return.

The variations from the original psalms are of slight moment. In ver. 1 the reduplication of the clause "Steadfast is my heart" is omitted, and "my glory" is detached from ver. 2, where it stands in Psalm lvii., and is made a second subject, equivalent to "I." In ver. 3 *a Jehovah* is substituted for *Lord*, and the copula "and" prefixed to *b*. Ver. 4 is not improved by the change of "unto the heavens" to "above the heavens," for an anti-climax is produced by following "above the heavens" with "unto the clouds."

In the second part, the only change affecting the sense is in ver. 9, where the summons to Philistia to "shout aloud because of me," which is probably meant in sarcasm, is transformed into the plain expression of triumph, "Over Philistia will I shout aloud." The other changes are "me" for "us" in ver. 6, the omission of "and" before "mine Manassch" in ver. 8, the substitution of a more usual synonym for "fenced" in ver. 10, and the omission of the pronoun "Thou" in ver. 11.

PSALM CIX.

- 1 God of my praise, be not silent,
- 2 For a wicked man's mouth and a mouth of deceit have they opened on me.
- 3 And with words of hate have they compassed me,
And have fought [against] me causelessly.
- 4 In return for my love, they have been my adversaries
But I—I was [all] prayer.
- 5 And they have laid upon me evil in return for good,
And hate in return for my love.
- 6 Set in office over him a wicked man,
And may an adversary stand at his right hand!
- 7 When he is judged, let him go out guilty,
And let his prayer be [counted] for sin!
- 8 Be his days few,
His office may another take!
- 9 Be his children orphans,
And his wife a widow!
- 10 And may his children wander up and down
and beg,
May they seek [bread] [far] from the ruins [of their house]!
- 11 May a creditor get into his nets all that he has,
And may strangers plunder [the fruit of] his toil!
- 12 May there be no one to continue lovingkindness to him,
And may there be no one that shows favour to his orphans!
- 13 May his posterity be cut off,
In the next generation may their name be blotted out!
- 14 Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before Jehovah,
And the sin of his mother not be blotted out!
- 15 May they be before Jehovah continually,

And may He cut off their memory from the earth!

- 16 Because he remembered not to show loving-kindness,
And persecuted the afflicted and poor man,
And the heart-stricken, to do him to death.
- 17 And he loved cursing—and it came on him,
And delighted not in blessing—and it remained far from him.
- 18 And he clothed himself [with] cursing like his garment,
And it came like water into his inwards,
And like oil into his bones.
- 19 May it be to him like a robe [with which] he covers himself,
And for a girdle [which] he continually girds on!
- 20 Be this the wage of my adversaries from Jehovah,
And of those who speak evil against my soul!
- 21 But Thou, Jehovah, Lord, deal with me for Thy name's sake,
Because Thy lovingkindness is good, deliver me,
- 22 Because afflicted and poor am I,
And my heart is pierced within me.
- 23 Like a shadow when it stretches out am I gone,
I am shaken out, like the locust.
- 24 My knees give out through fasting,
And my flesh falls away from fatness.
- 25 And I—I have become a reproach to them,
They see me, they nod their head.
- 26 Help me, Jehovah, my God,
Save me, according to Thy lovingkindness:
- 27 That they may know that this is Thy hand,
Thou—Thou, Jehovah, hast done it.
- 28 They—they curse, but Thou—Thou dost bless;
They arose, and were put to shame,
And Thy servant rejoices.
- 29 My adversaries clothe themselves [with] disgrace,
And cover themselves like a mantle with their shame.
- 30 I will praise Jehovah greatly with my mouth,
And amidst many will I praise Him.
- 31 For He stands at the right hand of the poor,
To save him from those that judge his soul.

THIS is the last and the most terrible of the imprecatory psalms. Its central portion (vv. 6-20) consists of a series of wishes, addressed to God, for the heaping of all miseries on the heads of one "adversary" and of all his kith and kin. These maledictions are enclosed in prayers, which make the most striking contrast to them; vv. 1-5 being the plaint of a loving soul, shrinkingly conscious of an atmosphere of hatred, and appealing gently to God; while vv. 21-31 expatiate in the presentation to Him of the suppliant's feebleness and cries for deliverance, but barely touch on the wished-for requital of enemies. The combination of devout meekness and trust with the fiery imprecations in the core of the psalm is startling to Christian consciousness, and calls for an effort of "historical imagination" to deal with it fairly. The attempts to attenuate the difficulty, either by making out that the wishes are not wishes, but prophecies of the fate of evildoers, or that vv. 6-20 are the psalmist's quotation of his enemies' wishes about him, or that the whole is Messianic prediction of the fate of Judas or of the enemies of the Christ, are too obviously makeshifts. It is far better to recognise the discordance between the tem-

per of the psalmist and that enjoined by Christ than to try to cover it over. Our Lord Himself has signalled the difference between His teaching and that addressed to "them of old time" on the very point of forgiveness of enemies, and we are but following His guidance when we recognise that the psalmist's mood is distinctly inferior to that which has now become the law for devout men.

Divine retribution for evil was the truth of the Old Testament, as forgiveness is that of the New. The conflict between God's kingdom and its enemies was being keenly and perpetually waged, in most literal fashion. Devout men could not but long for the triumph of that with which all good was associated, and therefore for the defeat and destruction of its opposite. For no private injuries, or for these only in so far as the suffering singer is a member of the community which represents God's cause, does he ask the descent of God's vengeance, but for the insults and hurts inflicted on righteousness. The form of these maledictions belongs to a lower stage of revelation; the substance of them, considered as passionate desires for the destruction of evil, burning zeal for the triumph of Truth, which is God's cause, and unquenchable faith that He is just, is a part of Christian perfection.

The usual variety of conjectures as to authorship exists. Delitzsch hesitatingly accepts the superscription as correct in assigning the psalm to David. Olshausen, as is his custom, says, "Maccabean"; Cheyne inclines to "the time of Nehemiah (in which case the enemy might be Sanballat), or even perhaps the close of the Persian age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 65). He thinks that the "magnanimous David" could not have uttered "these laboured imprecations," and that the speaker is "not a brave and bold warrior, but a sensitive poet." Might he not be both?

To address God as the "God of my praise," even at such a moment of dejection, is a triumph of faith. The name recalls to the psalmist past mercies, and expresses his confidence that he will still have cause to extol his Deliverer, while it also pleads with God what He has done as a reason for doing the like in new circumstances of need. The suppliant speaks in praise and prayer; he asks God to speak in acts of rescuing power. A praying man cannot have a dumb God. And His mighty Voice, which hushes all others and sets His suppliants free from fears and foes, is all the more longed for and required, because of those cruel voices that yelp and snarl round the psalmist. The contrast between the three utterances—his, God's, and his enemies'—is most vivid. The foes have come at him with open mouths. "A wicked man's mouth" would read, by a slight alteration, "a mouth of wickedness"; but the recurrence of the word "wicked man" in ver. 6 seems to look back to this verse, and to make the rendering above probable. Lies and hatred ring the psalmist round, but his conscience is clear. "They have hated me without a cause" is the experience of this ancient sufferer for righteousness' sake, as of the Prince of all such. This singer, who is charged with pouring out a flood of "unpurified passion," had, at any rate, striven to win over hatred by meekness; and if he is bitter, it is the pain and bitterness of love flung back with contumely, and only serving to exacerbate enmity. Nor had he met with evil the first returns of evil for good, but, as he says, "I was [all] prayer" (compare Psalm exx. 7, "I am—peace"). Re-

pelled, his whole being turned to God, and in calm communion with Him found defence and repose. But his patient meekness availed nothing, for his foes still "laid evil" on him in return for good. The prayer is a short record of a long martyrdom. Many a foiled attempt of patient love preceded the psalm. Not till the other way had been tried long enough to show that malignity was beyond the reach of conciliation did the psalmist appeal to the God of recompenses. Let that be remembered in judging the next part of the psalm.

The terrible maledictions (vv. 6-20) need little commentary. They may be left in all their awfulness, which is neither to be extenuated nor degraded into an outburst of fierce personal vindictiveness. It is something far more noble than that. These terrible verses are prophecy, but they are prayers too; and prayers which can only be accounted for by remembering the spirit of the old dispensation. They are the more intense, because they are launched against an individual, probably the chief among the foes. In vv. 6-15 we have imprecations pure and simple, and it is noteworthy that so large a part of these verses refers to the family of the evildoer. In vv. 16-20 the grounds of the wished-for destruction are laid in the sinner's perverted choice, and the automatic action of sin working its own punishment is vividly set forth.

Vv. 6-8 are best taken in close connection, as representing the trial and condemnation of the object of the psalmist's imprecations, before a tribunal. He prays that the man may be haled before a wicked judge. The word rendered "set" is the root from which that rendered "office" in ver. 8 comes, and here means to set in a position of authority—i.e., in a judicial one. His judge is to be "a wicked man" like himself, for such have no mercy on each other. An accuser is to stand at his right hand. The word rendered *adversary* (the verb cognate with which is used in ver. 4) is "Satan"; but the general meaning of hostile accuser is to be preferred here. With such a judge and prosecutor the issue of the cause is certain—"May he go out [from the judgment-hall] guilty." A more terrible petition follows, which is best taken in its most terrible sense. The condemned man cries for mercy, not to his earthly judge, but to God, and the psalmist can ask that the last despairing cry to Heaven may be unanswered, and even counted sin. It could only be so, if the heart that framed it was still an evil heart, despairing, indeed, but obdurate. Then comes the end: the sentence is executed. The criminal dies, and his office falls to another; his wife is a widow, and his children fatherless. This view of the connection gives unity to what is otherwise a mere heap of unconnected maledictions. It also brings out more clearly that the psalmist is seeking not merely the gratification of private animosity, but the vindication of public justice, even if ministered by an unjust judge. Peter's quotation of ver. 8 *b* in reference to Judas (Acts i. 20) does not involve the Messianic character of the psalm.

Vv. 10-15 extend the maledictions to the enemy's children and parents, in accordance with the ancient strong sense of family solidarity, which was often expressed in practice by visiting the kindred of a convicted criminal with ruin, and levelling his house with the ground. The psalmist wishes these consequences to fall in all their cruel severity, and pictures the children as vagabonds, driven from the desolation which had, in happier

days, been their home, and seeking a scanty subsistence among strangers. The imprecations of ver. 11 at first sight seem to hark back to an earlier stage in the wicked man's career, contemplating him as still in life. But the wish that his wealth may be "ensnared" by creditors and stolen by strangers is quite appropriate as a consequence of his sentence and execution; and the prayer in ver. 12, that there may be no one to "draw out lovingkindness" to him, is probably best explained by the parallel clause. A dead man lives a quasi-life in his children, and what is done to them is a prolongation of what was done to him. Thus helpless, beggars, homeless, and plundered, "the seed of evildoers" would naturally be short-lived, and the psalmist desires that they may be cut off, and the world freed from an evil race. His wishes go backwards too, and reach to the previous as well as the subsequent generation. The foe had come of a bad stock—parents, son, and son's sons are to be involved in a common doom, because partakers of a common sin. The special reason for the terrible desire that the iniquity of his father and mother may never be blotted out seems to be, the desire that the accumulated consequences of hereditary sin may fall on the heads of the third generation—a dread wish, which experience shows is often tragically fulfilled, even when the sufferers are far less guilty than their ancestors. "Father, forgive them" is the strongest conceivable contrast to these awful prayers. But the psalmist's petition implies that the sins in question were unrepented sins, and is, in fact, a cry that, as such, they should be requited in the "cutting off the memory" of such a brood of evildoers "from the earth."

In ver. 16 a new turn of thought begins, which is pursued till ver. 20—namely, that of the self-retributive action of a perverted choice of evil. "He remembered not" to be gracious to him who needed compassion; therefore it is just that he should not be remembered on earth, and that his sin should be remembered in heaven. He deliberately chose cursing rather than blessing as his attitude and act towards others; therefore cursing comes to him and blessing remains far from him, as others' attitude and act to him. The world is a mirror which, on the whole, gives back the smile or the frown which we present to it. Though the psalmist has complained that he had loved and been hated in return, he does not doubt that, in general, the curser is cursed back again and the blessing blessed. Outwardly and inwardly, the man is wrapped in and saturated with "cursing." Like a robe or a girdle, it encompasses him; like a draught of water, it passes into his inmost nature; like anointing oil oozing into the bones, it steals into every corner of his soul. His own doings come back to poison him. The kick of the gun which he fires is sure to hurt his own shoulder, and it is better to be in front of the muzzle than behind the trigger. The last word of these maledictions is not only a wish, but a declaration of the Law of Divine Retribution. The psalmist could not have found it in his heart to pray such a prayer unless he had been sure that Jehovah paid men's wages punctually in full, and that conviction is the kernel of his awful words. He is equally sure that his cause is God's—because he is sure that God's cause is his, and that he suffers for righteousness and for the righteous Jehovah.

The final part (vv. 21-31) returns to lowly, sad petitions for deliverance, of the kind common to many psalms. Very pathetically, and as, with a

tightening of his grasp, does the singer call on his helper by the double name "Jehovah, Lord," and plead all the pleas with God which are lived in these names. The prayer in ver. 21 *b* resembles that in Psalm lxi. 16, another of the psalms of imprecation. The image of the long-drawn-out shadow recurs in Psalm cii. 11. The word rendered "am I gone" occurs here only, and implies compulsory departure. The same idea of external force hurrying one out of life is picturesquely presented in the parallel clause. "I am shaken out," as a thing which a man wishes to get rid of is shaken out of the folds of a garment. The psalmist thinks of himself as being whirled away, helpless, as a swarm of locusts blown into the sea. The physical feebleness in ver. 24 is probably to be taken literally, as descriptive of the havoc wrought on him by his persecutions and trouble of soul, but may be, as often, metaphor for that trouble itself.

The expression in ver. 24 *b* rendered above "*falls away from fatness*" is literally "has become a liar," or faithless, which is probably a picturesque way of saying that the psalmist's flesh had, as it were, become a renegade from its former well-nourished condition, and was emaciated by his sorrow. Others would keep the literal meaning of the word rendered "fatness"—*i.e.*, oil—and translate "My flesh has shrunk up for lack of oil" (so Baethgen and Kay).

One more glance at the enemies, now again regarded as many, and one more flash of confidence that his prayer is heard, close the psalm. Once again God is invoked by His name Jehovah, and the suppliant presses close to him as "my God"; once again he casts himself on that lovingkindness, whose measure is wider than his thoughts and will ensure him larger answers than his desires; once again he builds all his hope on it, and pleads no claims of his own. He longs for personal deliverance; but not only for personal ends, but rather that it may be an undeniable manifestation of Jehovah's power. That is a high range of feeling which subordinates self to God even while longing for deliverance, and wishes more that He should be glorified than that self should be blessed. There is almost a smile on the psalmist's face as he contrasts his enemies' curses with God's blessing, and thinks how ineffectual are these and how omnipotent is that. He takes the issue of the strife between cursing men and a blessing God to be as good as already decided. So he can look with new equanimity on the energetic preparations of his foes; for he sees in faith their confusion and defeat, and already feels some springing in his heart of the joy of victory, and is sure of already clothing themselves with shame. It is the prerogative of Faith to behold things that are not as though they were, and to live as in the hour of triumph even while in the thick of the fight.

The psalm began with addressing "the God of my praise"; it ends with the confidence and the vow that the singer will yet praise Him. It painted an adversary standing at the right hand of the wicked to condemn him; it ends with the assurance that Jehovah stands at the right hand of His afflicted servant, as his advocate to protect him. The wicked man was to "go out guilty"; he whom God defends shall come forth from all that would judge his soul. "If God be for us, who can be against us? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?"

PSALM CX.

- 1 The oracle of Jehovah to my lord;
Sit Thou [enthroned] at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies the stool for Thy feet.
- 2 The sceptre of Thy might shall Jehovah stretch forth from Zion,
"Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies."
- 3 Thy people are free-will offerings in the day of Thine army;
In holy attire,
From the womb of the dawn,
[Comes] to Thee the dew of Thy youth[s].
- 4 Jehovah has sworn and will not repent,
Thou art a priest for ever,
After the manner of Melchizedek.
- 5 The Lord at Thy right hand
Has crushed kings in the day of His wrath.
- 6 He shall judge among the nations,
He has filled [the land] with corpses,
He has crushed the head over a wide land.
- 7 Of the brook shall He drink on the way,
Therefore shall He lift up [His] head.

Does our Lord's attribution of this psalm to David foreclose the question of its authorship for those who accept His authority? Many, who fully recognise and reverently bow to that authority, think that it does not, and appeal for support of their view to the unquestionable limitations of His earthly knowledge. It is urged that His object in His argument with the Pharisees, in which this psalm is quoted by Him (Matt. xxii. 41-46 and parallels), is not to instruct them on the authorship of the psalm, but to argue from its contents: and though He assumes the Davidic authorship, accepted generally at the time, yet the cogency of His argument is unimpaired, so long as it is recognised that the psalm is a Messianic one, and that the august language used in it of the Messiah is not compatible with the position of One who was a mere human son of David (Driver, "Introduction," p. 363, note). So also Dr. Sanday ("Inspiration," p. 420) says that "the Pharisees were taken upon their own ground, and the fallacy of their conclusion was shown on their own premises." But our Lord's argument is not drawn from the "august language" of the psalm, but from David's relationship to the Messiah, and crumbles to pieces if he is not the singer. It may freely be admitted that there are instances in our Lord's references to the Old Testament in which He speaks from the point of view of His hearers in regard to it; but these are cases in which nothing turned on the question whether that point of view was correct or not. Here everything turns on it; and to maintain that, in so important a crisis, He based His arguments on an error comes perilously near to imputing fallibility to Him as our teacher. Most of recent writers who advocate the view in question would recoil from such a consequence; but their position is divided from it by a thin line. Whatever the limitations of our Lord's human knowledge, they did not affect His authority in regard to what He did teach; and the present writer ventures to believe that He did teach that *David* in this psalm calls Messiah his Lord.

If so, the psalm stands alone, as not having primary reference to an earthly king. It is not, like other Messianic psalms, typical, but directly prophetic of Messiah, and of Him only. We are not warranted in denying the possibility of such direct

prophecy; and the picture drawn in this psalm, so far transcending any possible original among the sons of men, has not full justice done to its majestic lines, unless it is recognised as setting forth none other than the personal Messiah. True, it is drawn with colours supplied from earthly experiences, and paints a warrior-monarch. The prophet-psalmist, no doubt, conceived of literal warfare; but a prophet did not always understand the oracles which he spoke.

The psalm falls into two parts: the Vision of the Priest-King and His army (vv. 1-4); the King's Warfare and Victory (vv. 5-7).

"The oracle of Jehovah" introduces a fresh utterance of God's, heard by the psalmist, who thus claims to be the mouthpiece of the Divine will. It is a familiar prophetic phrase, but usually found at the close—not, as here, at the beginning—of the utterance to which it refers (see, however, Isa. lvi. 8; Zech. xii. 1). The unusual position makes the Divine origin of the following words more emphatic. "My Lord" is a customary title of respect in addressing a superior, but not in speaking of him. Its use here evidently implies that the psalmist regards Messiah as his king, and the best comment on it is Matt. xxii. 43: "How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord?" The substance of the oracle follows. He who is exalted to sit at the right hand of a king is installed thereby as his associate in rule. He who is seated by God at His right hand is received into such mystery of participation in Divine authority and power, as cannot be imposed on frail humanity. The rigid monotheism of the Jewish singers makes this tremendous "oracle" the more remarkable. Greek gods might have their assessors from among mortals, but who shall share Jehovah's throne? "Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king" (1 Chron. xxix. 23); but that is no parallel, nor does it show that the oracle of this psalm simply states the dignity of the theocratic king. Solomon's throne was Jehovah's, as being established by Him, and since he represented Jehovah on earth; but to sit at Jehovah's right hand means far more than this. That session of Messiah is represented as the prelude to the exercise of Divine power for His triumph over His foes; and that apparent repose, while Jehovah fights for him, is singularly contrasted with his activity as described in verses 6, 7. The singer speaks riddles about a union of undisturbed tranquillity and of warlike strenuousness, which are only solved when we see their fulfilment in Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, and who yet goes with His armies where they go. "He was received up, and sat on the right hand of God. . . . the Lord also working with them" (Mark xvi. 19, 20.) The opened heavens showed to Stephen his Master, not sitting, but standing in the posture of readiness to help him dying, and to receive him made more alive by death. His foot shall be on the neck of His foes, as Joshua bade the men of Israel put theirs on the conquered kings'. Opposition shall not only be subdued, but shall become subsidiary to Messiah's dominion, "a stepping-stone to higher things."

The Divine oracle is silent, and the strain is taken up by the psalmist himself, who speaks "in the spirit," in the remainder of the psalm, no less than he did when uttering Jehovah's word. Messiah's dominion has a definite earthly centre. From Zion is this King to rule. His mighty sceptre, the symbol and instrument of His God-given power,

is to stretch thence. How far? No limit is named to the sweep of His sway. But since Jehovah is to extend it, it must be conterminous with the reach of His omnipotence. Ver. 2 *b* may be taken as the words of Jehovah, but more probably they are the loyal exclamation of the psalmist, moved to his heart's depths by the vision which makes the bliss of his solitude. The word rendered "rule" is found also in Balaam's prophecy of Messiah (Numb. xxiv. 19) and in the Messianic Psalm lxxii. 8. The kingdom is to subsist in the midst of enemies. The normal state of the Church on earth is militant. Yet the enemies are not only a ring of antagonists round a centre of submission, but into their midst His power penetrates, and Messiah dominates them too, for all their embattled hostility. A throne round which storms of rebellion rage is an insecure seat. But this throne is established through enmity, because it is upheld by Jehovah.

The kingdom in relation to its subjects is the theme of ver. 3, which accords with the warlike tone of the whole psalm, by describing them as an army. The period spoken of is "the day of Thy host," or array—the time when the forces are mustered and set in order for battle. The word rendered *free-will offerings* may possibly mean simply "willingnesses," and the abstract noun may be used as in "I am—prayer" (Psalm cix. 4)—*i.e.*, most willing; but it is better to retain the fuller and more picturesque meaning of glad, spontaneous sacrifices, which corresponds with the priestly character afterwards ascribed to the people, and goes very deep into the essence of Christian service. There are to be no pressed men or mercenaries in that host. As Deborah sang of her warriors, these "offer themselves willingly." Glad consecration of self, issuing in spontaneous enlisting for the wars of the King, is to characterise all His subjects. The army is the nation. These soldiers are to be priests. They are clad in holy attire, "fine linen, clean and white." That representation goes as deep into the nature of the warfare they have to wage and the weapons they have to wield, as the former did into the impulse which sends them to serve under Messiah's flag. The priestly function is to bring God and man near to one another. Their warfare can only be for the carrying out of their office. Their weapons are sympathy, gentleness, purity. Like the Templars, the Christian soldier must bear the cross on his shield and the hilt of his sword. Another reading of this phrase is "on the holy mountains," which is preferred by many, among whom are Hupfeld and Cheyne. But the great preponderance of evidence is against the change, which obliterates a very striking and profound thought.

Ver. 3 *c, d* gives another picture of the host. The usual explanation of the clause takes "youth" as meaning, not the young vigour of the King, but, in a collective sense, the assembled warriors, whom it paints as in the bloom of early manhood. The principal point of comparison of the army with the dew is probably its multitude (2 Sam. xvii. 12). The warriors have the gift of un-aging youth, as all those have who renew their strength by serving Christ. And it is permissible to take other characteristics of the dew than its abundance, and to think of the mystery of its origin, of the tiny mirrors of the sunshine hanging on every cobweb, of its power to refresh, as well as of the myriads of its drops.

But this explanation, beautiful and deep as it is, is challenged by many. The word rendered

"dawn" is unusual. "Youth" is not found elsewhere in the sense thus assigned to it. "Dew" is thought to be an infelicitous emblem. "From a linguistic point of view" Cheyne pronounces both "dawn" and "dew" to be intolerable. Singularly enough, in the next sentence, he deprecates a previous opinion of his own as premature "until we know something certain of the Hebrew of the Davidic age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 482). But if such certainty is lacking, why should these two words be "intolerable"? He approves Bickell's conjectural emendation, "From the womb, from the dawn [of life], Thy youthful band is devoted to Thee."

Ver. 4 again enshrines a Divine utterance, which is presented in an even more solemn manner than that of ver. 1. The oath of Jehovah by Himself represents the thing sworn as guaranteed by the Divine character. God, as it were, pledges His own name, with its fulness of unchanging power, to the fulfilment of the word; and this irrevocable and omnipotent decree is made still more impressive by the added assurance that He "will not repent." Thus inextricably intertwined with the augustness of God's nature, the union of the royal and priestly offices in the person of Messiah shall endure for ever. Some commentators contend that every theocratic king of Israel was a priest, inasmuch as he was king of a priestly nation. But since the national priestliness did not hinder the appointment of a special order of priests, it is most natural to assume that the special order is here referred to. Why should the singer have gone back into the mists of antiquity, in order to find the type of a priest-king, if the union of offices belonged, by virtue of his kingship, to every Jewish monarch? Clearly the combination was unexampled; and such an incident as that of Uzzi-ah's leprosy shows how carefully the two great offices were kept apart. Their opposition has resulted in many tragedies: probably their union would be still more fatal, except in the case of One whose priestly sacrifice of Himself as a willing offering is the basis of His royal sway. The "order of Melchizedek" has received unexpected elucidation from the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, which bring to light, as a correspondent of the Pharaoh, one Ebed-tob, king of Uru-salim (the city of Salim, the god of peace). In one of his letters he says, "Behold, neither my father nor my mother have exalted me in this place; the prophecy [or perhaps, arm] of the mighty King has caused me to enter the house of my father." By the mighty King is meant the god whose sanctuary stood on the summit of Mount Moriah. He was king of Jerusalem, because he was priest of its god (Sayce, "Criticism and the Monuments," p. 175). The psalm lays stress on the eternal duration of the royalty and priesthood of Messiah; and although in other Messianic psalms the promised perpetuity may be taken to refer to the dynasty rather than the individual monarch, that explanation is impossible here, where a person is the theme.

Many attempts have been made to fit the language of the psalm to one or other of the kings of Israel; but, not to mention other difficulties, this ver. 4 remains as an insuperable obstacle. In default of Israelite kings, one or other of the Maccabean family has been thought of. Cheyne strongly pronounces for Simon Maccabæus, and refers, as others have done, to a popular decree in his favour, declaring him "ruler and high priest for ever" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 26). On this

identification. Baethgen asks if it is probable that the singer should have taken his theme from a popular decree, and have transformed it (*umgestempelt*) into a Divine oath. It may be added that Simon was not a king, and that he was by birth a priest.

The second part of the psalm carries the King into the battle-field. He comes forth from the throne, where He sat at Jehovah's right hand, and now Jehovah stands at His right hand. The word rendered *Lord* in ver. 5 is never used of any but God, and it is best to take it so here, even though to do so involves the necessity of supposing a change in the subject either in ver. 6 or ver. 7, which latter verse can only refer to the Messiah. The destructive conflict described is said to take place "in the day of His wrath"—*i.e.*, of Jehovah's. If this is strictly interpreted, the period intended is not that of "the day of Thine army," when by His priestly warriors the Priest-King wages a warfare among His enemies, which wins them to be His lovers, but that dread hour when He comes forth from His ascended glory to pronounce doom among the nations and to crush all opposition. Such a final apocalypse of the wrath of the Lamb is declared to us in clearer words, which may well be permitted to cast a light back on this psalm (Rev. xix. 11). "He has crushed kings" is the perfect of prophetic certainty or intuition, the scene being so vividly bodied before the singer that he regards it as accomplished. "He shall judge" or give doom "among the nations."—the future of pure prediction. Ver. 6 *b* is capable of various renderings. It may be rendered as above, or the verb may be intransitive and the whole clause translated, *It becomes full of corpses* (so Delitzsch); or the word may be taken as an adjective, in which case the meaning would be the same as if it were an intransitive verb. "The head over a wide land" is also ambiguous. If "head" is taken as a collective noun, it means rulers. But it may be also regarded as referring to a person, the principal antagonist of the Messiah. This is the explanation of many of the older interpreters, who think of Death or "the prince of this world," but is too fanciful to be adopted.

Ver. 7 is usually taken as depicting the King as pausing in His victorious pursuit of the flying foe, to drink, like Gideon's men, from the brook, and then with renewed vigour pressing on. But is not the idea of the Messiah needing refreshment in that final conflict somewhat harsh?—and may there not be here a certain desertion of the order of sequence, so that we are carried back to the time prior to the enthronement of the King? One is tempted to suggest the possibility of this closing verse being a full parallel with Phil. ii. 7-9. Christ on the way to His throne drank of "waters of affliction," and precisely therefore is He "highly exalted."

The choice for every man is, being crushed beneath His foot, or being exalted to sit with Him on His throne. "He that overcometh, to him will I give to sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne." It is better to sit on His throne than to be His footstool.

PSALM CXI.

Hallelujah.

- 1 **X** I will thank Jehovah with my whole heart,
2 In the council of the upright and in the congregation.

- 2 **J** Great are the works of Jehovah,
3 **I** Inquired into by all who delight in them.
4 **H** Honour and majesty is His working,
5 **A** And His righteousness stands fast for aye.
6 **H** He has made a memorial for His wonders,
7 **G** Gracious and compassionate is Jehovah.
8 **F** Food has He given to those who fear Him,
9 **H** He remembers His covenant for ever.
10 **T** The power of His works has He showed to His people,
11 **I** In giving them the inheritance of the nations.
12 **T** The works of His hands are truth and judgment;
13 **T** Trustworthy are all His commandments;
14 **E** Established for aye and for ever,
15 **D** Done in truth and uprightness.
16 **R** Redemption has He sent to His people,
17 **H** He has ordained His covenant for ever,
18 **H** Holy and dread is His name.
19 **T** The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom,
20 **G** Good understanding [belongs] to all who do them;
21 **H** His praise stands fast for aye.

ANOTHER series of psalms headed with Hallelujah begins here and includes the two following psalms. The prefix apparently indicates liturgical use. The present psalm is closely allied to the next. Both are acrostic and correspond verse to verse, as will appear in the exposition. Together they represent God and the godly, this psalm magnifying the Divine character and acts, the other painting the ideal godly man as, in some real fashion, an "imitator of God as a beloved child." Both are gnomic, and built up by accumulation of slightly connected particulars, rather than flowing continuously in a sequence which springs from one pregnant thought. Both have allusions to other psalms and to the Book of Proverbs, and share with many of the psalms of Book V. the character of being mainly working over of old materials.

The psalmist begins by a vow to thank Jehovah with his whole heart, and immediately proceeds to carry it out. "The upright" is by some understood as a national designation, and "council" taken as equivalent to "congregation." But it is more in accordance with usage to regard the psalmist as referring first to a narrower circle of like-minded lovers of good, to whose congenial ears he rejoices to sing. There was an Israel within Israel, who would sympathise with his song. The "congregation" is then either the wider audience of the gathered people, or, as Delitzsch takes it, equivalent to "*their* congregation"—*i. e.*, of the upright.

The theme of thanksgiving is, as ever, God's works for Israel; and the first characteristic of these which the psalmist sings is their greatness. He will come closer presently, and discern more delicate features, but now, the magnitude of these colossal manifestations chiefly animates his song. Far-stretching in their mass and in their consequences, deep-rooted in God's own character, His great deeds draw the eager search of "those who delight in them." These are the same sympathetic auditors to whom the song is primarily addressed. There were indolent beholders in Israel, before whom the works of God were passed without exciting the faintest desire to know more of their depth. Such careless onlookers, who see and see not, are rife in all ages. God shines out in His deeds, and they will not give one glance

of sharpened interest. But the test of caring for His doings is the effort to comprehend their greatness, and plunge oneself into their depths. The more one gazes, the more one sees. What was at first but dimly apprehended as great resolves itself, as we look; and, first, "Honour and majesty," the splendour of His reflected character, shine out from His deeds, and then, when still more deeply they are pondered, the central fact of their righteousness, their conformity to the highest standard of rectitude, becomes patent. Greatness and majesty, divorced from righteousness, would be no theme for praise. Such greatness is littleness, such splendour is phosphorescent corruption.

These general contemplations are followed in vv. 4-6 by references to Israel's history as the greatest example of God's working. "He has made a memorial for His wonders." Some find here a reference to the Passover and other feasts commemorative of the deliverance from Egypt. But it is better to think of Israel itself as the "memorial," or of the deeds themselves, in their remembrance by men, as being, as it were, a monument of His power. The men whom God has blessed are standing evidences of His wonders. "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord." And the great attribute, which is commemorated by that "memorial," is Jehovah's gracious compassion. The psalmist presses steadily towards the centre of the Divine nature. God's works become eloquent of more and more precious truth as he listens to their voice. They spoke of greatness, honour, majesty, righteousness, but tenderer qualities are revealed to the loving and patient gazer. The two standing proofs of Divine kindness are the miraculous provision of food in the desert and the possession of the promised land. But to the psalmist these are not past deeds to be remembered only, but continually repeated operations. "He remembers His covenant for ever," and so the experiences of the fathers are lived over again by the children, and to-day is as full of God as yesterday was. Still He feeds us, still He gives us *our* heritage.

From ver. 7 onwards a new thought comes in. God has spoken as well as wrought. His very works carry messages of "truth and judgment," and they are interpreted further by articulate precepts, which are at once a revelation of what He is and a law for what we should be. His law stands as fast as His righteousness (vv. 3, 8). A man may utterly trust His commandments. They abide eternally, for Duty is ever Duty, and His Law, while it has a surface of temporary ceremonial, has a core of immutable requirement. His commandments are *done*—i. e., appointed by Him—"in truth and uprightness." They are tokens of His grace and revelations of His character.

The two closing verses have three clauses each, partly from the exigencies of the acrostic structure, and partly to secure a more impressive ending. Ver. 9 sums up all God's works in the two chief manifestations of His goodness which should ever live in Israel's thanks, His sending redemption and His establishing His everlasting covenant—the two facts which are as fresh to-day, under new and better forms, as when long ago this unknown psalmist sang. And he gathers up the total impression which God's dealings should leave, in the great saying, "Holy and dread is His name." In ver. 10 he somewhat passes the limits of his theme, and trenches on the territory of the next psalm, which is already beginning

to shape itself in his mind. The designation of the fear of the Jehovah as "the beginning of wisdom" is from Prov. i. 7, ix. 10. "Beginning" may rather mean "principal part" (Prov. iv. 7, "principal thing"). The "them" of ver. 10 *b* is best referred, though the expression is awkward, to "commandments" in ver. 7. Less probably it is taken to allude to the "fear" and "wisdom" of the previous clause. The two clauses of this verse descriptive of the godly correspond in structure to *a* and *b* of ver. 9, and the last clause corresponds to the last of that verse, expressing the continual praise which should rise to that holy and dread Name. Note that the perpetual duration, which has been predicated of God's attributes, precepts, and covenant (vv. 3, 5, 8, 9), is here ascribed to His praise. Man's songs cannot fall dumb, so long as God pours out Himself in such deeds. As long as that Sun streams across the desert, stony lips will part in music to hail its beams.

PSALM CXII.

Hallelujah.

- 1 ⁸ Happy the man who fears Jehovah.
- 2 [Who] delights exceedingly in His commandments.
- 2 ² Mighty on the earth shall his seed be,
- 3 The generation of the upright shall be blessed.
- 3 ⁷ Wealth and riches are in his house,
- 4 And his righteousness stands fast for aye.
- 4 ¹ There riseth in the darkness light to the upright.—
- 5 ⁷ Gracious and pitiful and righteous is he.
- 5 ² Well is the man who pities and lends,
- 6 He shall maintain his causes in [the] judgment.
- 6 ² For he shall not be moved for ever,
- 7 In everlasting remembrance shall the righteous be held.
- 7 ² Of evil tidings he shall not be afraid,
- 8 Steadfast is his heart, trusting in Jehovah.
- 8 ² Established is his heart, he shall not fear,
- 9 Until he looks on his adversaries.
- 9 ² He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor,
- 10 His righteousness stands fast for aye,
- 11 His horn shall be exalted with glory.
- 10 ⁷ The wicked man shall see it and be grieved,
- 11 He shall gnash his teeth and melt away,
- 12 The desire of wicked men shall perish.

"Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," might be inscribed on this picture of a godly man, which, in structure and substance, reflects the contemplation of God's character and works contained in the preceding psalm. The idea that the godly man is, in some real sense, an image of God runs through the whole, and comes out strongly, at several points, in the repetition of the same expressions in reference to both. The portrait of the ideal good man, outlined in this psalm, may be compared with those in Psalms xv. and xxiv. Its most characteristic feature is the prominence given to beneficence, which is regarded as eminently a reflection of God's. The foundation of righteousness is laid in ver. 1, in devout awe and inward delight in the commandments. But the bulk of the psalm describes the blessed consequences, rather than the essential characteristics, of godliness.

The basis of righteousness and beneficence to men must be laid in reverence and conformity of

will towards God. Therefore the psalm begins with proclaiming that, apart from all external consequences, these dispositions carry blessedness in themselves. The close of the preceding psalm had somewhat overpassed its limits, when it declared that "the fear of Jehovah" was the beginning of wisdom and that to do His commandments was sound discretion.

This psalm echoes these sayings, and so links itself to the former one. It deepens them by pointing out that the fear of Jehovah is a fountain of joy as well as of wisdom, and that inward delight in the Law must precede outward doing of it. The familiar blessing attached in the Old Testament to godliness, namely, prosperous posterity, is the first of the consequences of righteousness which the psalm holds out. That promise belongs to another order of things from that of the New Testament; but the essence of it is true still, namely, that the only secure foundation for permanent prosperity is in the fear of Jehovah. "The generation of the upright" (ver. 2) does not merely mean the natural descendants of a good man—"It is a moral rather than a genealogical term" (Hupfeld)—as is usually the case with the word "generation." Another result of righteousness is declared to be "wealth and riches" (ver. 3), which again, must be taken as applying more fully to the Old Testament system of Providence than to that of the New.

A parallelism of the most striking character between God and the godly emerges in ver. 3 *b*, where the same words are applied to the latter as were used of the former, in the corresponding verse of Psalm cxi. It would be giving too great evangelical definiteness to the psalmist's words, to read into them the Christian teaching that man's righteousness is God's gift through Christ, but it unwarrantably eviscerates them of their meaning, if we go to the other extreme, and, with Hupfeld, suppose that the psalmist put in the clause under stress of the exigencies of the acrostic structure, and regard it as a "makeshift" and "stop-gap." The psalmist has a very definite and noble thought. Man's righteousness is the reflection of God's; and has in it some kindred with its original, which guarantees stability not all unlike the eternity of that source. Since ver. 3 *b* thus brings into prominence the ruling thought of the two psalms, possibly we may venture to see a fainter utterance of that thought, in the first clause of the verse, in which the "wealth and riches" in the righteous man's house may correspond to the "honour and majesty" attendant on God's works (cxi. 3 *a*).

Ver. 4 blends consequences of righteousness and characterisation of it, in a remarkable way. The construction is doubtful. In *a*, "upright" is in the plural, and the adjectives in *b* are in the singular number. They are appended abruptly to the preceding clause; and the loose structure has occasioned difficulty to expositors, which has been increased by the scruples of some, who have not given due weight to the leading thought of correspondence between the human and Divine, and have hesitated to regard ver. 4 *b*, as referring to the righteous man, seeing that in Psalm cxi. 4 *b* refers to God. Hence efforts have been made to find other renderings. Delitzsch would refer the clause to God, whom he takes to be meant by "light" in the previous clause, while Hitzig, followed by Baethgen, would translate, "As a light, he (the righteous) rises in darkness for the upright," and would then consider "gracious," etc., as in apposition with "light," and

descriptive of the righteous man's character as such. But the very fact that the words are applied to God in the corresponding verse of the previous psalm suggests their application here to the godly man, and the sudden change of number is not so harsh as to require the ordinary translation to be abandoned. However dark may be a good man's road, the very midnight blackness is a prophecy of sunrise; or, to use another figure,

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

(Compare Psalm xcvi. 11.) The fountain of pity in human hearts must be fed from the great source of compassion in God's, if it is to gush out unremittingly and bless the deserts of sorrow and misery. He who has received "grace" will surely exercise grace. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke vi. 36).

Ver. 5 blends characteristics and consequences of goodness in reverse order from that in ver. 4. The compassionate man of ver. 4 *b* does not let pity evaporate, but is moved by it to act and to lend (primarily money, but secondarily) any needful help or solace. Benevolence which is not translated into beneficence is a poor affair. There is no blessing in it or for it; but it is well with the man who turns emotions into deeds. Lazy compassion hurts him who indulges in it, but that which "lends" gets joy in the act of bestowing aid. The result of such active compassion is stated in ver. 5 *b* as being that such a one will "maintain his causes in judgment," by which seems to be meant the judgment of earthly tribunals. If compassion and charity guide a life, it will have few disputes, and will contain nothing for which a judge can condemn. He who obeys the higher law will not break the lower.

Vv. 6-8 dwell mainly on one consequence of righteousness, namely, the stability which it imparts. While such a man lives, he shall be unmoved by shocks, and after he dies, his memory will live, like a summer evening's glow which lingers in the west till a new morning dawns. In ver. 7 the resemblance of the godly to God comes very beautifully to the surface. Psalm cxi. 7 deals with God's commandments as "trustworthy." The human parallel is an *established* heart. He who has learned to lean upon Jehovah (for such is the literal force of "trusting" here), and has proved the commandments utterly reliable as basis for his life, will have his heart steadfast. The same idea is repeated in ver. 8 with direct quotation of the corresponding verse of Psalm cxi. In both the word for "established" is the same. The heart that delights in God's established commandments is established by them, and, sooner or later, will look in calm security on the fading away of all evil things and men, while it rests indeed, because it rests in God. He who builds his transient life on and into the Rock of Ages wins rocklike steadfastness, and some share in the perpetuity of his Refuge. Lives rooted in God are never uprooted.

The two final verses are elongated, like the corresponding ones in Psalm cxi. Again, beneficence is put in the forefront, as a kind of shorthand summing up of all virtues. And, again, in ver. 9 the analogy is drawn out between God and the godly. "He has sent redemption to His people"; and they, in their degree, are to be communicative of the gifts of which they have been made recipient. Little can they give, compared with what they have received; but what they have they hold in trust for those who need it, and

the sure test of having obtained "redemption" is a "heart open as day to melting charity." In the former psalm, ver. 9 *b* declared that God has "ordained His covenant for ever" and here the corresponding clause re-affirms that the good man's righteousness endures for ever. The final clauses of both verses also correspond, in so far as, in the former psalm, God's Name is represented as "holy and dread"—*i. e.*, the total impression made by His deeds exalts Him—and in the latter, the righteous man's "horn" is represented as "exalted in glory" or honour—*i. e.*, the total impression made by his deeds exalts him. Paul quotes the two former clauses of ver. 9 in 2 Cor. ix. 9 as involving the truth that Christian giving does not impoverish. The exercise of a disposition strengthens it; and God takes care that the means of beneficence shall not be wanting to him who has the spirit of it. The later Jewish use of "righteousness" as a synonym for *alms-giving* has probably been influenced by this psalm, in which beneficence is the principal trait in the righteous man's character, but there is no reason for supposing that the psalmist uses the word in that restricted sense.

Ver. 10 is not parallel with the last verse of Psalm cxi., which stands, as we have seen, somewhat beyond the scope of the rest of that psalm. It gives one brief glimpse of the fate of the evildoer, in opposition to the loving picture of the blessedness of the righteous. Thus it too is rather beyond the immediate object of the psalm of which it forms part. The wicked *sees*, in contrast with the righteous man's *seeing* in ver. 8. The one looks with peace on the short duration of antagonistic power, and rejoices that there is a God of recompenses; the other grinds his teeth in envious rage, as he beholds the perpetuity of the righteous. He "shall melt away," *i. e.*, in jealousy or despair. Opposition to goodness, since it is enmity towards God, is self-condemned to impotence and final failure. Desires turned for satisfaction elsewhere than to God are sure to perish. The sharp contrast between the righteousness of the good man, which endures for ever, in his steadfast because trustful heart, and the crumbling schemes and disappointed hopes which gnaw the life of a man whose aims go athwart God's will, solemnly proclaims an eternal truth. This Psalm, like Psalm i., touches the two poles of possible human experience, in its first and last words, beginning with "happy the man" and ending with "shall perish."

PSALM CXIII.

Hallelujah.

- 1 Praise, ye servants of Jehovah,
Praise the name of Jehovah.
- 2 Be the name of Jehovah blessed
From henceforth and for evermore!
- 3 From the rising of the sun to its going
down,
Praised be the name of Jehovah.
- 4 High above all nations is Jehovah,
Above the heavens His glory.
- 5 Who is like Jehovah our God?
Who sits enthroned on high,
- 6 Who looks far below
On the heavens and on the earth;
- 7 Who raises the helpless from the dust,
From the rubbi-h-heap He lifts the needy,

- 8 To seat him with nobles,
With the nobles of His people;
- 9 Who seats the barren [woman] in a house,
—A glad mother of her children.

THIS pure burst of praise is the first of the psalms composing the Hallel, which was sung at the three great feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles), as well as at the festival of Dedication and at the new moons. "In the domestic celebration of the Passover night 'the Hallel' is divided into two parts; the one half, Psalms cxiii., cxiv., being sung before the repast, before the emptying of the second festal cup, and the other half, Psalms cxv.-cxviii., after the repast, after the filling of the fourth cup, to which the 'having sung an hymn' in Matt. xxvi. 30, Mark xiv. 26, . . . may refer" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*).

Three strophes of three verses each may be recognised, of which the first summons Israel to praise Jehovah, and reaches out through all time and over all space, in longing that God's name may be known and praised. The second strophe (vv. 4-6) magnifies God's exalted greatness; while the third (vv. 7-9) adores His condescension, manifested in His stooping to lift the lowly. The second and third of these strophes, however, overlap in the song, as the facts which they celebrate do. God's loftiness can never be adequately measured, unless His condescension is taken into account; and His condescension never sufficiently wondered at, unless His loftiness is felt.

The call to praise is addressed to Israel, whose designation "servants of Jehovah" recalls Isaiah II.'s characteristic use of that name in the singular number for the nation. With strong emphasis, the name of Jehovah is declared as the theme of praise. God's revelation of His character by deed and word must precede man's thanksgiving. They, to whom that Name has been entrusted, by their reception of His mercies are bound to ring it out to all the world. And in the Name itself, there lies enshrined the certainty that through all ages it shall be blessed, and in every spot lit by the sun shall shine as a brighter light, and be hailed with praises. The psalmist has learned the world-wide significance of Israel's position as the depository of the Name, and the fair vision of a universal adoration of it fills his heart. Ver. 3 *b* may be rendered "worthy to be praised is the name," but the context seems to suggest the rendering above.

The infinite exaltation of Jehovah above all dwellers on this low earth and above the very heavens does not lift Him too high for man's praise, for it is wedded to condescension as infinite. Incomparable is He; but still adoration can reach Him, and men do not clasp mist, but solid substance, when they grasp His Name. That incomparable uniqueness of Jehovah is celebrated in ver. 5 *a* in strains borrowed from Exod. xv. 11, while the striking description of loftiness combined with condescension in vv. 5 *b* and 6 resembles Isa. lvii. 15. The literal rendering of vv. 5 *b* and 6 *a* is, "Who makes high to sit, Who makes low to behold," which is best understood as above. It may be questioned whether "On the heavens and on the earth" designates the objects on which His gaze is said to be turned; or whether, as some understand the construction, it is to be taken with "Who is like Jehovah our God?" the intervening clauses being parenthetical; or whether, as others prefer, "in heaven"

points back to "enthroned on high," and "on earth" to "looks far below." But the construction which regards the totality of created things, represented by the familiar phrase "the heavens and the earth," as being the objects on which Jehovah looks down from His inconceivable loftiness, accords best with the context and yields an altogether worthy meaning. Transcendent elevation, condescension, and omniscience are blended in the poet's thought. So high is Jehovah that the highest heavens are far beneath Him, and, unless His gaze were all-discerning, would be but a dim speck. That He should enter into relations with creatures, and that there should be creatures for Him to enter into relations with, are due to His stooping graciousness. These far-darting looks are looks of tenderness, and signify care as well as knowledge. Since all things lie in His sight, all receive from His hand.

The third strophe pursues the thought of the Divine condescension as especially shown in stooping to the dejected and helpless and lifting them. The effect of the descent of One so high must be to raise the lowliness to which He bends. The words in vv. 7, 8, are quoted from Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 8). Probably the singer has in his mind Israel's restoration from exile, that great act in which Jehovah had shown His condescending loftiness, and had lifted His helpless people as from the ash-heap, where they lay as outcasts. The same event seems to be referred to in ver. 9, under a metaphor suggested by the story of Hannah whose words have just been quoted. The "barren" is Israel (comp. Isa. liv. 1). The expression in the original is somewhat obscure. It stands literally "the barren of the house," and is susceptible of different explanations; but probably the simplest is to regard it as a contracted expression for the unfruitful wife in a house, "a housewife, but yet not a mother. Such an one has in her husband's house no sure position. . . . If God bestows children upon her, He by that very fact makes her for the first time thoroughly at home and rooted in her husband's house" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The joy of motherhood is tenderly touched in the closing line, in which the definite article is irregularly prefixed to "sons," as if the poet "points with his finger to the children with whom God blesses her" (Delitzsch, *u. s.*). Thus Israel, with her restored children about her, is secure in her home. That restoration was the signal instance of Jehovah's condescension and delight in raising the lowly. It was therefore the great occasion for world-wide and age-long praise.

The singer did not know how far it would be transcended by a more wonderful, more heart-touching manifestation of stooping love, when "The Word became flesh." How much more exultant and world-filling should be the praises from the lips of those who do know how low that Word has stooped, and how high He has risen, and how surely all who hold His hand will be lifted from any ash-heap and set on His throne, sharers in the royalty of Him who has been partaker of their weakness!

PSALM CXIV.

- 1 When Israel went forth from Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a stammering
people,
- 2 Judah became His sanctuary,
Israel His dominion.

- 3 The sea beheld and fled,
Jordan turned back.
- 4 The mountains leaped like rams,
The hills like the sons of a flock.
- 5 What ails thee, Sea, that thou fleest?
Jordan, that thou art turned back?
- 6 Mountains, that ye leap like rams?
Hills, like the sons of a flock?
- 7 At the presence of the Lord, writhe in pangs,
O earth,
At the presence of the God of Jacob,
- 8 Who turns the rock into a pool of water,
The flint into a fountain of waters.

It is possible that in this psalm Israel, restored from Babylon, is looking back to the earlier Exodus, and thrilling with the great thought that that old past lives again in the present. Such a historical parallel would minister courage and hope. But the eyes of psalmists were ever turning to the great days when a nation was born, and there are no data in this psalm which connect it with a special period, except certain peculiarities in the form of the words "turns" and "fountain" in ver. 8, both of which have a vowel appended (*i* in the former, *o* in the latter word), which is probably an archaism, used by a late poet for ornament's sake. The same peculiarity is found in Psalm cxiii. 5-9, where it occurs five times.

A familiar theme is treated here with singular force and lyric fervour. The singer does not heap details together but grasps one great thought. To him there are but two outstanding characteristics of the Exodus: one, its place and purpose as the beginning of Israel's prerogative, and another, its apocalypse of the Majesty of Jehovah, the Ruler of Nature in its mightiest forms. These he hymns, and then leaves them to make their own impression. He has no word of "moral," no application, counsel, warning, or encouragement to give. Whoso will can draw these. Enough for him to lift his soaring song, and to check it into silence in the midst of its full music. He would be a consummate artist, if he were not something much better. The limpid clearness, the eloquent brevity of the psalm are not more obvious than its masterly structure. Its four pairs of verses, each laden with one thought, the dramatic vividness of the sudden questions in the third pair, the skilful suppression of the Divine name till the close, where it is pealed out in full tones of triumph, make this little psalm a gem.

In vv. 1, 2, the slighting glance at the land left by the ransomed people is striking. The Egyptians are to this singer "a stammering people," talking a language which sounded to him barely articulate. The word carries a similar contempt to that in the Greek "barbarian," which imitates the unmeaning babble of a foreign tongue. To such insignificance in the psalmist's mind had the once dreaded oppressors sunk! The great fact about the Exodus was that it was the birthday of the Nation, the beginning of its entrance on its high prerogatives. If the consecration of Judah as "His sanctuary" took place when Israel went forth from Egypt, there can be no reference to the later erection of the material sanctuary in Jerusalem, and the names of Judah and Israel must both apply to the people, not to the land, which it would be an anachronism to introduce here. That deliverance from Egypt was in order to God's dwelling in Israel, and

thereby sanctifying or setting it apart to Himself, "a kingdom of priests and an holy nation." Dwelling in the midst of them, He wrought wonders for them, as the psalm goes on to hymn; but this is the grand foundation fact, that Israel was brought out of bondage to be God's temple and kingdom. The higher deliverance of which that Exodus is a foreshadowing is, in like manner, intended to effect a still more wonderful and intimate indwelling of God in His Church. Redeemed humanity is meant to be God's temple and realm.

The historical substratum for vv. 3, 4, is the twin miracles of drying up the Red Sea and the Jordan, which began and closed the Exodus, and the "quaking" of Sinai at the Theophany accompanying the giving of the Law. These physical facts are imaginatively conceived as the effects of panic produced by some dread vision; and the psalmist heightens his representation by leaving unnamed the sight which dried the sea, and shook the steadfast granite cliffs. In the third pair of verses he changes his point of view from that of narrator to that of a wondering spectator, and asks what terrible thing, unseen by him, strikes such awe? All is silent now, and the wonders long since past. The sea rolls its waters again over the place where Pharaoh's host lie. Jordan rushes down its steep valley as of old, the savage peaks of Sinai know no tremors;—but these momentary wonders proclaimed an eternal truth.

So the psalmist answers his own question, and goes beyond it in summoning the whole earth to tremble, as sea, river, and mountain had done, for the same Vision before which they had shrunk is present to all Nature. Now the psalmist can peal forth the Name of Him, the sight of whom wrought these wonders. It is "the Lord," the Sovereign Ruler, whose omnipotence and plastic power over all creatures were shown when His touch made rock and flint forget their solidity and become fluid, even as His will made the waves solid as a wall, and His presence shook Sinai. He is still Lord of Nature. And, more blessed still, the Lord of Nature is the God of Jacob. Both these names were magnified in the two miracles (which, like those named in ver. 3, are a pair) of giving drink to the thirsty pilgrims. With that thought of omnipotence blended with gracious care, the singer ceases. He has said enough to breed faith and hearten courage, and he drops his harp without a formal close. The effect is all the greater, though some critics prosaically insist that the text is defective and put a row or two of asterisks at the end of ver. 8, "since it is not discernible what purpose the representation [*i. e.*, the whole psalm] is to serve" (Graetz)!

PSALM CXV.

- 1 Not to us, not to us, Jehovah,
But to Thy name give glory,
For the sake of Thy lovingkindness, for the
sake of Thy truth.
- 2 Why should the nations say,
"Where, then, is their God?"
- 3 But our God is in the heavens,
Whatsoever He willed, He has done.
- 4 Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of the hands of men.
- 5 A mouth is theirs—and they cannot speak,
Eyes are theirs—and they cannot see,
- 6 Ears are theirs—and they cannot hear,
A nose is theirs—and they cannot smell.
- 7 Their hands—[with them] they cannot
handle.
Their feet—[with them] they cannot walk,
Not a sound can they utter with their throat.
- 8 Like them shall those who make them be,
[Even] every one that trusts in them.
- 9 Israel, trust thou in Jehovah,
Their help and shield is He.
- 10 House of Aaron, trust in Jehovah,
Their help and shield is He.
- 11 Ye who fear Jehovah, trust in Jehovah,
Their help and shield is He.
- 12 Jehovah has remembered us—He will bless,
He will bless the house of Israel,
He will bless the house of Aaron,
- 13 He will bless those who fear Jehovah,
The small as well as the great.
- 14 Jehovah will add to you,
To you and to your children.
- 15 Blessed be ye of Jehovah,
Who made heaven and earth!
- 16 The heavens are Jehovah's heavens,
But the earth He has given to the children of
men.
- 17 It is not the dead who praise Jehovah,
Neither all they who descend into silence.
- 18 But we—we will bless Jehovah,
From henceforth and for evermore.

Hallelujah.

ISRAEL is in straits from heathen enemies, and cries to Jehovah to vindicate His own Name by delivering it. Strengthened by faith, which has been stung into action by taunts aimed at both the nation and its Protector, the psalmist triumphantly contrasts Jehovah in the heavens, moving all things according to His will, with idols which had the semblance of powers the reality of which was not theirs. Sarcastic contempt, indignation, and profound insight into the effect of idolatry in assimilating the worshipper to his god, unite in the picture (vv. 3-8). The tone swiftly changes into a summons to withdraw trust from such vanities, and set it on Jehovah, who can and will bless His servants (vv. 9-15); and the psalm closes with recognition of Jehovah's exaltation and beneficence, and with the vow to return blessing to Him for the blessings, already apprehended by faith, which He bestows on Israel.

Obviously the psalm is intended for temple worship, and was meant to be sung by various voices. The distribution of its parts may be doubtful. Ewald would regard vv. 1-11 as the voice of the congregation while the sacrifice was being offered; vv. 12-15 as that of the priest announcing its acceptance; and vv. 16-18 as again the song of the congregation. But there is plainly a change of singer at ver. 9; and the threefold summons to trust in Jehovah in the first clauses of vv. 9, 10, 11, may with some probability be allotted to a ministering official, while the refrain, in the second clause of each of these verses, may be regarded as pealed out with choral force. The solo voice next pronounces the benediction on the same three classes to whom it had addressed the call to trust. And the congregation, thus receiving Jehovah's blessing, sends back its praise, as sunshine from a mirror, in vv. 16-18.

The circumstances presupposed in the psalm suit many periods of Israel's history. But probably this, like the neighboring psalms, is a product of the early days after the return from Babylon, when the feeble settlers were ringed round by scoffing foes, and had brought back from exile a more intimate knowledge and contemptuous aversion for idols and idolatry than had before been felt in Israel. Cheyne takes the psalm to be Maccabean, but acknowledges that there is nothing in it to fix that date, which he seeks to establish for the whole group mainly because he is sure of it for one member of the group, namely, Psalm cxviii. ("Orig. of Psalt.," 18 sq.).

The prayer in vv. 1, 2, beautifully blends profound consciousness of demerit and confidence that, unworthy as Israel is, its welfare is inextricably interwoven with Jehovah's honour. It goes very deep into the logic of supplication, even though the thing desired is but deliverance from human foes. Men win their pleas with God, when they sue *in formâ pauperis*. There must be thorough abnegation of all claims based on self, before there can be faithful urging of the one prevalent motive, God's care for His own fair fame. The under side of faith is self-distrust, the upper side is affiance on Jehovah. God has given pledges for His future by His past acts of self-revelation, and cannot but be true to His Name. His loving-kindness is no transient mood, but rests on the solid basis of His faithfulness, like flowers rooted in the clefts of a rock. The taunts that had tortured another psalmist long before (Psalm xlii. 3) have been flung now from heathen lips, with still more bitterness, and call for Jehovah's thunderous answer. If Israel goes down before its foes, the heathen will have warrant to scoff.

But from their bitter tongues and his own fears, the singer turns, in the name of the sorely harassed congregation, to ring out the proclamation which answers the heathen taunt, before God answers it by deeds. "Our God is in heaven"—that is where He is; and He is not too far away to make His hand felt on earth. He is no impotent image; He does what He wills, executing to the last tittle His purposes; and conversely, He wills what He does, being constrained by no outward force, but drawing the determinations of His actions from the depths of His being. Therefore, whatever evil has befallen Israel is not a sign that it has lost Him, but a proof that He is near. The brief, pregnant assertion of God's omnipotence and sovereign freedom, which should tame the heathens' arrogance and teach the meaning of Israel's disasters, is set in eloquent opposition to the fiery indignation which dashes off the sarcastic picture of an idol. The tone of the description is like that of the manufacture of an image in Isa. xlv. 9-20. Psalm cxxxv. 15-18 repeats it verbatim. The vehemence of scorn in these verses suggests a previous, compelled familiarity with idolatry such as the exiles had. It corresponds with the revolution which that familiarity produced, by extirpating for ever the former hankering after the gods of the nations. No doubt, there are higher weapons than sarcasm; and, no doubt, a Babylonian wise man could have drawn distinctions between the deity and its image, but such cobwebs are too fine-spun for rough fingers to handle, and the idolatry both of pagans and of Christians identifies the two.

But a deeper note is struck in ver. 8, in the assertion that, as is the god, so becomes the worshipper. The psalmist probably means chiefly, if not exclusively, in respect to the impotence just

spoken of. So the worshipper and his idol are called by the same name (Isa. xlv. 9, *vanity*), and, in the tragic summary of Israel's sins and punishment in 2 Kings xvii. 15, it is said, that "they followed after vanity and became vain." But the statement is true in a wider sense. Worship is sure to breed likeness. A lustful, cruel god will make his devotees so. Men make gods after their own image, and, when made, the gods make men after theirs. The same principle which degrades the idolater lifts the Christian to the likeness of Christ. The aim and effect of adoration is assimilation.

Probably the congregation is now silent, and a single voice takes up the song, with the call, which the hollowness of idolatry makes so urgent and reasonable, to trust in Jehovah, not in vanities. It is thrice repeated, being first addressed to the congregation, then to the house of Aaron, and finally to a wider circle, those who "fear Jehovah." These are most naturally understood as proselytes, and, in the prominence given to them, we see the increasing consciousness in Israel of its Divine destination to be God's witness to the world. Exile had widened the horizon, and fair hopes that men who were not of Israel's blood would share Israel's faith and shelter under the wings of Israel's God stirred in many hearts. The crash of the triple choral answer to the summons comes with magnificent effect, in the second clauses of vv. 9, 10, 11, triumphantly telling how safe are they who take refuge behind that strong buckler. The same threefold division into *Israel*, *house of Aaron*, and *they who fear Jehovah* occurs in Psalm cxviii. 2-4, and, with the addition of "house of Levi," in Psalm cxxxv.

Promises of blessing occupy vv. 12-15, which may probably have been sung by priests, or rather by Levites, the musicians of the Temple service. In any case, these benedictions are authoritative assurances from commissioned lips, not utterances of hopeful faith. They are Jehovah's response to Israel's obedience to the preceding summons; swiftly sent, as His answers ever are. Calm certainty that He will bless comes at once into the heart that deeply feels that He is its shield, however His manifestation of outward help may be lovingly delayed. The blessing is parted among those who had severally been called to trust, and had obeyed the call. Universal blessings have special destinations. The fiery mass breaks up into cloven tongues and sits on each. Distinctions of position make no difference in its reception. Small vessels are filled, and great ones can be no more than full. Cedars and hyssop rejoice in impartial sunshine. Israel, when blessed increases in number, and there is an inheritance of good from generation to generation. The seal of such hopes is the Name of Him who blesses, "the Maker of heaven and earth," to whose omnipotent, universal sway these impotent gods in human form are as a foil.

Finally, we may hear the united voices of the congregation thus blessed breaking into full-throated praise in vv. 16-18. As in ver. 3 God's dwelling in heaven symbolised His loftiness and power, so here the thought that "the heavens are Jehovah's heavens" implies both the worshippers' trust in His mighty help and their lowliness even in trust. The earth is man's, but by Jehovah's gift. Therefore its inhabitants should remember the terms of their tenure, and thankfully recognise His giving love. But heaven and earth do not include all the universe. There is another

region, the land of silence, whither the dead descend. No voice of praise wakes its dumb sleep. (Comp. Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19.) That pensive contemplation, on which the light of the New Testament assurance of Immortality has not shone, gives keener edge to the bliss of present ability to praise Jehovah. We who know that to die is to have a new song put into immortal lips may still be stimulated to fill our brief lives here with the music of thanksgiving, by the thought that, so far as our witness for God to men is concerned, most of us will "descend into silence" when we pass into the grave. Therefore we should shun silence, and bless Him while we live here.

PSALM CXVI.

- 1 I love—for Jehovah hears
My voice, my supplications.
- 2 For he has bent His ear to me,
And throughout my days will I call.
- 3 The cords of death ringed me round,
And the narrows of Sheol found me;
Distress and trouble did I find.
- 4 And on the name of Jehovah I called,
"I beseech Thee, Jehovah, deliver my soul."
- 5 Gracious is Jehovah and righteous,
And our God is compassionate.
- 6 The keeper of the simple is Jehovah,
I was brought low and He saved me.
- 7 Return, my soul, to thy rest,
For Jehovah has lavished good on thee.
- 8 For Thou hast delivered my soul from
death,
My eye from tears,
My foot from stumbling.
- 9 I shall walk before Jehovah in the lands of
the living
- 10 I believed when I [thus] spake,
"I am greatly afflicted."
- 11 I said in my agitation,
"All men deceive."
- 12 What shall I return to Jehovah,
[For] all His goodness lavished on me?
- 13 The cup of salvations will I lift,
And on the name of Jehovah will I call.
- 14 My vows will I repay to Jehovah,
Oh! may I [do it] before all His people!
- 15 Precious in the eyes of Jehovah
Is the death of His favoured ones.
- 16 I beseech Thee, Jehovah—for I am Thy
servant,
I am Thy servant, the son of Thy hand-
maid,
Thou hast loosed my bonds.
- 17 To Thee will I offer a sacrifice of thanks-
giving,
And on the name of Jehovah will I call.
- 18 My vows will I repay to Jehovah,
Oh! may I [do it] before all His people!
- 19 In the courts of the house of Jehovah,
In the midst of thee, Jerusalem.

Hallelujah.

THIS psalm is intensely individual. "I," "me," or "my" occurs in every verse but two (vv. 5, 19). The singer is but recently delivered from some peril, and his song heaves with a ground-swell of emotion after the storm. Hupfeld

takes offence at its "continual alternation of petition and recognition of the Divine beneficence and deliverance, or vows of thanksgiving," but surely that very blending is natural to one just rescued and still panting from his danger. Certain grammatical forms indicate a late date, and the frequent allusions to earlier psalms point in the same direction. The words of former psalmists were part of this singer's mental furniture, and came to his lips, when he brought his own thanksgivings. Hupfeld thinks it "strange" that "such a patched-up (*zusammengestoppelter*) psalm," has "imposed" upon commentators, who speak of its depth and tenderness; it is perhaps stranger that its use of older songs has imposed upon so good a critic and hid these characteristics from him. Four parts may be discerned, of which the first (vv. 1-4) mainly describes the psalmist's peril; the second (vv. 5-9), his deliverance; the third glances back to his alarm and thence draws reasons for his vow of praise (vv. 10-14); and the fourth bases the same vow on the remembrance of Jehovah's having loosed his bonds.

The early verses of Psalm xviii. obviously colour the psalmist's description of his distress. That psalm begins with an expression of love to Jehovah, which is echoed here, though a different word is employed. "I love" stands in ver. 1 without an object, just as "I will call" does in ver. 2, and "I believed" and "I spoke" in ver. 10. Probably "Thee" has fallen out, which would be the more easy, as the next word begins with the letter which stands for it in Hebrew. Cheyne follows Graetz in the conjectural adoption of the same beginning as in ver. 10, "I am confident." This change necessitates translating the following "for" as "that," whereas it is plainly to be taken, like the "for" at the beginning of ver. 2, as **causal**. Ver. 3 is moulded on Psalm xviii. 5, with a modification of the metaphors by the unusual expression "the narrows of Sheol." The word rendered *narrows* may be employed simply as=distress or straits, but it is allowable to take it as picturing that gloomy realm as a confined gorge, like the throat of a pass, from which the psalmist could find no escape. He is like a creature caught in the toils of the hunter Death. The stern rocks of a dark defile have all but closed upon him, but, like a man from the bottom of a pit, he can send out one cry before the earth falls in and buries him. He cried to Jehovah, and the rocks flung his voice heavenwards. Sorrow is meant to drive to God. When cries become prayers, they are not in vain. The revealed character of Jehovah is the ground of a desperate man's hope. His own Name is a plea which Jehovah will certainly honour. Many words are needless when peril is sore and the suppliant is sure of God. To name Him and to cry for deliverance are enough. "I beseech Thee" represents a particle which is used frequently in this psalm, and by some peculiarities in its use here indicates a late date.

The psalmist does not pause to say definitely that he was delivered, but breaks into the celebration of the Name on which he had called, and from which the certainty of an answer followed. Since Jehovah is gracious, righteous (as strictly adhering to the conditions He has laid down), and merciful (as condescending in love to lowly and imperfect men), there can be no doubt how He will deal with trustful suppliants. The psalmist turns for a moment from his own experience to sum himself in the great thought of the Name, and thereby to come into touch with all who share

his faith. The cry for help is wrung out by personal need, but the answer received brings into fellowship with a great multitude. Jehovah's character leads up in ver 6. to a broad truth as to His acts, for it ensures that He cannot but care for the "simple," whose simplicity lays them open to assailants, and whose single-hearted adhesion to God appeals unfailingly to His heart. Happy the man who, like the psalmist, can give confirmation from his own experience to the broad truths of God's protection to ingenuous and guileless souls! Each individual may, if he will, thus narrow to his own use the widest promises, and put "I" and "me" wherever God has put "whosoever." If he does he will be able to turn his own experience into universal maxims, and encourage others to put "whosoever" where his grateful heart has put "I" and "me."

The deliverance, which is thus the direct result of the Divine character, and which extends to all the simple, and therefore included the psalmist, leads to calm repose. The singer does not say so in cold words, but beautifully wooes his "soul," his sensitive nature, which had trembled with fear in death's net, to come back to its rest. The word is in the plural, which may be only another indication of late date, but is more worthily understood as expressing the completeness of the repose, which in its fulness is only found in God, and is made the more deep by contrast with previous "agitation."

Vv. 8, 9, are quoted from Psalm lvi. 13 with slight variations, the most significant of which is the change of "light" into "lands." It is noticeable that the Divine deliverance is thus described as surpassing the psalmist's petition. He asked, "Deliver my soul." Bare escape was all that he craved, but he received, not only the deliverance of his soul from death, but, over and above, his tears were wiped away by a loving hand, his feet stayed by a strong arm. God over-answers trustful cries, and does not give the minimum consistent with safety, but the maximum of which we are capable. What shall a grateful heart do with such benefits? "I will walk before Jehovah in the lands of the living," joyously and unconstrainedly (for so the form of the word "walk" implies), as ever conscious of that presence which brings blessedness and requires holiness. The paths appointed may carry the traveller far, but into whatever lands he goes, he will have the same glad heart within to urge his feet and the same loving eye above to beam guidance on him.

The third part (vv. 10-14) recurs to the psalmist's mood in his trouble, and bases on the retrospect of that and of God's mercy the vow of praise. Ver. 10 may be variously understood. The "speaking" may be taken as referring to the preceding expressions of trust or thanksgivings for deliverance. The sentiment would then be that the psalmist was confident that he should one day thus speak. So Cheyne; or the rendering may be "I believed in that I spake thus"—i. e., that he spake those trustful words of ver. 9 was the result of sheer faith (so Kay). The thing spoken may also be the expressions which follow, and this seems to yield the most satisfactory meaning. "Even when I said, I am afflicted and men fail me, I had not lost my faith." He is re-calling the agitation which shook him, but feels that, through it all, there was an unshaken centre of rest in God. The presence of doubt and fear does not prove the absence of trust. There may live a spark of it, though almost buried below masses of cold un-

belief. What he said was the complaint that he was greatly afflicted, and the bitter wail that all men deceive or disappoint. He said so in his agitation (Psalm xxxi. 22). But even in recognising the folly of trusting in men, he was in some measure trusting God, and the trust, though tremulous, was rewarded.

Again he hurries on to sing the issues of deliverance, without waiting to describe it. That little dialogue of the devout soul with itself (vv. 12, 13) goes very deep. It is an illuminative word as to God's character, an emancipating word as to the true notion of service to Him, a guiding word as to common life. For it declares that men honour God most by taking His gifts with recognition of the Giver, and that the return which He in His love seeks is only our thankful reception of His mercy. A giver who desires but these results is surely Love. A religion which consists first in accepting God's gift and then in praising by lip and life Him who gives banishes the religion of fear, of barter, of unwelcome restrictions and commands. It is the exact opposite of the slavery which says, "Thou art an austere man, reaping where thou didst not sow." It is the religion of which the initial act is faith, and the continual activity, the appropriation of God's spiritual gifts. In daily life there would be less despondency and weakening regrets over vanished blessings, if men were more careful to take and enjoy thankfully all that God gives. But many of us have no eyes for other blessings, because some one blessing is withdrawn or denied. If we treasured all that is given, we should be richer than most of us are.

In ver. 14 the particle of beseeching is added to "before," a singular form of expression which seems to imply desire that the psalmist may come into the temple with his vows. He may have been thinking of the "sacrificial meal in connection with the peace-offerings." In any case, blessings received in solitude should impel to public gratitude. God delivers His suppliants that they may magnify Him before men.

The last part (vv. 15-19) repeats the refrain of ver. 14, but with a different setting. Here the singer generalises his own experience, and finds increase of joy in the thought of the multitude who dwell safe under the same protection. The more usual form of expression for the idea in ver. 15 is "their blood is precious" (Psalm lxxii. 14). The meaning is that the death of God's saints is no trivial thing in God's eyes, to be lightly permitted. (Compare the contrasted thought, xlii. 12.) Then, on the basis of that general truth, is built ver. 16, which begins singularly with the same beseeching word which has already occurred in vv. 4 and 14. Here it is not followed by an expressed petition, but is a yearning of desire for continued or fuller manifestation of God's favour. The largest gifts, most fully accepted and most thankfully recognised, still leave room for longing which is not pain, because it is conscious of tender relations with God that guarantee its fulfilment. "I am Thy servant." Therefore the longing which has no words needs none. "Thou hast loosed my bonds." His thoughts go back to "the cords of death" (ver. 3), which had held him so tightly. God's hand has slackened them, and, by freeing him from that bondage, has bound him more closely than before to himself. "Being made free from sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness." So, in the full blessedness of received deliverance, the grateful heart offers itself to God, as moved by His mercies to become a living sacri-

fice, and calls on the Name of Jehovah, in its hour of thankful surrender, as it had called on that Name in its time of deep distress. Once more the lonely suppliant, who had waded such deep waters without companion but Jehovah, seeks to feel himself one of the glad multitude in the courts of the house of Jehovah, and to blend his single voice in the shout of a nation's praise. We suffer and struggle for the most part alone. Grief is a hermit, but Joy is sociable; and thankfulness desires listeners to its praise. The perfect song is the chorus of a great "multitude which no man can number."

PSALM CXVII.

- 1 Praise Jehovah, all nations,
Laud Him, all peoples.
 - 2 For great is His lovingkindness over us,
And the troth of Jehovah endures for ever.
- Hallelujah.

THIS shortest of the psalms is not a fragment, though some MSS. attach it to the preceding and some to the following psalm. It contains large "riches in a narrow room," and its very brevity gives force to it. Paul laid his finger on its special significance, when he quoted it in proof that God meant His salvation to be for the whole race. Jewish narrowness was an after-growth and a corruption. The historical limitations of God's manifestation to a special nation were means to its universal diffusion. The fire was gathered in a grate, that it might warm the whole house. All men have a share in what God does for Israel. His grace was intended to fructify through it to all. The consciousness of being the special recipients of Jehovah's mercy was saved from abuse, by being united with the consciousness of being endowed with blessing that they might diffuse blessing.

Nor is the psalmist's thought of what Israel's experience proclaimed concerning God's character less noteworthy. As often, lovingkindness is united with troth or faithfulness as twin stars which shine out in all God's dealings with His people. That lovingkindness is "mighty over us"—the word used for *being mighty* has the sense of *prevailing*, and so "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The permanence of the Divine Lovingkindness is guaranteed by God's Troth, by which the fulfilment of every promise and the prolongation of every mercy are sealed to men. These two fair messengers have appeared in yet fairer form than the psalmist knew, and the world has to praise Jehovah for a world-wide gift, first bestowed on and rejected by a degenerate Israel, which thought that it owned the inheritance, and so lost it.

PSALM CXVIII.

- 1 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 2 O let Israel say,
That His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 3 O let the house of Aaron say,
That His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 4 O let those who fear Jah say,
That His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 5 Out of the strait place I called on Jah,
Jah answered me [by bringing me out] into an open place.

- 6 Jehovah is for me, I will not fear,
What can man do to me?
- 7 Jehovah is for me, as my helper,
And I shall gaze on my haters.
- 8 Better is it to take refuge in Jehovah
Than to trust in man.
- 9 Better is it to take refuge in Jehovah
Than to trust in princes.
- 10 All nations beset me round about;
In the name of Jehovah will I cut them down.
- 11 They have beset me round about, yea, round
about beset me;
In the name of Jehovah will I cut them down.
- 12 They beset me round about like bees,
They were extinguished like a thorn fire;
In the name of Jehovah will I cut them down.
- 13 Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall,
But Jehovah helped me.
- 14 Jah is my strength and song,
And He is become my salvation.
- 15 The sound of shrill shouts of joy and salvation
is [heard] in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of Jehovah does prowess.
- 16 The right hand of Jehovah is exalted,
The right hand of Jehovah does prowess.
- 17 I shall not die, but live,
And I tell forth the works of Jah.
- 18 Jah has chastened me sore,
But to death He has not given me up.
- 19 Open ye to me the gates of righteousness,
I will go in by them, I will thank Jah.
- 20 This is the gate of Jehovah:
The righteous may go in by it.
- 21 I will thank Thee, for Thou hast answered me,
And art become my salvation.
- 22 The stone [which] the builders rejected
Is become the head [stone] of the corner.
- 23 From Jehovah did this come to pass,
It is wonderful in our eyes.
- 24 This is the day [which] Jehovah has made,
Let us leap for joy and be glad in it.
- 25 O, I beseech Thee, Jehovah, save, I beseech;
O, I beseech Thee, Jehovah, give prosperity.
- 26 Blessed be he that comes in the name of Jehovah;
We bless you from the house of Jehovah.
- 27 Jehovah is God, and He has given us light;
Order the bough-bearing procession,—
To the horns of the altar!
- 28 My God art Thou, and I will thank Thee,
My God, I will exalt Thee.
- 29 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.

THIS is unmistakably a psalm for use in the Temple worship, and probably meant to be sung antiphonally, on some day of national rejoicing (ver. 24). A general concurrence of opinion points to the period of the Restoration from Babylon as its date, as in the case of many psalms in this Book V., but different events connected with that restoration have been selected. The psalm implies the completion of the Temple, and therefore shuts out any point prior to that. Delitzsch fixes on the dedication of the Temple as the occasion; but the view is still more probable which

supposes that it was sung on the great celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, recorded in Neh. viii. 14-18. In later times ver. 25 was the festal cry raised while the altar of burnt-offering was solemnly compassed, once on each of the first six days of the Feast of Tabernacles, and seven times on the seventh. This seventh day was called the "Great Hosanna; and not only the prayers at the Feast of Tabernacles, but even the branches of osiers (including the myrtles), which are bound to the palm branch (*Lulab*), were called Hosannas" (Delitzsch). The allusions in the psalm fit the circumstances of the time in question. Stier, Perowne, and Baethgen concur in preferring this date: the last-named critic, who is very slow to recognise indications of specific dates, speaks with unwonted decisiveness, when he writes, "I believe that I can say with certainty, Psalm cxviii. was sung for the first time at the Feast of Tabernacles in the year 444 B. C." Cheyne follows his usual guides in pointing to the purification and reconstruction of the Temple by Judas Maccabæus as "fully adequate to explain alike the tone and the expressions." He is "the terrible hero," to whose character the refrain, "In the name of Jehovah I will cut them down," corresponds. But the allusions in the psalm are quite as appropriate to any other times of national jubilation and yet of danger, such as that of the Restoration, and Judas the Maccabee had no monopoly of the warrior trust which flames in that refrain.

Apparently the psalm falls into two halves, of which the former (vv. 1-16) seems to have been sung as a processional hymn while approaching the sanctuary, and the latter (vv. 17-29), partly at the Temple gates, partly by a chorus of priests within, and partly by the procession when it had entered. Every reader recognises traces of antiphonal singing; but it is difficult to separate the parts with certainty. A clue may possibly be found by noting that verses marked by the occurrence of "I," "me," and "my" are mingled with others more impersonal. The personified nation is clearly the speaker of the former class of verses, which tells a connected story of distress, deliverance, and grateful triumph; while the other less personal verses generalise the experience of the first speaker, and sustain substantially the part of the chorus in a Greek play. In the first part of the psalm we may suppose that a part of the procession sang the one and another portion the other series; while in the second part (vv. 17-29) the more personal verses were sung by the whole *cortège* arrived at the Temple, and the more generalised other part was taken by a chorus of priests or Levites within the sanctuary. This distribution of verses is occasionally uncertain, but on the whole is clear, and aids the understanding of the psalm.

First rings out from the full choir the summons to praise, which peculiarly belonged to the period of the Restoration (Ezra iii. 11; Psalms cvi. 1, cvii. 1). As in Psalm cxv., three classes are called on: the whole house of Israel, the priests, and "those who fear Jehovah"—*i. e.*, aliens who have taken refuge beneath the wings of Israel's God. The threefold designation expresses the thrill of joy in the recovery of national life; the high estimate of the priesthood as the only remaining God-appointed order, now that the monarchy was swept away; and the growing desire to draw the nations into the community of God's people.

Then, with ver. 5, the single voice begins. His experience, now to be told, is the reason for the

praise called for in the previous verses. It is the familiar sequence reiterated in many a psalm and many a life,—distress, or "a strait place" (Psalm cxvi. 3), a cry to Jehovah, His answer by enlargement, and a consequent triumphant confidence, which has warrant in the past for believing that no hand can hurt him whom Jehovah's hand helps. Many a man passes through the psalmist's experience without thereby achieving the psalmist's settled faith and power to despise threatening calamities. We fail both in recounting clearly to ourselves our deliverances and in drawing assurance from them for the future. Ver. 5 *b* is a pregnant construction. He "answered me in [or, into] an open place"—*i. e.*, by bringing me into it. The contrast of a narrow gorge and a wide plain picturesquely expresses past restraints and present freedom of movement. Ver. 6 is taken from Psalm lvi. 9, 11; and ver. 7 is influenced by Psalm liv. 4, and reproduces the peculiar expression occurring there, "Jehovah is among my helpers,"—on which compare remarks on that passage.

Vv. 8, 9, are impersonal, and generalise the experience of the preceding verses. They ring out loud, like a trumpet, and are the more intense for reiteration. Israel was but a feeble handful. Its very existence seemed to depend on the caprice of the protecting kings who had permitted its return. It had had bitter experience of the unreliableness of a monarch's whim. Now, with superb reliance, which was felt by the psalmist to be the true lesson of the immediate past, it peals out its choral confidence in Jehovah with a "heroism of faith which may well put us to the blush." These verses surpass the preceding in that they avow that faith in Jehovah makes men independent of human helpers, while the former verses declared that it makes superior to mortal foes. Fear of and confidence in man are both removed by trust in God. But it is perhaps harder to be weaned from the confidence than to rise above the fear.

The individual experience is resumed in vv. 10-14. The energetic reduplications strengthen the impression of multiplied attacks, corresponding with the facts of the Restoration period. The same impression is accentuated by the use in ver. 11 *a* of two forms of the same verb, and in ver. 12 *a* by the metaphor of a swarm of angry bees (Deut. i. 44). Numerous, venomous, swift, and hard to strike at as the enemies were, buzzing and stinging around, they were but insects after all, and a strong hand could crush them. The psalmist does not merely look to God to interpose for him, as in vv. 6, 7, but expects that God will give him power to conquer by the use of his own strengthened arm. We are not only objects of Divine protection, but organs of Divine power. Trusting in the revealed character of Jehovah, we shall find conquering energy flowing into us from Him, and the most fierce assaults will die out as quickly as a fire of dry thorn twigs, which sinks into ashes the sooner the more it crackles and blazes. Then the psalmist individualises the multitude of foes, just as the collective Israel is individualised, and brings assailants and assailed down to two antagonists, engaged in desperate duel. But a third Person intervenes. "Jehovah helped me" (ver. 13); as in old legends, the gods on their immortal steeds charged at the head of the hosts of their worshippers. Thus delivered, the singer breaks into the ancient strain, which had gone up on the shores of the sullen sea that rolled over Pharaoh's army, and is still true after centuries have intervened: "Jah is my strength

and song, and He is become my salvation." Miriam sang it, the restored exiles sang it, tried and trustful men in every age have sung and will sing it, till there are no more foes; and then, by the shores of the sea of glass mingled with fire, the calm victors will lift again the undying "song of Moses and of the Lamb."

Vv. 15, 16, are probably best taken as sung by the chorus, generalising and giving voice to the emotions excited by the preceding verses. The same reiteration which characterised vv. 8, 9, reappears here. Two broad truths are built on the individual voice's autobiography: namely, that trust in Jehovah and consequent conformity to His law are never in vain, but always issue in joy; and that God's power, when put forth, always conquers. "The tents of the righteous" may possibly allude to the "tabernacles", constructed for the feast, at which the song was probably sung.

Vv. 17-19 belong to the individual voice. The procession has reached the Temple. Deeper thoughts than before now mark the retrospect of past trial and deliverance. Both are recognised to be from Jehovah. It is He who has corrected, severely indeed, but still "in measure, not to bring to nothing, but to make capable and recipient of fuller life." The enemy thrust sore, with intent to make Israel fall; but God's strokes are meant to make us stand the firmer. It is beautiful that all thought of human foes has faded away, and God only is seen in all the sorrow. But His chastisement has wider purposes than individual blessedness. It is intended to make its objects the heralds of His name to the world. Israel is beginning to lay to heart more earnestly its world-wide vocation to "tell forth the works of Jehovah." The imperative obligation of all who have received delivering help from Him is to become missionaries of His name. The reed is cut and pared thin and bored with hot irons, and the very pith of it extracted, that it may be fit to be put to the owner's lips, and give out music from his breath. Thus conscious of its vocation and eager to render its due of sacrifice and praise, Israel asks that "the gates of righteousness" may be opened for the entrance of the long procession. The Temple doors are so called, because Righteousness is the condition of entrance (Isa. xxvi. 2: compare Psalm xxiv.).

Ver. 20 may belong to the individual voice, but is perhaps better taken as the answer from within the Temple, of the priests or Levites who guarded the closed doors, and who now proclaim what must be the character of those who would tread the sacred courts. The gate (not as in ver. 19, *gates*) belongs to Jehovah, and therefore access by it is permitted to none but the righteous. That is an everlasting truth. It is possible to translate, "This is the gate to Jehovah"—i. e., by which one comes to His presence; and that rendering would bring out still more emphatically the necessity of the condition laid down: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

The condition is supposed to be met; for in ver. 21 the individual voice again breaks into thanksgiving, for being allowed once more to stand in the house of Jehovah. "Thou hast answered me": the psalmist had already sung that Jah had answered him (ver. 5). "And art become my salvation": he had already hailed Jehovah as having become such (ver. 14). God's deliverance is not complete till full communion with Him is enjoyed. Dwelling in His house is the crown of all His blessings. We are set free from enemies,

from sins and fears and struggles, that we may abide for ever with Him, and only then do we realise the full sweetness of His redeeming hand, when we stand in His presence and commune evermore with Him.

Vv. 22, 23, 24, probably belong to the priestly chorus. They set forth the great truth made manifest by restored Israel's presence in the rebuilt Temple. The metaphor is suggested by the incidents connected with the rebuilding. The "stone" is obviously Israel, weak, contemptible, but now once more laid as the very foundation stone of God's house in the world. The broad truth taught by its history is that God lays as the basis of His building—i. e., uses for the execution of His purposes—that which the wisdom of man despises and tosses aside. There had been abundant faint-heartedness among even the restored exiles. The nations around had scoffed at these "feeble Jews," and the scoffs had not been without echoes in Israel itself. Chiefly, the men of position and influence, who ought to have strengthened drooping courage, had been infected with the tendency to rate low the nation's power, and to think that their enterprise was destined to disaster. But now the Temple is built, and the worshippers stand in it. What does that teach but that all has been God's doing? So wonderful is it, so far beyond expectation, that the very objects of such marvellous intervention are amazed to find themselves where they stand. So rooted is our tendency to unbelief that, when God does what He has sworn to do, we are apt to be astonished with a wonder which reveals the greatness of our past incredulity. No man who trusts God ought to be surprised at God's answers to trust.

The general truth contained here is that of Paul's great saying, "God hath chosen the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the things that are strong." It is the constant law, not because God chooses unfit instruments, but because the world's estimates of fitness are false, and the qualities which it admires are irrelevant with regard to His designs, while the requisite qualities are of another sort altogether. Therefore, it is a law which finds its highest exemplification in the foundation for God's true temple, other than which can no man lay. "Israel is not only a figure of Christ—there is an organic unity between Him and them. Whatever, therefore, is true of Israel in a lower sense is true in its highest sense of Christ. If Israel is the rejected stone made the head of the corner, this is far truer of Him who was indeed rejected of men, but chosen of God and precious, the corner stone of the one great living temple of the redeemed" (Perowne).

Ver. 24 is best regarded as the continuation of the choral praise in vv. 22, 23. "The day" is that of the festival now in process, the joyful culmination of God's manifold deliverances. It is a day in which joy is duty, and no heart has a right to be too heavy to leap for gladness. Private sorrows enough many of the jubilant worshippers no doubt had, but the sight of the Stone laid as the head of the corner should bring joy even to such. If sadness was ingratitude and almost treason then, what sorrow should now be so dense that it cannot be pierced by the Light which lighteth every man? The joy of the Lord should float, like oil on stormy waves, above our troublous sorrows, and smooth their tossing.

Again the single voice rises, but not now in thanksgiving, as might have been expected, but in plaintive tones of earnest imploring (ver. 25).

Standing in the sanctuary, Israel is conscious of its perils, its need, its weakness, and so with pathetic reiteration of the particle of entreaty, which occurs twice in each clause of the verse, cries for continued deliverance from continuing evils, and for prosperity in the course opening before it. The "day" in which unmingled gladness inspires our songs has not yet dawned, fair as are the many days which Jehovah has made. In the earthly house of the Lord thanksgiving must ever pass into petition. An unending day comes, when there will be nothing to dread, and no need for the sadder notes occasioned by felt weakness and feared foes.

Vv. 26, 27, come from the chorus of priests, who welcome the entering procession, and solemnly pronounce on them the benediction of Jehovah. They answer, in His name, the prayer of ver. 25, and bless the single leader of the procession and the multitudes following. The use of ver. 26 *a* and of the "Hosanna" (an attempted transliteration of the Hebrew "Save, I beseech") from ver. 25 at Christ's entrance into Jerusalem probably shows that the psalm was regarded as Messianic. It is so, in virtue of the relation already referred to between Israel and Christ. He "cometh in the name of Jehovah" in a deeper sense than did Israel, the servant of the Lord.

Ver. 27 *a* recalls the priestly benediction (Numb. vi. 25), and thankfully recognises its ample fulfilment in Israel's history, and especially in the dawning of new prosperity now. Ver. 27 *b, c*, is difficult. Obviously it should be a summons to worship, as thanksgiving for the benefits acknowledged in *a*. But what is the act of worship intended is hard to say. The rendering "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar," has against it the usual meaning of the word rendered *sacrifice*, which is rather *festival*, and the fact that the last words of the verse cannot possibly be translated "to the horns," etc., but must mean "as far as" or "even up to the horns," etc. There must therefore be a good deal supplied in the sentence; and commentators differ as to how to fill the gap. Delitzsch supposes that "the number of the sacrificial animals is to be so great that the whole space of the courts of the priests becomes full of them, and the binding of them has therefore to take place even up to the horns of the altar." Perowne takes the expression to be a pregnant one for "till [the victim] is sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the horns of the altar." So Hupfeld, following Chaldee and some Jewish interpreters. Others regard the supposed ellipsis as too great to be natural, and take an entirely different view. The word rendered *sacrifice* in the former explanation is taken to mean a *procession* round the altar, which is etymologically justifiable, and is supported by the known custom of making such a circuit during the Feast of Tabernacles. For "cords" this explanation would read *branches* or *boughs*, which is also warranted. But what does "binding a procession with boughs" mean? Various answers are given. Cheyne supposes that the branches borne in the hands of the members of the procession were in some unknown way used to bind or link them together before they left the temple. Baethgen takes "with boughs" as="bearing boughs," with which he supposes that the bearers touched the altar horns, for the purpose of transferring to themselves the holiness concentrated there. Either explanation has difficulties,—the former in requiring an unusual sense for the word rendered *sac-*

rifice; the latter in finding a suitable meaning for that translated *bind*. In either *c* is but loosely connected with *b*, and is best understood as an exclamation. The verb rendered *bind* is used in 1 Kings xx. 14, 2 Chron. xiii. 3, in a sense which fits well with "procession" here—i. e., that of marshalling an army for battle. If this meaning is adopted, *b* will be the summons to order the bough-bearing procession, and *c* a call to march onwards, so as to encircle the altar. This meaning of the obscure verse may be provisionally accepted, while owning that our ignorance of the ceremonial referred to prevents complete understanding of the words.

Once more Miriam's song supplies ancient language of praise for recent mercies, and the personified Israel compasses the altar with thanksgiving (ver. 28). Then the whole multitude, both of those who had come up to the Temple and of those who had welcomed them there, join in the chorus of praise with which the psalm begins and ends, and which was so often pealed forth in those days of early joy for the new manifestations of that Lovingkindness which endures through all days, both those of past evil and those of future hoped-for good.

PSALM CXIX.

It is lost labour to seek for close continuity or progress in this psalm. One thought pervades it—the surpassing excellence of the Law; and the beauty and power of the psalm lie in the unwearied reiteration of that single idea. There is music in its monotony, which is subtly varied. Its verses are like the ripples on a sunny sea, alike and impressive in their continual march, and yet each catching the light with a difference, and breaking on the shore in a tone of its own. A few elements are combined into these hundred and seventy-six gnomic sentences. One or other of the usual synonyms for the Law—viz., word, saying, statutes, commandments, testimonies, judgments—occurs in every verse, except vv. 122 and 132. The prayers "Teach me, revive me, preserve me—according to Thy word," and the vows "I will keep, observe, meditate on, delight in—Thy law," are frequently repeated. There are but few pieces in the psalmist's kaleidoscope, but they fall into many shapes of beauty; and though all his sentences are moulded after the same general plan, the variety within such narrow limits is equally a witness of poetic power which turns the fetters of the acrostic structure into helps, and of devout heartfelt love for the Law of Jehovah.

The psalm is probably of late date; but its allusions to the singer's circumstances, whether they are taken as autobiographical or as having reference to the nation, are too vague to be used as clues to the period of its composition. An early poet is not likely to have adopted such an elaborate acrostic plan, and the praises of the Law naturally suggest a time when it was familiar in an approximately complete form. It may be that the rulers referred to in vv. 23, 46, were foreigners, but the expression is too general to draw a conclusion from. It may be that the double-minded (ver. 113), who err from God's statutes (ver. 118), and forsake His law (ver. 53), are Israelites who have yielded to the temptations to apostatise, which came with the early Greek period, to which Baethgen, Cheyne, and others would assign the psalm. But these expressions, too, are of so gen-

eral a nature that they do not give clear testimony of date.

§ 8

- 1 Blessed the perfect in [their] way,
Who walk in the law of Jehovah!
- 2 Blessed they who keep His testimonies,
That seek Him with the whole heart,
- 3 [Who] also have done no iniquity,
[But] have walked in His ways!
- 4 Thou hast commanded Thy precepts,
That we should observe them diligently.
- 5 O that my ways were established
To observe Thy statutes!
- 6 Then shall I not be ashamed,
When I give heed to all Thy commandments.
- 7 I will thank Thee with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Thy righteous judgments.
- 8 Thy statutes will I observe;
Forsake me not utterly.

The first three verses are closely connected. They set forth in general terms the elements of the blessedness of the doers of the Law. To walk in it—*i. e.*, to order the active life in conformity with its requirements—ensures perfectness. To keep God's testimonies is at once the consequence and the proof of seeking Him with whole-hearted devotion and determination. To walk in His ways is the preservative from evil-doing. And such men cannot but be blessed with a deep sacred blessedness, which puts to shame coarse and turbulent delights, and feeds its pure fires from God Himself. Whether these verses are taken as exclamation or declaration, they lead up naturally to ver. 4, which reverently gazes upon the loving act of God in the revelation of His will in the Law, and bethinks itself of the obligations bound on us by that act. It is of God's mercy that He has commanded, and His words are meant to sway our wills, since He has broken the awful silence, not merely to instruct us, but to command; and nothing short of practical obedience will discharge our duties to his revelation. So the psalmist betakes himself to prayer, that he may be helped to realise the purpose of God in giving the Law. His contemplation of the blessedness of obedience and of the Divine act of declaring His will moves him to longing, and his consciousness of weakness and wavering makes the longing into prayer that his wavering may be consolidated into fixity of purpose and continuity of obedience. When a man's ways are established to observe, they will be established by observing, God's statutes. For nothing can put to the blush one whose eye is directed to these.

“Whatever record leap to light,
He never shall be shamed.”

Nor will he cherish hopes that fail, nor desires that, when accomplished, are bitter of taste. To give heed to the commandments is the condition of learning them and recognising how righteous they are; and such learning makes the learner's heart righteous like them, and causes it to run over in thankfulness for the boon of knowledge of God's will. By all these thoughts the psalmist is brought to his fixed resolve in ver. 8, to do what God meant him to do when He gave the Law; and what the singer had just longed that he might be able to do—namely, to observe the statutes. But in his resolve he remembers his weakness, and therefore he glides into prayer for that Presence without which resolves are transient and abortive.

- 9 Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his path?
By taking heed, according to Thy word.
- 10 With my whole heart have I sought Thee,
Let me not wander from Thy commandments.
- 11 In my heart have I hid Thy saying,
That I may not sin against Thee.
- 12 Blessed art Thou, Jehovah,
Teach me Thy statutes.
- 13 With my lips have I rehearsed
All the judgments of Thy mouth.
- 14 In the way of Thy testimonies have I rejoiced,
As over all [kinds of] wealth.
- 15 In Thy precepts will I meditate,
And will have respect to all Thy paths.
- 16 In Thy statutes will I delight myself,
I will not forget Thy word.

The inference drawn from ver. 9, that the psalmist was a young man, is precarious. The language would be quite as appropriate to an aged teacher desirous of guiding impetuous youth to sober self-control. While some verses favour the hypothesis of the author's youth (ver. 141, and perhaps vv. 99, 100), the tone of the whole, its rich experience and comprehensive grasp of the manifold relations of the Law to life, imply maturity of years and length of meditation. The psalm is the ripe fruit of a life which is surely past its spring. But it is extremely questionable whether these apparently personal traits are really so. Much rather is the poet “thinking . . . of the individuals of different ages and spiritual attainments who may use his works” (Cheyne, *in loc.*).

The word rendered “By taking heed” has already occurred in vv. 4, 5 (“observe”). The careful study of the Word must be accompanied with as careful study of self. The object observed there was the Law; here, it is the man himself. Study God's law, says the psalmist, and study Thyself in its light; so shall youthful impulses be bridled, and the life's path be kept pure. That does not sound so like a young man's thought as an old man's maxim, in which are crystallised many experiences.

The rest of the section intermingles petitions, professions, and vows, and is purely personal. The psalmist claims that he is one of those whom he has pronounced blessed, inasmuch as he *has* “sought” God with his “whole heart.” Such longing is no mere idle aspiration, but must be manifested in obedience, as ver. 2 has declared. If a man longs for God, he will best find Him by doing His will. But no heart-desire is so rooted as to guarantee that it shall not die, nor is past obedience a certain pledge of a like future. Wherefore the psalmist prays, not in reliance on his past, but in dread that he may falsify it, “Let me not wander.” He had not only sought God in his heart, but had there hid God's law, as its best treasure, and as an inward power controlling and stimulating. Evil cannot flow from a heart in which God's law is lodged. That is the tree which sweetens the waters of the fountain. But the cry “Teach me Thy statutes” would be but faltering, if the singer could not rise above himself, and take heart by gazing upon God, whose own great character is the guarantee that He will not leave a seeking soul in ignorance.

Professions and vows now take the place of petitions. “From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” and the word hid in it will certainly not be concealed. It is buried deep, that it

may grow high. It is hidden, that it may come abroad. Therefore ver. 13 tells of bold utterance, which is as incumbent on men as obedient deeds.

A sane estimate of earthly good will put it decisively below the knowledge of God and of His will. Lives which despise what the world calls riches, because they are smitten with the desire of any sort of wisdom, are ever nobler than those which keep the low levels. And highest of all is the life which gives effect to its conviction that man's true treasure is to know God's mind and will. To rejoice in His testimonies is to have wealth that cannot be lost and pleasures that cannot wither. That glad estimate will surely lead to happy meditation on them, by which their worth shall be disclosed and their sweep made plain. The miser loves to tell his gold; the saint, to ponder his wealth in God. The same double direction of the mind, already noted, reappears in ver. 15, where quiet meditation on God's statutes is associated with attention to the ways which are called His, as being pointed out by, and pleasing to, Him, but are ours, as being walked in by us. Inward delight in, and practical remembrance of, the Law are vowed in ver. 16, which covers the whole field of contemplative and active life.

§ 2

- 17 Deal bountifully with Thy servant, that I may live,
So will I observe Thy word.
- 18 Open my eyes, that I may behold
Wonders out of Thy law.
- 19 A stranger am I on the earth,
Hide not from me Thy commandments.
- 20 Crushed is my soul with longing
Towards Thy judgments at all times.
- 21 Thou hast rebuked the proud [so that they are]
cursed,
Those who wander from Thy commandments.
- 22 Remove from me reproach and shame,
For Thy testimonies do I keep.
- 23 Princes also sit and speak with one another
against me,
Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes.
- 24 Also Thy testimonies are my delight,
The men of my counsel.

In ver. 17 the psalmist desires continued life, mainly because it affords the opportunity of continued obedience. He will "observe Thy Word," not only in token of gratitude, but because to him life is precious chiefly because in its activities he can serve God. Such a reason for wishing to live may easily change to a willingness to die, as it did with Paul, who had learned that a better obedience was possible when he had passed through the dark gates, and therefore could say, "To die is gain." Vv. 18, 19, are connected in so far as the former desires subjective illumination and the latter objective revelation. Opened eyes are useless, if commandments are hidden; and the disclosure of the latter is in vain unless there are eyes to see them. Two great truths lie in the former petition—namely, that scales cover our spiritual vision which only God can take away, and that His revelation has in its depths truths and treasures which can only be discerned by His help. The cognate petition in ver. 19 is based upon the pathetic thought that man is a stranger on earth, and therefore needs what will take away his sense of homelessness and unrest. All other creatures are

adapted to their environments, but he has a consciousness that he is an exile here, a haunting, stinging sense, which vaguely feels after repose in his native land. "Thy commandments" can still it. To know God's will, with knowledge which is acceptance and love, gives rest, and makes every place a mansion in the Father's house.

There may possibly be a connection between vv. 20 and 21—the terrible fate of those who wander from the commandments, as described in the latter verse, being the motive for the psalmist's longing expressed in the former. The "judgments" for which he longed, with a yearning which seemed to bruise his soul, are not, as might be supposed, God's judicial acts, but the word is a synonym for "commandments," as throughout the psalm.

The last three verses of the section appear to be linked together. They relate to the persecutions of the psalmist for his faithfulness to God's law. In ver. 22 he prays that reproach and shame, which wrapped him like a covering, may be lifted from him; and his plea in ver. 22 *b* declares that he lay under these because he was true to God's statutes. In ver. 23 we see the source of the reproach and shame, in the conclave of men in authority, whether foreign princes or Jewish rulers, who were busy slandering him and plotting his ruin; while, with wonderful beauty, the contrasted picture in *b* shows the object of that busy talk, sitting silently absorbed in meditation on the higher things of God's statutes. As long as a man can do that, he has a magic circle drawn round him, across which fears and cares cannot step. Ver. 24 heightens the impression of the psalmist's rest. "Also Thy testimonies are my delight"—not only the subjects of his meditation, but bringing inward sweetness, though earth is in arms against him; and not only are they his delights, but "the men of his counsel," in whom he, solitary as he is, finds companionship that arms him with resources against that knot of whispering enemies.

§ 7

- 25 My soul cleaves to the dust,
Revive me according to Thy word.
- 26 My ways I told and Thou answeredst me,
Teach me Thy statutes.
- 27 The way of Thy precepts make me understand,
And I will meditate on Thy wonders.
- 28 My soul weeps itself away for grief,
Raise me up according to Thy word.
- 29 The way of lying remove from me,
And [with] Thy law be gracious to me.
- 30 The way of faithfulness I have chosen,
Thy judgments have I set [before me].
- 31 I have cleaved to Thy testimonies;
Jehovah, put me not to shame.
- 32 The way of Thy commandments will I run,
For Thou dost enlarge my heart.

The exigencies of the acrostic plan are very obvious in this section, five of the verses of which begin with "way" or "ways," and two of the remaining three with "cleaves." The variety secured under such conditions is remarkable. The psalmist's soul cleaves to the dust—i. e., is bowed in mourning (cf. xlv. 25); but still, though thus darkened by sorrow and weeping itself away for grief (ver. 28), it cleaves to "Thy testimonies" (ver. 31). Happy in their sorrow are they who, by reason of the force which bows their sensitive nature to the dust, cling the more closely in their true selves to the declared will of God! Their

sorrow appeals to God's heart, and is blessed if it dictates the prayer for His quickening (ver. 25). Their cleaving to His law warrants their hope that He will not put them to shame.

The first pair of verses in which "way" is the acrostic word (vv. 26, 27) sets "my ways" over against "the way of Thy precepts." The psalmist has made God his confidant, telling Him all his life's story, and has found continual answers, in gifts of mercy and inward whispers. He asks, therefore, for further illumination, which will be in accordance with these past mutual communications. Tell God thy ways and He will teach thee His statutes. The franker our confession, the more fervent our longing for fuller knowledge of His will. "The way of Thy precepts" is the practical life according to these, the ideal which shall rebuke and transform "my ways." The singer's crooked course is spread before God, and he longs to see clearly the straight path of duty, on which he vows that he will meditate, and find wonders in the revelation of God's will. Many a sunbeam is wasted for want of intent eyes. The prayer for understanding is vain without the vow of pondering. The next pair of "way-" verses (vv. 29, 30) contrasts ways of "lying" and of "faithfulness"—*i. e.*, sinful life which is false towards God and erroneous in its foundation maxims, and life which is true in practice to Him and to man's obligations. The psalmist prays that the former may be put far from him; for he feels that it is only too near, and his unhelped feet too ready to enter on it. He recognises the inmost meaning of the Law as an outcome of God's favour. It is not harsh, but glowing with love, God's best gift. The prayer in ver. 29 has the psalmist's deliberate choice in ver. 30 as its plea. That choice does not lift him above the need of God's help, and it gives him a claim thereon. Our wills may seem fixed, but the gap between choice and practice is wide, and our feebleness will not bridge it, unless He strengthens us. So the last verse of this section humbly vows to transform meditation and choice into action, and to "run the way of God's commandments," in thanksgiving for the joy with which, while the psalmist prays, he feels that his heart swells.

§ 7

- 33 Teach me, Jehovah, the way of Thy statutes,
And I will keep it to the end.
- 34 Make me understand so that I may keep
Thy law,
And I will observe it with [my] whole heart.
- 35 Make me walk in the path of Thy com-
mandments,
For in it I delight.
- 36 Incline my heart to Thy testimonies,
And not to plunder.
- 37 Make my eyes go aside from beholding
vanity,
In Thy ways revive me.
- 38 Confirm to Thy servant Thy promise,
Which tends to Thy fear.
- 39 Make my reproach pass away which I dread,
For thy judgments are good.
- 40 Behold, I have longed for Thy precepts,
In Thy righteousness revive me.

Vv. 33 and 34 are substantially identical in their prayer for enlightenment and their vow of obedience. Both are based on the conviction that outward revelation is incomplete without in-

ward illumination. Both recognise the necessary priority of enlightened reason as condition of obedient action, and such action as the test and issue of enlightenment. Both vow that knowledge shall not remain barren. They differ in that the former verse pledges the psalmist to obedience unlimited in time and the latter to obedience without reservation. But even in uttering his vow the singer remembers his need of God's help to keep it, and turns it, in ver. 35, into petition, which he very significantly grounds on his heart's delight in the Law. Warm as that delight may be, circumstances and flesh will cool it, and it is ever a struggle to translate desires into deeds. Therefore we need the sweet constraint of our Divine Helper to make us walk in the right way. Again, in ver. 36 the preceding profession is caught up and modulated into petition. "Incline my heart" stands to "In it I delight," just as "Make me walk" does to "I will observe it." Our purest joys in God and in His Will depend on Him for their permanence and increase. Our hearts are apt to spill their affection on the earth, even while we would bear the cup filled to God. And one chief rival of "Thy testimonies" is worldly gain, from which there must be forcible detachment in order to, and as accompaniment of, attachment to God. All possessions which come between us and Him are "plunder," unjust gain.

The heart is often led astray by the eyes. The senses bring fuel to its unholy flames. Therefore, the next petition (ver. 37) asks that they may be made, as it were, to pass on one side of tempting things, which are branded as being "vanity," without real substance or worth, however they may glitter and solicit the gaze. To look longingly on earth's good makes us torpid in God's ways; and to be earnest in the latter makes us dead to the former. There is but one real life for men, the life of union with God and of obedience to His commandments. Therefore, the singer prays to be revived in God's ways. Experience of God's faithfulness to His plighted word will do much to deliver from earth's glamour, as ver. 38 implies. The second clause is elliptical in Hebrew, and is now usually taken as above, meaning that God's promise fulfilled leads men to reverence Him. But the rendering "who is [devoted] to Thy fear" is tenable and perhaps better. The "reproach" in ver. 39 is probably that which would fall on the psalmist if he were unfaithful to God's law. This interpretation gives the best meaning to ver. 39 *b*, which would then contain the reason for his desire to keep the "judgments"—*i. e.*, the commandments, not the judicial acts—which he feels to be good. The section ends with a constantly recurring strain. God's righteousness, His strict discharge of all obligations, guarantees that no longing, turned to Him, can be left unsatisfied. The languishing desire will be changed into fuller joy of more vigorous life. The necessary precursor of deeper draughts from the Fountain of Life is thirst for it, which faithfully turns aside from earth's sparkling but drugged potions.

§ 8

- 41 And let Thy lovingkindnesses come to me,
Jehovah,
Thy salvation according to Thy promise.
- 42 And I shall have a word to answer him that
reproaches me,
For I trust in Thy word.

- 43 And pluck not the word of truth out of my mouth utterly,
For I have waited for Thy judgments.
44 And I would observe Thy law continually,
For ever and aye.
45 And I would walk at liberty,
For I have sought Thy precepts.
46 And I would speak of Thy testimonies before kings,
And not be ashamed.
47 And I will delight myself in Thy judgments,
Which I love.
48 And I will lift up my palms to Thy commandments [which I love],
And meditate on Thy statutes.

There are practically no Hebrew words beginning with the letter required as the initial in this section, except the copula "and." Each verse begins with it, and it is best to retain it in translation, so as to reproduce in some measure the original impression of uniformity. The verses are aggregated rather than linked. "And" sometimes introduces a consequence, as probably in ver. 42, and sometimes is superfluous in regard to the sense. A predominant reference to the duty of bearing witness to the Truth runs through the section. The prayer in ver. 41 for the visits of God's lovingkindnesses which, in their sum, make salvation, and are guaranteed by His word of promise, is urged on the ground that, by experience of these, the psalmist will have his answer ready for all carpers who scoff at him and his patient faith. Such a prayer is entirely accordant with the hypothesis that the speaker is the collective Israel, but not less so with the supposition that he is an individual. "Whereas I was blind, now I see" is an argument that silences sarcasm. Ver. 43 carries on the thought of witnessing and asks that "the word of truth"—i. e., the Law considered as disclosure of truth rather than of duty—may not be snatched from the witness's mouth, as it would be if God's promised lovingkindnesses failed him. The condition of free utterance is rich experience. If prayers had gone up in vain from the psalmist's lips, no glad proclamation could come from them.

The verbs at the beginnings of vv. 44-46 are best taken as optatives, expressing what the psalmist would fain do, and, to some extent, has done. There is no true religion without that longing for unbroken conformity with the manifest will of God. Whoever makes that his deepest desire, and seeks after God's precepts, will "walk at liberty," or *at large*, for restraints that are loved are not bonds, and freedom consists not in doing as I would, but in willing to do as I ought. Strong in such emancipation from the hindrances of one's own passions, and triumphant over external circumstances which may mould, but not dominate, a God-obeying life, the psalmist would fain open his mouth unabashed before rulers. The "kings" spoken of in ver. 46 may be foreign rulers, possibly the representatives of the Persian monarch, or later alien sovereigns, or the expression may be quite general and the speaker be a private person, who feels his courage rising as he enters into the liberty of perfect submission.

Vv. 47, 48, are general expressions of delight in the Law. Lifting the hands towards the commandments seems to be a figure for reverent regard, or longing, as one wistfully stretches them out towards some dear person or thing that one

would fain draw closer. The phrase "which I love" in ver. 48 overweights the clause, and is probably a scribe's erroneous repetition of 47 *b*.

§ 1

- 49 Remember the word to Thy servant,
On which Thou hast caused me to hope.
50 This is my comfort in my affliction,
That Thy promise has given me life.
51 The proud have derided me exceedingly,
From Thy law I have not declined.
52 I have remembered Thy judgments [which are] from of old, Jehovah,
And I have comforted myself.
53 Fiery anger has seized me because of the wicked,
Who forsake Thy law.
54 Thy statutes have been songs for me,
In my house of sojourning.
55 I remembered Thy name in the night, Jehovah,
And observed Thy law.
56 This good has been mine,
That I have kept Thy precepts.

This section has only one verse of petition, the others being mainly avowals of adherence to the Law in the face of various trials. The single petition (ver. 49) pleads the relation of servant, as giving a claim on the great Lord of the household, and adduces God's having encouraged hope as imposing on Him an obligation to fulfil it. Expectations fairly deduced from His word are prophets of their own realisation. In ver. 50, "This" points to the fact stated in *b*—namely, that the Word had already proved its power in the past by quickening the psalmist to new courage and hope—and declares that that remembered experience solaces his present sorrow. A heart that has been revived by life-giving contact with the Word has a hidden warmth beneath the deepest snows, and cleaves the more to that Word.

Vv. 51-53 describe the attitude of the lover of the Law in presence of the ungodly. He is as unmoved by shafts of ridicule as by the heavier artillery of slander and plots (ver. 23). To be laughed out of one's faith is even worse than to be terrified out of it. The lesson is not needless in a day when adherence and obedience to the Word are smiled at in so many quarters as indicating inferior intelligence. The psalmist held fast by it, and while laughter, with more than a trace of bitterness, rung about him, threw himself back on God's ancient and enduring words, which made the scoffs sound very hollow and transient (ver. 52). Righteous indignation, too, rises in a devout soul at sight of men's departure from God's law (ver. 53). The word rendered "fiery anger" is found in xi. 6 ("a wind of *burning*"), and is best taken as above, though some would render *horror*. The wrath was not unmingled with compassion (ver. 136), and, whilst it is clearly an emotion belonging to the Old Testament rather than to the Christian type of devotion, it should be present, in softened form, in our feelings towards evil.

In ver. 54 the psalmist turns from gainsayers. He strikes again the note of ver. 19, calling earth his place of transitory abode, or, as we might say, his inn. The brevity of life would be crushing, if God had not spoken to us. Since He has, the pilgrims can march "with songs and everlasting

joy upon their heads," and all about their moving camp the sound of song may echo. To its lovers, God's law is not "harsh and crabbed. . . . but musical as is Apollo's lute." This psalm is one of the poet's songs. Even those of us who are not singers can and should meditate on God's law, till its melodious beauty is disclosed and its commandments, that sometimes sound stern, set themselves to rhythm and harmony. As God's words took bitterness out of the thought of mortality, so His name remembered in the night brought light into darkness, whether physical or other. We often lose our memory of God and our hold of His hand when in sorrow, and grief sometimes thinks that it has a dispensation from obedience. So we shall be the better for remembering the psalmist's experience, and should, like him, cling to the Name in the dark, and then we shall have light enough to "observe Thy law." Ver. 56 looks back on the mingled life of good and evil, of which some of the sorrows have just been touched, and speaks deep contentment with its portion. Whatever else is withheld or withdrawn, that lot is blessed which has been helped by God to keep His precepts, and they are happy and wise who deliberately prefer that good to all beside.

§ 7

- 57 My portion is Jehovah,
I have said that I would observe Thy words.
58 I have sought Thy favour with my whole
heart,
Be merciful to me according to Thy promise.
59 I have thought on my ways,
And turned my feet to Thy testimonies.
60 I hastened and delayed not
To observe Thy commandments.
61 The cords of the wicked have enwrapped me,
Thy law have I not forgotten.
62 At midnight will I rise to thank Thee,
Because of Thy righteous judgments.
63 A companion am I of all who fear Thee,
And of those who observe Thy precepts.
64 Of Thy lovingkindness, Jehovah, the earth
is full,
Thy statutes do Thou teach me.

Ver. 57 goes to the root of the matter in setting forth the resolve of obedience as the **result of the consciousness of possessing God.** He who feels, in his own happy heart, that Jehovah is his portion will be moved thereby to vow to keep His words. This psalmist had learned the evangelical lesson that he did not win God by keeping the Law, but that he was moved to keep the Law because he had won God; and he had also learned the companion truth, that the way to retain that possession is obedience.

Ver. 58 corresponds in some measure to ver. 57, but the order of clauses is inverted, *a* stating the psalmist's prayer, as ver. 57 *b* did his resolve, and *b* building on his cry the hope that God would be truly his portion and bestow His favour on him. But the true ground of our hope is not our most whole-hearted prayers, but God's promise. The following five verses change from the key of petition into that of profession of obedience to, and delight in, the Law. The fruit of wise consideration of one's conduct is willing acceptance of God's law as His witness of what is right for us. The only "ways" which sober consideration will approve are those marked out in mercy by Him, and meditation on conduct is worthless if it does not

issue in turning our feet into these. Without such meditation we shall wander on bye-ways and lose ourselves. Want of thought ruins men (ver. 59). But such turning of our feet to the right road has many foes, and chief among them is lingering delay. Therefore resolve must never be let cool, but be swiftly carried into action (ver. 60). The world is full of snares, and they lie thick round our feet whenever these are turned towards God's ways. The only means of keeping clear of them is to fix heart and mind on God's law. Then we shall be able to pick our steps among traps and pits (ver. 61). Physical weariness limits obedience, and needful sleep relaxes nervous tension, so that many a strenuous worker and noble aspirant falls beneath his daylight self in wakeful night seasons. Blessed they who in the night see visions of God and meditate on His law, not on earthly vanities or aims (ver. 62). Society has its temptations as solitude has. The man whose heart has fed in secret on God and His law will naturally gravitate towards like-minded people. Our relation to God and His uttered will should determine our affinities with men, and it is a bad sign when natural impulses do not draw us to those who fear God. Two men who have that fear in common are liker each other in their deepest selves, however different they may be in other respects, than either of them is to those to whom he is likeliest in surface characteristics and unlike in this supreme trait (ver. 63). One pathetic petition closes the section. In ver. 19 the psalmist had based his prayer for illumination on his being a stranger on earth; here he grounds it on the plenitude of God's lovingkindness, which floods the world. It is the same plea in another form. All creatures bask in the light of God's love, which falls on each in a manner appropriate to its needs. Man's supreme need is the knowledge of God's statutes; therefore, the same all-embracing Mercy, which cares for these happy, careless creatures, will not be implored in vain, to satisfy his nobler and more pressing want. All beings get their respective boons unasked; but the pre-eminence of ours is partly seen in this, that it cannot be given without the co-operation of our desire. It will be given wherever that condition is fulfilled (ver. 64).

§ 8

- 65 Good hast Thou done with Thy servant,
Jehovah, according to Thy word.
66 Good judgment and knowledge teach me,
For I have believed Thy commandments.
67 Before I was afflicted, I went astray,
But now have I observed Thy saying.
68 Good art Thou and doing good,
Teach me Thy statutes.
69 The proud have trumped up a lie against
me,
I, I with all [my] heart will keep Thy pre-
cepts.
70 Gross as fat is their heart,
I, I delight in Thy law.
71 Good for me was it that I was afflicted,
That I might learn Thy statutes.
72 Good for me is the law of Thy mouth,
Above thousands of gold and silver.

The restrictions of the acrostic structure are very obvious in this section, five of the eight verses of which begin with "Good." The epithet is first applied in ver. 65 to the whole of God's dealings with the psalmist. To the devout soul

all life is of one piece, and its submission and faith exercise transmuting power on pains and sorrows, so that the psalmist can say—

“Let one more attest,
I have lived, seen God’s hand through a lifetime,
And all was for best.”

The epithet is next applied (ver. 66) to the perception (lit. taste) or faculty of discernment of good and evil, for which the psalmist prays, basing his petition on his belief of God’s word. Swift, sure, and delicate apprehension of right and wrong comes from such belief. The heart in which it reigns is sensitive as a goldsmith’s scales or a thermometer which visibly sinks when a cloud passes before the sun. The instincts of faith work surely and rapidly. The settled judgment that life had been good includes apparent evil (ver. 67), which is real evil in so far as it pains, but is, in a deeper view, good, inasmuch as it scourges a wandering heart back to true obedience and therefore to well-being. The words of ver. 67 are specially appropriate as the utterance of the Israel purified from idolatrous tendencies by captivity, but may also be the expression of individual experience. The epithet is next applied to God Himself (ver. 68). How steadfast a gaze into the depths of the Divine nature and over the broad field of the Divine activity is in that short, all-including clause, containing but three words in the Hebrew, “Good art Thou and doing good”! The prayer built on it is the one which continually recurs in this psalm, and is reached by many paths. Every view of man’s condition, whether it is bright or dark, and every thought of God, bring the psalmist to the same desire. Here God’s character and beneficence, widespread and continual, prompt to the prayer, both because the knowledge of His will is our highest good, and because a good God cannot but wish His servants to be like Himself, in loving righteousness and hating iniquity.

Vv. 69 and 70 are a pair, setting forth the antithesis, frequent in the psalm, between evil men’s conduct to the psalmist and his tranquil contemplation of, and delight in, God’s precepts. False slanders buzz about him, but he cleaves to God’s Law, and is conscious of innocence. Men are dull and insensible, as if their hearts were water-proofed with a layer of grease, through which no gentle rain from heaven could steal; but the psalmist is all the more led to open his heart to the gracious influences of that law, because others close theirs. If a bad man is not made worse by surrounding evil, he is made better by it.

Just as in vv. 65 and 68 the same thought of God’s goodness is expressed, ver. 71 repeats the thought of ver. 67, with a slight deepening. There the beneficent influence of sorrow was simply declared as a fact; here it is thankfully accepted, with full submission and consent of the will. “Good for me” means not only good in fact, but *in my estimate*. The repetition of the phrase at the beginning of the next verse throws light on its meaning in ver. 71. The singer thinks that he has two real goods, pre-eminent among the uniform sequence of such, and these are, first, his sorrows, which he reckons to be blessings, because they have helped him to a firmer grasp of the other, the real good for every man, the Law which is sacred and venerable, because it has come from the very lips of Deity. That is our true wealth. Happy they whose estimate of it corres-

ponds to its real worth, and who have learned, by affliction or anyhow, that material riches are dross, compared with its solid preciousness!

§

- 73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me,
Give me understanding that I may learn Thy commandments.
- 74 Let those who fear Thee see me and rejoice,
For I have waited for Thy word.
- 75 I know, Jehovah, that Thy judgments are
in righteousness,
And that [in] faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me.
- 76 Oh let Thy lovingkindness be [sent] to
comfort me,
According to Thy promise to Thy servant.
- 77 Let Thy compassions come to me that I may
live,
For Thy law is my delight.
- 78 Let the proud be shamed, for they have
lyingly dealt perversely with me;
I, I meditate on Thy precepts.
- 79 Let those who fear Thee turn to me,
And they shall know Thy testimonies.
- 80 Let my heart be sound in Thy statutes,
That I be not shamed.

Prayer for illumination is confined to the first and last verses of this section, the rest of which is mainly occupied with petitions for gracious providences, based upon the grounds of the psalmist’s love of the Law, and of the encouragement to others to trust, derivable from his experience. Ver. 73 puts forcibly the thought that man is evidently an incomplete fragment, unless the gift of understanding is infused into his material frame. God has begun by shaping it, and therefore is pledged to go on to bestow spiritual discernment, when His creature asks it. But that prayer will only be answered if the suppliant intends to use the gift for its right purpose of learning God’s statutes. Ver. 74 prays that the psalmist may be a witness that hope in His word is never vain, and so that his deliverances may be occasions of widespread gladness. God’s honour is involved in answering His servant’s trust. Vv. 75-77 are linked together. “Judgments” (ver. 75) seem to mean here providential acts, not, as generally in this Psalm, the Law. The acknowledgment of the justice and faithfulness which send sorrows precedes the two verses of petition for “loving-kindness” and “compassions.” Sorrows still sting and burn, though recognised as sent in love, and the tried heart yearns for these other messengers to come from God to sustain and soothe. God’s promise and the psalmist’s delight in God’s law are the double ground of the twin petitions. Then follow three verses which are discernibly connected, as expressing desires in regard to “the proud,” the devout, and the psalmist himself. He prays that the first may be shamed—i. e., that their deceitful or causeless hostility may be balked—and, as in several other verses, contrasts his own peaceful absorption in the Law with their machinations. He repeats the prayer of ver. 74 with a slight difference, asking that his deliverance may draw attention to him, and that others may, from contemplating his security, come to know the worth of God’s testimonies. In ver. 79 *b* the text reads “they shall know” (as the result of observing the psalmist), which the Hebrew margin needlessly alters into “those who know.” For himself he prays that his heart may

be sound, or thoroughly devoted to keep the law, and then he is sure that nothing shall ever put him to shame. "Who is he who will harm you, if ye be zealous for that which is good?"

§ 3

- 81 My soul has pined for Thy salvation,
For Thy word have I waited.
82 My eyes have pined for Thy promise,
Saying, When wilt Thou comfort me?
83 For I am become like a wine-skin in the
smoke;
Thy statutes have I not forgotten.
84 How many are the days of Thy servant?
When wilt Thou execute judgment on my
persecutors?
85 The proud have digged pits for me,
—They who are not according to Thy law.
86 All Thy commandments are faithfulness,
Lyingly they persecute me, help Thou me.
87 They had all but made an end of me on
earth,
But I, I have not forgotten Thy precepts.
88 According to Thy lovingkindness revive
me,
And I will observe the testimonies of Thy
mouth.

This section has more than usual continuity. The psalmist is persecuted, and in these eight verses pours out his heart to God. Taken as a whole, they make a lovely picture of patient endurance and submissive longing. Intense and protracted yearning for deliverance has wasted his very soul, but has not merged in impatience or unbelief, for he has "waited for Thy word." His eyes have ached with straining for the signs of approaching comfort, the coming of which he has not doubted, but the delay of which has tried his faith. This longing has been quickened by troubles, which have wrapped him round like pungent smoke-wreaths eddying among the rafters, where disused wine-skins hang and get blackened and wrinkled. So has it been with him, but, through all, he has kept hold of God's statutes. So he plaintively reminds God of the brevity of his life, which has so short a tale of days that judgment on his persecutors must be swift, if it is to be of use. Vv. 85-87 describe the busy hostility of his foes. It is truculently contrary to God's law, and therefore, as is implied, worthy of God's counter-working. Ver. 85 *b* is best taken as a further description of the "proud," which is spread before God as a reason for His judicial action. The antithesis in ver. 86, between the "faithfulness" of the Law and the "lying" persecutors, is the ground of the prayer, "Help Thou me." Even in extremest peril, when he was all but made away with, the psalmist still clung to God's precepts (ver. 87), and therefore he is heartened to pray for reviving, and to vow that then, bound by new chains of gratitude, he will, more than ever, observe God's testimonies. The measure of the new wine poured into the shrivelled wine-skin is nothing less than the measureless lovingkindness of God; and nothing but experience of His benefits melts to obedience.

§ 4

- 89 For ever, Jehovah,
Thy word is set fast in the heavens.
90 To generation after generation lasts Thy faith-
fulness.
Thou hast established the earth, and it stands
firm.

- 91 According to Thy ordinances they stand firm
to-day,
For all [things] are Thy servants.
92 Unless Thy law had been my delight,
Then had I perished in my affliction.
93 Never will I forget Thy precepts,
For with them Thou hast revived me.
94 To Thee do I belong, save me,
For Thy precepts have I sought.
95 For me have the wicked waited to destroy me,
Thy testimonies will I consider.
96 To all perfection have I seen a limit,
Thy commandment is exceeding broad.

The stability of nature witnesses to the steadfastness of the Word which sustains it. The Universe began and continues, because God puts forth His will. The heavens with their pure depths would collapse, and all their stars would flicker into darkness, if that uttered Will did not echo through their overwhelming spaces. The solid earth would not be solid, but for God's power immanent in it. Heaven and earth are thus His servants. Ver. 91 *a* may possibly picture them as standing waiting "for Thine ordinances," but the indefinite preposition is probably better regarded as equivalent to *In accordance with*. The psalmist has reached the grand conceptions of the universal reign of God's law, and of the continuous forth-putting of God's will as the sustaining energy of all things. He seeks to link himself to that great band of God's servants, to be in harmony with stars and storms, with earth and ocean, as their fellow-servant; but yet he feels that his relation to God's law is closer than theirs, for he can delight in that which they unconsciously obey. Such delight in God's uttered will changes affliction from a foe, threatening life, to a friend, ministering strength (ver. 92). Nor does that Law when loved only avert destruction; it also increases vital power (ver. 93) and re-invigorates the better self. There is a sense in which the law *can* give life (Gal. iii. 21), but it must be welcomed and enshrined in the heart, in order to do so. The frequently recurring prayer for "salvation" has a double plea in ver. 94. The soul that has yielded itself to God in joyful obedience thereby establishes a claim on Him. He cannot but protect His own possession. Ownership has its obligations, which He recognises. The second plea is drawn from the psalmist's seeking after God's precepts, without which seeking there would be no reality in his profession of being God's. To seek them is the sure way to find both them and salvation (ver. 94). Whom God saves, enemies will vainly try to destroy, and, while they lurk in waiting to spring on the psalmist, his eyes are directed, not towards them, but to God's testimonies. To give heed to these is the sure way to escape snares (ver. 95). Lifelong experience has taught the psalmist that there is a flaw in every human excellence, a limit soon reached and never passed to all that is noblest in man; but high above all achievements, and stretching beyond present vision, is the fair ideal bodied forth in the Law. Since it is God's commandment, it will not always be an unreached ideal, but may be indefinitely approximated to; and to contemplate it will be joy, when we learn that it is prophecy because it is commandment.

§ 5

- 97 How I love Thy law!
All the day is it my meditation.

- 98 Wiser than my enemies do Thy commandments make me,
For they are mine for ever.
99 More than all my teachers am I prudent,
For Thy testimonies are my meditation.
100 More than the aged do I understand,
For Thy precepts have I kept.
101 From every evil path have I held back my feet,
That I might observe Thy word.
102 From Thy judgments have I not departed,
For Thou, Thou hast instructed me.
103 How sweet are Thy promises to my palate,
More than honey to my mouth!
104 By Thy precepts I have understanding,
Therefore I hate every path of falsehood.

One thought pervades this section, that the Law is the fountain of sweetest wisdom. The rapture of love with which it opens is sustained throughout. The psalmist knows that he has not merely more wisdom of the same sort as his enemies, his teachers, and the aged have, but wisdom of a better kind. His foes were wise in craft, and his teachers drew their instructions from earthly springs, and the elders had learned that bitter, worldly wisdom, which has been disillusioned of youth's unsuspectingness and dreams, without being thereby led to grasp that which is no illusion. But a heart which simply keeps to the Law reaches, in its simplicity, a higher truth than these know, and has instinctive discernment of good and evil. Worldly wisdom is transient. "Whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away," but the wisdom that comes with the commandment is enduring as it (ver. 98). Meditation must be accompanied with practice, in order to make the true wisdom one's own. The depths of the testimonies must be sounded by patient brooding on them, and then the knowledge thus won must be carried into act. To do what we know is the sure way to know it better, and to know more (vv. 99, 100). And that positive obedience has to be accompanied by abstinence from evil ways; for in such a world as this "Thou shalt not" is the necessary preliminary to "Thou shalt." The psalmist has a better teacher than those whom he has outgrown, even God Himself, and His instruction has a graciously constraining power, which keeps its conscious scholars in the right path (ver. 102). These thoughts draw another exclamation from the poet, who feels, as he reflects on his blessings, that the law beloved ceases to be harsh and is delightful as well as healthgiving. It is promise as well as law, for God will help us to be what He commands us to be. They who love the Lawgiver find sweetness in the law (ver. 103). And this is the blessed effect of the wisdom which it gives, that it makes us quick to detect sophistries which tempt into forbidden paths, and fills us with wholesome detestation of these (ver. 104).

§ 2

- 105 A lamp to my foot is Thy word,
And a light to my path.
106 I have sworn, and have fulfilled it,
To observe Thy righteous judgments.
107 I am afflicted exceedingly,
Jehovah, revive me according to Thy word.
108 The free-will offerings of my mouth accept, I
pray Thee, Jehovah,
And teach me Thy judgments.
109 My soul is continually in my hand,
But Thy law I do not forget.

- 110 The wicked have laid a snare for me,
Yet from Thy precepts I do not stray.
111 Thy testimonies have I taken as my heritage
for ever,
For the joy of my heart are they.
112 I have inclined my heart to perform Thy
statutes,
For ever, [to the] end.

A lamp is for night; light shines in the day. The Word is both, to the psalmist. His antithesis may be equivalent to a comprehensive declaration that the Law is light of every sort, or it may intend to lay stress on the varying phases of experience, and turn our thoughts to that Word which will gleam guidance in darkness, and shine, a better sun, on bright hours. The psalmist's choice, not merely the inherent power of the Law, is expressed in ver. 105. He has taken it for his guide, or, as ver. 106 says, has sworn and kept his oath, that he would observe the righteous decisions, which would point to his foot the true path. The affliction bemoaned in ver. 107 is probably the direct result of the conduct professed in ver. 106. The prayer for reviving, which means deliverance from outward evils rather than spiritual quickening, is, therefore, presented with confidence, and based upon the many promises in the Word of help to sufferers for righteousness. Whatever our afflictions, there is ease in telling God of them, and if our desires for His help are "according to Thy word," they will be as willing to accept help to bear as help which removes the sorrow and thus will not be offered unanswered. That cry for reviving is best understood as being "the free-will offerings" which the psalmist prays may be accepted. Happy in their afflictions are they whose chief desire even then is to learn more of God's statutes! They will find that their sorrows are their best teachers. If we wish most to make advances in His school, we shall not complain of the guides to whom He commits us. Continual alarms and dangers tend to foster disregard of Duty, as truly as does the opposite state of unbroken security. A man absorbed in keeping himself alive is apt to think he has no attention to spare for God's law (ver. 109), and one ringed about by traps is apt to take a circuit to avoid them, even at the cost of divergence from the path marked out by God (ver. 110). But, even in such circumstances, the psalmist did what all good men have to do, deliberately chose his portion, and found God's law better than any outward good, as being able to diffuse deep, sacred, and perpetual joy through all his inner nature. The heart thus filled with serene gladness is thereby drawn to perform God's statutes with lifelong persistency, and the heart thus inclined to obedience has tapped the sources of equally enduring joy.

§ 3

- 113 The double-minded I hate,
But Thy law I love.
114 My shelter and my shield art Thou,
For Thy word have I waited.
115 Depart from me, ye evil-doers,
That I may keep the commandments of my
God.
116 Uphold me according to Thy promise that I
may live,
And let me not be ashamed of my hope.
117 Hold me up and I shall be saved,
And have regard to Thy statutes continually.

- 118 Thou makest light of all those who stray from
Thy statutes,
For their deceit is a lie.
119 [Like] dross Thou hast cast aside all the
wicked of the earth,
Therefore I love Thy testimonies.
120 My flesh creeps for fear of Thee,
And of Thy judgments I am afraid.

This section is mainly the expression of firm resolve to cleave to the Law. Continuity may be traced in it, since vv. 113-115 breathe love and determination, which pass in vv. 116, 117, into prayer, in view of the psalmist's weakness and the strength of temptation, while in vv. 118-120 the fate of the despisers of the Law intensifies the psalmist's clinging grasp of awe-struck love. Hatred of "double-minded" who waver between God and idols, and are weak accordingly, rests upon, and in its turn increases, whole-hearted adherence to the Law.

It is a tepid devotion to it which does not strongly recoil from lives that water down its precepts and try to walk on both sides of the way at once. Whoever has taken God for his defence can afford to bide God's time for fulfilment of His promises (ver. 114). And the natural results of such love to, and waiting for, His word are resolved separation from the society of those whose lives are moulded on opposite principles, and the ordering of external relations in accordance with the supreme purpose of keeping the commandments of Him whom love and waiting claim as "my God" (ver. 115). But resolves melt in the fire of temptation, and the psalmist knows life and himself too well to trust himself. So he betakes himself to prayer for God's upholding, without which he cannot live. A hope built on God's promise has a claim on Him, and its being put to shame in disappointment would be dishonour to God (ver. 116). The psalmist knows that his wavering will can only be fixed by God, and that experience of His sustaining hand will make a stronger bond between God and him than anything besides. The consciousness of salvation must precede steadfast regard to the precepts of the God who saves (ver. 117). To stray from the Law is ruin, as is described in vv. 118, 119. They who wander are despised or made light of, "for their deceit is a lie"—i. e., the hopes and plans with which they deceive themselves are false. It is a gnarled way of saying that all godless life is a blunder as well as a sin, and is fed with unrealisable promises. Dross is flung away when the metal is extracted. Slag from a furnace is hopelessly useless, and this psalmist thinks that the wicked of the earth are "thrown as rubbish to the void." He is not contemplating a future life, but God's judgments as manifested here in providence, and his faith is assured that, even here, that process is visible. Therefore, gazing upon the fate of evil-doers, his flesh creeps and every particular hair stands on end (as the word means). His dread is full of love, and love is full of dread. Profoundly are the two emotions yoked together in vv. 119 *b* and 120 *b*, "I love Thy testimonies . . . of Thy judgments I am afraid."

§ 2

- 121 I have done judgment and righteousness,
Thou wilt not leave me to my oppressors.
122 Be surety for Thy servant for good,
Let not the proud oppress me.

- 123 My eyes pine for Thy salvation
And for Thy righteous promise.
124 Deal with Thy servant according to Thy lovingkindness,
And teach me Thy statutes.
125 Thy servant am I; give me understanding,
That I may know Thy testimonies.
126 It is time for Jehovah to work,
They have made void Thy law.
127 Therefore I love Thy commandments
More than gold and more than fine gold.
128 Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts to be
right,
Every false way do I hate.

The thought of evil-doers tinges most of this section. It opens with a triplet of verses, occasioned by their oppressions of the psalmist, and closes with a triplet occasioned by their breaches of the Law. In the former, he is conscious that he has followed the "judgment" or law of God, and hence hopes that he will not be abandoned to his foes. The consciousness and the hope equally need limitation, to correspond with true estimates of ourselves and with facts: for there is no absolute fulfilment of the Law, and good men are often left to be footballs for bad ones. But in its depths the confidence is true. Precisely because he has it, the psalmist prays that it may be vindicated by facts. "Be surety for Thy servant"—a profound image, drawn from legal procedure, in which one man becomes security for another and makes good his deficiencies. Thus God will stand between the hunted man and his foes, undertaking for him. "Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me." How much the fulfilment in Christ has exceeded the desire of the psalmist! "The oppressors' wrong" had lasted long, and the singer's weary eyes had been strained in looking for the help which seemed to tarry (compare ver. 82), and that fainting gaze humbly appeals to God. Will He not end the wistful watching speedily? Vv. 124, 125, are a pair, the psalmist's relation of servant being adduced in both as the ground of his prayer for teaching. But they differ, in that the former verse lays stress on the consonance of such instruction with God's lovingkindness, and the latter, on its congruity with the psalmist's position and character as His servant. God's best gift is the knowledge of His will, which He surely will not withhold from spirits willing to serve, if they only knew how. Vv. 126-128 are closely linked. The psalmist's personal wrongs melt into the wider thought of wickedness which does its little best to make void that sovereign, steadfast law. Delitzsch would render "It is time to work for Jehovah"; and the meaning thus obtained is a worthy one. But that given above is more in accordance with the context. It is bold—and would be audacious if a prayer did not underlie the statement—to undertake to determine when evil has reached such height as to demand God's punitive action. But, however slow we should be to prescribe to Him the when or the how of His intervention, we may learn from the psalmist's emphatic "Therefore," which stand co-ordinately at the beginnings of vv. 127, 128, that the more men make void the Law, the more should God's servants prize it, and the more should they bind its precepts on their moral judgment, and heartily loathe all paths which, specious as they may be, are "paths of falsehood," though all the world may avow that they are true.

§ D

- 129 Wonderful are Thy testimonies,
Therefore my soul keeps them.
130 The opening of Thy words gives light,
It gives understanding to the simple.
131 My mouth did I open wide, and panted,
For I longed for Thy commandments.
132 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
According to the right of those who love Thy
name.
133 Establish my steps by Thy promise,
And let not iniquity lord it over me.
134 Redeem me from the oppression of men,
That I may observe Thy precepts.
135 Cause Thy face to shine upon Thy servant,
And teach me Thy statutes.
136 My eyes run down [in] streamlets of water,
Because men observe not Thy law.

§ E

- 137 Righteous art Thou, Jehovah,
And upright are Thy judgments,
138 In righteousness Thou hast commanded Thy
testimonies,
And in exceeding faithfulness.
139 My zeal has consumed me,
For my adversaries have forgotten Thy words.
140 Well tried by fire is Thy promise,
And Thy servant loves it.
141 Small and despised am I,
Thy precepts have I not forgotten.
142 Thy righteousness is righteousness for ever,
And Thy law is truth.
143 Distress and anguish have found me,
Thy commandments are my delight.
144 Righteousness for ever are Thy testimonies,
Give me understanding that I may live.

Devout souls do not take offence at the depths and difficulties of God's word, but are thereby drawn to intenser contemplation of them. We weary of the Trivial and Obvious. That which tasks and outstrips our powers attracts. But the obscurity must not be arbitrary, but inherent, a clear obscure, like the depths of a pure sea. These wonderful testimonies give light, notwithstanding, or rather because of, their wonderfulness, and it is the simple heart, not the sharpened intellect, that penetrates furthest into them and finds light most surely (ver. 130). Therefore the psalmist longs for God's commandments, like a wild creature panting open-mouthed for water. He puts to shame our indifference. If his longing was not excessive, how defective is ours! Ver. 132, like ver. 122, has no distinct allusion to the Law, though the word rendered in it "right" is that used in the psalm for the Law considered as "judgments." The prayer is a bold one, pleading what is justly due to the lovers of God's name. Kay appropriately quotes "God is not *unrighteous* to forget your work and labour of *love*, which ye have showed towards His *name*" (Heb. vi. 10). One would have expected "Law" instead of "name" in the last word of the verse, and possibly the conception of Law may be, as it were, latent in "name," for the latter does carry in it imperative commandments and plain revelations of duty. God's Name holds the Law in germ. The Law is but the expansion of the meaning of the Name. "Promise" in ver. 133 (lit. saying) must be taken in a widened sense, as including all God's revealed will. The only escape from the tyranny of sin is to have our steps established by God's word, and His help is needed for such establishment. Rebellion against sin's dominion is already victory over it, if the rebel summons God's heavenly reinforcements to his help. It is a high attainment to desire deliverance from men, chiefly in order to observe, unhindered, God's commandments (ver. 134). And it is as high a desire to seek the light of God's face mainly as the means of seeing His will more clearly. The psalmist did not merely wish for outward prosperity or inward cheer and comfort, but that these might contribute to fulfilling his deepest wish of learning better what God would have him to do (ver. 135). The moods of indignation (ver. 53) and of hatred (vv. 104, 113, 128) have given place to softer emotions, as they ever should (ver. 136). Tears and dewy pity should mingle with righteous anger, as when Jesus "looked round about on them with anger, being with the anger grieved at the hardening of their heart" (Mark iii. 5).

The first word suggested to the psalmist under this letter is Righteousness. That august conception was grasped by devout Israelites with a tenacity, and assumed a prominence, in their thoughts, unparalleled elsewhere. It is no mere yielding to the requirements of the acrostic scheme which sets that great word in four of the eight verses of this section (137, 138, 142, 144). Two thoughts are common to them all, that Righteousness has its seat in the bosom of God, and that the Law is a true transcript of that Divine righteousness. These things being so, it follows that the Law is given to men in accordance with the Divine "faithfulness"—i. e., in remembrance and discharge of the obligations which God has undertaken towards them. Nor less certainly does it follow that that Law, which is the "radiation" of God's righteousness, is eternal as its fountal source (vv. 142, 144). The beam must last as long as the sun. No doubt, there are transient elements in the Law which the psalmist loved, but its essence is everlasting, because its origin is God's everlasting Righteousness. So absorbed is he in adoring contemplation of it, that he even forgets to pray for help to keep it, and not till ver. 144 does he ask for understanding that he may live. True life is in the knowledge of the Law by which God is known, as Jesus has taught us that to know the only true God is life eternal. A faint gleam of immortal hope perhaps shines in that prayer, for if the "testimonies" are for ever, and the knowledge of them is life, it cannot be that they shall outlast the soul that knows and lives by them. One more characteristic of God's righteous testimonies is celebrated in ver. 140—namely, that they have stood sharp tests, and, like metal in the furnace, have not been dissolved but brightened by the heat. They have been tested, when the psalmist was afflicted and found them to hold true. The same fire tried him and them, and he does not glorify his own endurance, but the promise which enabled him to stand firm. The remaining verses of the section describe the psalmist's afflictions and clinging to the Law. Ver. 139 recurs to his emotions on seeing men's neglect of it. "Zeal" here takes the place of grief (ver. 136) and of indignation and hatred. Friction against widespread godlessness generates a flame of zeal, as it should always do. "Small and despised" was Israel among the great powers of the ancient world, but he who meditates on the Law is armed against contempt and contented in insignificance (ver. 141). "Distress and anguish" may surround him, but hidden springs of "delight" well up in the heart that cleaves to the Law, like out-

bursts of fresh water rising to the surface of a salt sea (ver. 144).

§ 7

- 145 I have called with my whole heart; answer me, Jehovah;
Thy statutes will I keep.
146 I have called unto Thee, save me,
And I will observe Thy testimonies.
147 I anticipated the morning twilight and cried aloud,
For Thy word I waited.
148 My eyes anticipated the night watches,
That I might meditate on Thy promise.
149 Hear my voice according to Thy lovingkindness,
Jehovah, according to Thy judgments revive me.
150 They draw near who follow after mischief,
From Thy law they are far off.
151 Near art Thou, Jehovah,
And all Thy commandments are truth.
152 Long ago have I known from Thy testimonies,
That Thou hast founded them for ever.

The first two verses are a pair, in which former prayers for deliverance and vows of obedience are recalled and repeated. The tone of supplication prevails through the section. The cries now presented are no new things. The psalmist's habit has been prayer, whole-hearted, continued, and accompanied with the resolve to keep by obedience and to observe with sharpened watchfulness the utterances of God's will. Another pair of verses follows (vv. 147, 148), which recall the singer's wakeful devotion. His voice rose to God ere the dim morning broke, and his heart kept itself in submissive expectance. His eyes saw God's promises shining in the nightly darkness, and making meditation better than sleep. The petitions in ver. 149 may be taken as based upon the preceding pairs. The psalmist's patient continuance gives him ground to expect an answer. But the true ground is God's character, as witnessed by His deeds of lovingkindness and His revelation of His "judgments" in the Law.

Another pair of verses follows (vv. 150, 151), in which the hostile nearness of the psalmist's foes, gathering round him with malignant purpose, is significantly contrasted, both with their remoteness in temper from the character enjoined in the Law, and with the yet closer proximity of the assailed man's defender. He who has God near him, and who realises that His "commandments are truth," can look untrembling on mustering masses of enemies. This singer had learned that before danger threatened. The last verse of the section breathes the same tone of long-continued and habitual acquaintance with God and His Law as the earlier pairs of verses do. The convictions of a lifetime were too deeply rooted to be disturbed by such a passing storm. There is, as it were, a calm smile of triumphant certitude in that "Long ago." Experience teaches that the foundation, laid for trust as well as for conduct in the Law, is too stable to be moved, and that we need not fear to build our all on it. Let us build rock on that rock, and answer God's everlasting testimonies with our unwavering reliance and submission.

§ 8

- 153 See my affliction, and deliver me,
For Thy law do I not forget.

- 154 Plead my plea and redeem me,
Revive me according to Thy promise.
155 Far from the wicked is salvation,
For they seek not Thy statutes.
156 Thy compassions are many, Jehovah,
According to Thy judgments revive me.
157 Many are my pursuers and my adversaries,
From Thy testimonies I have not declined.
158 I beheld the faithless and loathed [them]
Because they observed not Thy promise.
159 See how I love Thy precepts,
Jehovah, according to Thy lovingkindness revive me.
160 The sum of Thy word is truth,
And every one of Thy righteous judgments endures for ever.

The prayer "revive me" occurs thrice in this section. It is not a petition for spiritual quickening so much as for removal of calamities, which restrained free, joyous life. Its repetition accords with other characteristics of this section, which is markedly a cry from a burdened heart. The psalmist is in affliction; he is, as it were, the defendant in a suit, a captive needing a strong avenger (ver. 154), compassed about by a swarm of enemies (ver. 157), forced to endure the sight of the faithless and to recoil from them (ver. 158). His thoughts vibrate between his needs and God's compassions, between his own cleaving to the Law and its grand comprehensiveness and perpetuity. His prayer now is not for fuller knowledge of the Law, but for rescue from his troubles. It is worth while to follow his swift turns of thought, which, in their windings, are shaped by the double sense of need and of Divine fulness. First come two plaintive cries for rescue, based in one case on his adherence to the Law, and in the other on God's promise. Then his eye turns on those who do not, like him, seek God's statutes, and these he pronounces, with solemn depth of insight, to be far from the salvation which he feels is his, because they have no desire to know God's will. That is a pregnant word. Swiftly he turns from these unhappy ones to gaze on the multitude of God's compassions, which hearten him to repeat his prayer for revival, according to God's "judgments"—i. e., His decisions contained in the Law. But, again, his critical position among enemies forces itself into remembrance, and he can only plead that, in spite of them, he has held fast by the Law, and, when compelled to see apostates, has felt no temptation to join them, but a wholesome loathing of all departure from God's word. That loathing was the other side of his love. The more closely we cleave to God's precepts, the more shall we recoil from modes of thought and life which flout them. And then the psalmist looks wistfully up once more and asks that his love may receive what God's lovingkindness emboldens it to look for as its result—namely, the reviving, which he thus once more craves. That love for the Law has led him into the depths of understanding God's Word, and so his lowly petitions swell into the declaration, which he has verified in life, that its sum-total is truth, and a perpetual possession for loving hearts, however ringed round by enemies and "weighed upon by sore distress."

§ 9

- 161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause,
But at Thy words my heart stands in awe.
162 I rejoice over thy promise,
As one that finds great booty.

- 163 Lying I hate and abhor,
Thy law do I love.
164 Seven times a day I praise Thee,
Because of Thy righteous judgments.
165 Great peace have they that love Thy law,
And they have no stumbling block.
166 I have hoped for Thy salvation, Jehovah,
And Thy commandments have I done.
167 My soul has observed Thy testimonies,
And I love them exceedingly.
168 I have observed Thy precepts and Thy testi-
monies,
For all my ways are before Thee.

The tone of this section is in striking contrast with that of the preceding. Here, with the exception of the first clause of the first verse, all is sunny, and the thunder-clouds are hulled down on the horizon. Joy, peace, and hope breathe through the song. Beautifully are reverential awe and exuberant gladness blended as contemporaneous results of listening to God's word. There is rapture in that awe; there is awe in that bounding gladness. To possess that law is better than to win rich booty. The spoils of the conflict, which we wage with our own negligence or disobedience, are our best wealth. The familiar connection between love of the Law and hatred of lives which depart from it, and are therefore lies and built on lies, re-appears, yet not as the ground of prayer for help, but as part of the blessed treasures which the psalmist is recounting. His life is accompanied by music of perpetual praise. Seven times a day—*i. e.*, unceasingly—his glad heart breaks into song, and "the o'ercome of his song" is ever God's righteous judgments. His own experience gives assurance of the universal truth that the love of God's law secures peace, inasmuch as such love brings the heart into contact with absolute good, inasmuch as submission to God's will is always peace, inasmuch as the fountain of unrest is dried up, inasmuch as all outward things are allies of such a heart and serve the soul that serves God. Such love saves from falling over stumbling-blocks, and enables a man "to walk firmly and safely on the clear path of duty." Like the dying Jacob, such a man waits for God's salvation, patiently expecting that each day will bring its own form of help and deliverance, and his waiting is no idle anticipation, but full of strenuous obedience (ver. 166), and of watchful observance, such as the eyes of a servant direct to his master (ver. 167 *a*). Love makes such a man keen to note the slightest indications of God's will, and eager to obey them all (vv. 167 *b*, 168 *a*). All this joyous profession of the psalmist's happy experience he spreads humbly before God, appealing to Him whether it is true. He is not flaunting his self-righteousness in God's face, but gladly recounting to God's honour all the "spoils" that he has found, as he penetrated into the Law and it penetrated into his inmost being.

§ 7

- 169 Let my cry come near before Thy face, Je-
hovah,
According to Thy word give me understand-
ing.
170 Let my supplication come before Thy face,
According to Thy promise deliver me.
171 My lips shall well forth praise,
For Thou teachest me Thy statutes.

- 172 My tongue shall sing of Thy promise,
For all Thy commandments are righteousness.
173 Let Thy hand be [stretched out] to help me,
For Thy precepts have I chosen.
174 I long for Thy salvation, Jehovah,
And Thy law is my delight.
175 Let my soul live and it shall praise Thee,
And let Thy judgments help me
176 I have strayed like a lost sheep, seek Thy
servant.
For Thy commandments do I not forget.

The threads that have run through the psalm are knotted firmly together in this closing section, which falls into four pairs of verses. In the first, the manifold preceding petitions are concentrated into two for understanding and deliverance, the twin needs of man, of which the one covers the whole ground of inward illumination, and the other comprises all good for outward life, while both are in accordance with the large confidence warranted by God's faithful words. Petition passes into praise. The psalmist instinctively obeys the command, "By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known." His lips give forth not only shrill cries of need, but well up songs of thanks; and, while a thousand mercies impel the sparkling flood of praise, the chief of these is God's teaching him His righteous statutes (vv. 171, 172). In the next pair of verses, the emphasis lies, not on the prayer for help so much as on its grounds in the psalmist's deliberate choice of God's precepts, his patient yearning for God's salvation, and his delight in the Law, all of which characteristics have been over and over again professed in the psalm. Here, once more, they are massed together, not in self-righteousness, but as making it incredible that, God being the faithful and merciful God which He is, His hand should hang idle when His servant cries for help (vv. 173, 174). The final pair of verses sets forth the relations of the devout soul with God in their widest and most permanent forms. The true life of the soul must come from Him, the Fountain of Life. A soul thus made to live by communion with, and derivation of life from, God lives to praise, and all its motions are worship. To it the Law is no menace nor unwelcome restriction, but a helper. Life drawn from God, turned to God in continual praise, and invigorated by unfailing helps ministered through His uttered will, is the only life worth living. It is granted to all who ask for it. But a lower, sadder note must ever mingle in our prayers. Aspiration and trust must be intertwined with consciousness of weakness and distrust of one's self. Only those who are ignorant of the steps of the soul's pilgrimage to God can wonder that the psalmist's last thoughts about himself blend confession of wandering like a straying sheep, and profession of not forgetting God's commandments. Both phases of consciousness co-exist in the true servant of God, as, alas! both have grounds in his experience. But our sense of having wandered should ever be accompanied with the tender thought that the lost sheep is a sheep, beloved and sought for by the great Shepherd, in whose search not in our own docile following of His footsteps, lies our firmest hope. The psalmist prayed "Seek Thy servant," for he knew how continually he would be tempted to stray. But we know better than he did how wonderfully the answer has surpassed his petition. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

PSALMS CXX.—CXXXIV.

THESE fifteen psalms form a short psalter within the Psalter, each having the same title (with a slight grammatical variation in Psalm cxxi.). Its meaning is very doubtful. Many of the older authorities understand it to signify "a song of steps," and explain it by a very uncertain tradition that these psalms were sung on fifteen steps leading from the court of the women to that of the men, each on one step. The R. V.'s rendering, "degrees," uses that word in this sense (like the Latin *gradus*). But though undoubtedly the word means steps, there is no sufficient support for the tradition in question; and, as Delitzsch well observes, if this were the meaning of the title, "it would be much more external than any of the other inscriptions to the Psalms."

Another explanation fixes on the literal meaning of the word—*i. e.*, "goings up"—and points to its use in the singular for the Return from Babylon (Ezra vii. 9), as supporting the view that these were psalms sung by the returning exiles. There is much in the group of songs to favour this view; but against it is the fact that Psalms cxxii. and cxxxiv. imply the existence of the Temple, and the fully organised ceremonial worship.

A third solution is that the name refers to the structure of these psalms, which have a "step-like, progressive rhythm." This is Gesenius' explanation, adopted by Delitzsch. But the peculiar structure in question, though very obvious in several of these psalms, is scarcely perceptible in others, and is entirely absent from Psalm cxxxii.

The remaining explanation of the title is the most probable—that the "goings up" were those of the worshippers travelling to Jerusalem for the feasts. This little collection is, then, "The Song Book of the Pilgrims," a designation to which its contents well correspond.

PSALM CXX.

- 1 To Jehovah in my straits I cried,
And He answered me.
- 2 Jehovah, deliver my soul from the lying lip,
From the deceitful tongue.
- 3 What shall He give to thee, and what more shall
He give thee,
Deceitful tongue?
- 4 Arrows of the Mighty, sharpened ones,
With coals of broom.
- 5 Woe is me that I sojourn in Meshech,
[That] I dwell beside the tents of Kedar!
- 6 Long has my soul had her dwelling
With him who hates peace.
- 7 I am—peace; but when I speak,
They are for war.

THE collection of pilgrim songs is appropriately introduced by one expressive of the unrest arising from compulsory association with uncongenial and hostile neighbours. The psalmist laments that his sensitive "soul" has been so long obliged to be a "sojourner" where he has heard nothing but lying and strife. Weary of these, his soul stretches her wings towards a land of rest. His feeling ill at ease amidst present surroundings stings him to take the pilgrim's staff. "In" this singer's "heart are the ways."

The simplicity of this little song scarcely admits of separation into parts; but one may note that an introductory verse is followed by two groups of

three verses each,—the former of which is prayer for deliverance from the "deceitful tongue," and prediction that retribution will fall on it (vv. 2-4); while the latter bemoans the psalmist's uncongenial abode among enemies (vv. 5-7).

The verbs in ver. 1 are most naturally referred to former experiences of the power of prayer, which encourage renewed petition. Devout hearts argue that what Jehovah has done once He will do again. Since His mercy endureth forever, He will not weary of bestowing, nor will former gifts exhaust His stores. Men say, "I have given so often that I can give no more"; God says, "I have given, therefore I will give." The psalmist was not in need of defence against armed foes, but against false tongues. But it is not plain whether these were slanderous, flattering, or untrustworthy in their promises of friendship. The allusions are too general to admit of certainty. At all events, he was surrounded by a choking atmosphere of falsehood, from which he longed to escape into purer air. Some commentators would refer the allusions to the circumstances of the exiles in Babylon; others to the slanders of the Samaritans and others who tried to hinder the rebuilding of the Temple; others think that his own hostile fellow-countrymen are the psalmist's foes. May we not rather hear in his plaint the voice of the devout heart, which ever painfully feels the dissonance between its deep yearnings and the Babel of vain words which fills every place with jangling and deceit? To one who holds converse with God, there is nothing more appalling or more abhorrent than the flood of empty talk which drowns the world. If there was any specific foe in the psalmist's mind, he has not described him so as to enable us to identify him.

Ver. 3 may be taken in several ways, according as "deceitful tongue" is taken as a vocative or as the nominative of the verb "give," and as that verb is taken in a good or a bad sense, and as "thee" is taken to refer to the tongue or to some unnamed person. It is unnecessary to enter here on a discussion of the widely divergent explanations given. They fall principally into two classes. One takes the words "deceitful tongue" as vocative, and regards the question as meaning, "What retribution shall God give to thee, O deceitful tongue?" while the other takes it as asking what the tongue shall give unto an unnamed person designated by "thee." That person is by some considered to be the owner of the tongue, who is asked what profit his falsehood will be to him; while others suppose the "thee" to mean Jehovah, and the question to be like that of Job (x. 3). Baethgen takes this view, and paraphrases, "What increase of Thy riches canst Thou expect therefrom, that Thou dost permit the godless to oppress the righteous?" Grammatically either class of explanation is warranted; and the reader's feeling of which is most appropriate must decide. The present writer inclines to the common interpretation, which takes ver. 3 as addressed to the deceitful tongue, in the sense, "What punishment shall God inflict upon thee?" Ver. 4 is the answer, describing the penal consequences of falsehood, as resembling the crimes which they avenge. Such a tongue is likened to sharp arrows and swords in Psalms lvii. 4, lxiv. 3, etc. The punishment shall be like the crime. For the sentiment compare Psalm cxl. 9, 10. It is not necessary to suppose that the "Mighty" is God, though such a reference gives force to the words. "The tongue which shot piercing arrows is pierced by the sharpened

arrows of an irresistibly strong One; it, which set its neighbour in a fever of anguish, must endure a lasting heat of broom-coals, which consumes it surely" (Delitzsch).

In the group of vv. 5-7, the psalmist bemoans his compulsory association with hostile companions, and longs to "flee away and be at rest." Meshech was the name of barbarous tribes who, in the times of Sargon and Sennacherib inhabited the highlands to the east of Cilicia, and in later days retreated northwards to the neighbourhood of the Black Sea (Sayce, "Higher Criticism and Monuments," p. 130). Kedar was one of the Bedawin tribes of the Arabian desert. The long distance between the localities occupied by these two tribes requires an allegorical explanation of their names. They stand as types of barbarous and truculent foes—as we might say, Samoyeds and Patagonians. The psalmist's plaint struck on Cromwell's heart, and is echoed, with another explanation of its meaning which he had, no doubt, learned from some Puritan minister: "I live, you know where, in Meshech, which they say signifies prolonging; in Kedar, which signifies blackness; yet the Lord forsaketh me not" (Carlyle, "Letters and Speeches," i. 127: London, 1846). The peace-loving psalmist describes himself as stunned by the noise and quarrelsomeness of those around him. "I am—peace" (compare Psalm cix. 4). But his gentlest word is like a spark on tinder. If he but speaks, they fly to their weapons, and are ready without provocation to answer with blows.

So the psalm ends as with a long-drawn sigh. It inverts the usual order of similar psalms, in which the description of need is wont to precede the prayer for deliverance. It thus sets forth most pathetically the sense of discordance between a man and his environment, which urges the soul that feels it to seek a better home. So this is a true pilgrim psalm.

PSALM CXXI.

- 1 I will lift mine eyes to the hills;
Whence cometh my help?
- 2 My help [comes] from Jehovah,
The Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 May He not suffer thy feet to totter,
May thy Keeper not slumber!
- 4 Behold, thy Keeper slumbers not;
Behold, He slumbers not nor sleeps
[Who is] the Keeper of Israel.
- 5 Jehovah is thy Keeper,
Jehovah is thy shade on thy right hand.
- 6 By day the sun shall not smite thee,
Nor the moon by night.
- 7 Jehovah shall keep thee from all evil,
He shall keep thy soul.
- 8 Jehovah shall keep thy going out and thy
coming in,
From now, even for evermore.

How many timid, anxious hearts has this sweet outpouring of quiet trust braced and lifted to its own serene height of conscious safety! This psalmist is so absorbed in the thought of his Keeper that he barely names his dangers. With happy assurance of protection, he says over and over again the one word which is his amulet against foes and fears. Six times in these few verses does the thought recur that Jehovah is the Keeper of Israel or of the single soul. The quiet-

ness that comes of confidence is the singer's strength. Whether he is an exile, looking across the plains of Mesopotamia towards the blue hills, which the eye cannot discern, or a pilgrim catching the first sight of the mountain on which Jehovah sits enshrined, is a question which cannot be decisively answered; but the power and beauty of this little breathing of peaceful trust are but slightly affected by any hypothesis as to the singer's circumstances. Vv. 1 and 2 stand apart from the remainder, in so far as in them the psalmist speaks in the first person, while in the rest of the psalm he is spoken to in the second. But this does not necessarily involve the supposition of an antiphonal song. The two first verses may have been sung by a single voice, and the assurances of the following ones by a chorus or second singer. But it is quite as likely that, as in other psalms, the singer is in vv. 3-8 himself the speaker of the assurances which confirm his own faith.

His first words describe the earnest look of longing. He will lift his eyes from all the coil of troubles and perils to the heights. *Sursum corda* expresses the true ascent which these psalms enjoin and exemplify. If the supposition that the psalmist is an exile on the monotonous levels of Babylon is correct, one feels the pathetic beauty of his wistful gaze across the dreary flats towards the point where he knows that the hills of his father-land rise. To look beyond the low levels where we dwell, to the unseen heights where we have our home, is the condition of all noble living amid these lower ranges of engagement with the Visible and Transient. "Whence comes my help?" is a question which may be only put in order to make the assured answer more emphatic, but may also be an expression of momentary despondency, as the thought of the distance between the gazer and the mountains chills his aspirations. "It is easy to look, but hard to journey thither. How shall I reach that goal? I am weak; the way is long and beset with foes." The loftier the ideal, the more needful, if it is ever to be reached, that our consciousness of its height and of our own feebleness should drive us to recognise our need of help in order to attain it.

Whoever has thus high longings sobered by lowly estimates of self is ready to receive the assurance of Divine aid. That sense of impotence is the precursor of faith. We must distrust ourselves, if we are ever to confide in God. To know that we need His aid is a condition of obtaining it. Bewildered despondency asks, "Whence comes my help?" and scans the low levels in vain. The eye that is lifted to the hills is sure to see Him coming to succour; for that question on the lips of one whose looks are directed thither is a prayer, rather than a question; and the assistance he needs sets out towards him from the throne, like a sunbeam from the sun, as soon as he looks up to the light.

The particle of negation in ver. 3 is not that used in ver. 4, but that which is employed in commands or wishes. The progress from subjective desire in ver. 3, to objective certainty of Divine help as expressed in ver. 4 and the remainder of the psalm, is best exhibited if the verbs in the former verse are translated as expressions of wish—"May He not," etc. Whether the speaker is taken to be the psalmist or another makes little difference to the force of ver. 3, which lays hold in supposition of the truth just uttered in ver. 2, and thereby gains a more assured certainty that it is true, as the following verses go on to declare. It is no drop to a lower mood to pass from as-

sertion of God's help to prayer for it. Rather it is the natural progress of faith. Both clauses of ver. 2 become specially significant if this is a song for pilgrims. Their daily march and their nightly encampment will then be placed under the care of Jehovah, who will hold up their feet unwearied on the road and watch unslumbering over their repose. But such a reference is not necessary. The language is quite general. It covers the whole ground of toil and rest, and prays for strength for the one and quiet security in the other.

The remainder of the psalm expands the one thought of Jehovah the Keeper, with sweet reiteration, and yet comprehensive variation. First, the thought of the last clause of the preceding verse is caught up again. Jehovah is the keeper of the community, over which He watches with unslumbering care. He keeps Israel, so long as Israel keeps His law; for the word so frequently used here is the same as is continually employed for observance of the commandments. He had seemed to slumber while Israel was in exile, and had been prayed to awake, in many a cry from the captives. Now they have learned that He never slumbers: His power is unwearied, and needs no recuperation; His watchfulness is never at fault. But universal as is His care, it does not overlook the single defenceless suppliant. He is "thy Keeper," and will stand at thy right hand, where helpers stand, to shield thee from all dangers. Men lose sight of the individual in the multitude, and the wider their benevolence or beneficence, the less it takes account of units; but God loves all because He loves each, and the aggregate is kept because each member of it is. The light which floods the universe gently illumines every eye. The two conceptions of defence and impartation of power are smelted together in the pregnant phrase of ver. 5 *b*, "thy shade at thy right hand."

The notion of shelter from evils predominates in the remainder of the psalm. It is applied in ver. 6 to possible perils from physical causes: the fierce sunlight beat down on the pilgrim band, and the moon was believed, and apparently with correctness, to shed malignant influences on sleepers. The same antithesis of day and night, work and rest, which is found in ver. 3 appears again here. The promise is widened out in ver. 7 so as to be all-inclusive. "All evil" will be averted from him who has Jehovah for his keeper; therefore, if any so-called Evil comes, he may be sure that it is Good with a veil on. We should apply the assurances of the psalm to the interpretation of life; as well as take them for the antidote of fearful anticipations.

Equally comprehensive is the designation of that which is to be kept. It is "thy soul," the life or personal being. Whatever may be shorn away by the sharp shears of Loss, that will be safe; and if it is, nothing else matters very much. The individual soul is of large account in God's sight: He keeps it as a deposit entrusted to Him by faith. Much may go; but His hand closes round us when we commit ourselves into it, and none is able to pluck us thence.

In the final verse, the psalmist recurs to his favourite antithesis of external toil and repose in the home, the two halves of the pilgrim life for every man; and while thus, in the first clause of the verse, he includes all varieties of circumstance, in the second he looks on into a future of which he does not see the bounds, and triumphs over all possible foes that may lurk in its dim recesses, in the assurance that, however far it may extend, and

whatever strange conditions it may hide, the Keeper will be there, and all will be well. Whether or not he looked to the last "going out," our exodus from earth (Luke ix. 31; 2 Peter i. 15), or to that abundant entrance (2 Peter i. 11) into the true home which crowns the pilgrimage here, we cannot but read into his indefinite words their largest meaning, and rejoice that we have One who "is able to keep that which we have committed to Him against that day."

PSALM CXXII.

- 1 I rejoiced when they said to me,
To the house of Jehovah let us go.
- 2 Standing are our feet
In thy gates, Jerusalem.
- 3 Jerusalem that art built [again]
As a city that is compact together.
- 4 Whither went up the tribes, the tribes of Jah,
—[According to] the precept for Israel—
To give thanks to the name of Jehovah.
- 5 For there were set thrones of judgment,
Thrones for the house of David.
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;
Prosperous be they who love thee!
- 7 Be peace within thy bulwark,
Prosperity within thy palaces.
- 8 Because of my brethren and my companions'
sake
Let me now wish thee peace.
- 9 Because of the house of Jehovah our God
Let me now seek thy good.

THIS is very distinctly a pilgrim psalm. But there is difficulty in determining the singer's precise point of view, arising from the possibility of understanding the phrase in ver. 2, "are standing," as meaning either "are" or "were standing" or "have stood." If it is taken as a present tense, the psalm begins by recalling the joy with which the pilgrims began their march, and in ver. 2 rejoices in reaching the goal. Then, in vv. 3, 4, 5 the psalmist paints the sight of the city which gladdened the gazer's eyes, remembers ancient glories when Jerusalem was the rallying-point for united worship and the seat of the Davidic monarchy, and finally pours out patriotic exhortations to love Jerusalem and prayers for her peace and prosperity. This seems the most natural construing of the psalm. If, on the other hand, ver. 2 refers to a past time, "the poet, now again returning home or actually returned, remembers the whole pilgrimage from its beginning onwards." This is possible; but the warmth of emotion in the exclamation in ver. 3 is more appropriate to the moment of rapturous realisation of a long-sought joy than to the paler remembrance of it.

Taking, then, the former view of the verse, we have the beginning and end of the pilgrimage brought into juxtaposition in vv. 1 and 2. It was begun in joy; it ends in full attainment and a satisfied rapture, as the pilgrim finds the feet which have traversed many a weary mile planted at last within the city. How fading the annoyances of the road! Happy they whose life's path ends where the psalmist's did! The joy of fruition will surpass that of anticipation, and difficulties and dangers will be forgotten.

Vv. 3-5 give voice to the crowding thoughts and memories waked by that moment of supreme joy, when dreams and hopes have become realities, and the pilgrim's happy eyes do actually see the

city. It stands "built," by which is best understood *built anew*, rising from the ruins of many years. It is "compact together," the former breaches in the walls and the melancholy gaps in the buildings being filled up. Others take the reference to be to the crowding of its houses, which its site, a narrow peninsula of rock with deep ravines on three sides, made necessary. But fair to his eyes as the Jerusalem of to-day looked, the poet-patriot sees angustier forms rising behind it, and recalls vanished glories, when all the twelve tribes came up to worship, according to the commandment, and there was yet a king in Israel. The religious and civil life of the nation had their centres in the city; and Jerusalem had become the seat of worship because it was the seat of the monarchy. These days were past; but though few in number, the tribes still were going up; and the psalmist does not feel the sadness but the sanctity of the vanished past.

Thus moved to the depths of his soul, he breaks forth into exhortation to his companion pilgrims to pray for the peace of the city. There is a play on the meaning of the name in ver. 6 *a*; for, as the Tel-el-Amarna tablets have told us, the name of the city of the priest-king was Uru Salim—the city of [the god of] peace. The prayer is that the *nomen* may become *omen*, and that the hope that moved in the hearts that had so long ago and in the midst of wars given so fair a designation to their abode, may be fulfilled now at last. A similar play of words lies in the interchange of "peace" and "prosperity," which are closely similar in sound in the Hebrew. So sure is the psalmist that God will favour Zion, that he assures his companions that individual well-being will be secured by loyal love to her. The motive appealed to may be so put as to be mere selfishness, though, if any man loved Zion not for Zion's sake but for his own, he could scarcely be deemed to love her at all. But rightly understood, the psalmist proclaims an everlasting truth, that the highest good is realised by sinking self in a passion of earnest love for and service to the City of God. Such love is in itself well-being; and while it may have no rewards appreciable by sense, it cannot fail of sharing in the good of Zion and the prosperity of God's chosen.

The singer puts forth the prayers which he enjoins on others, and rises high above all considerations of self. His desires are winged by two great motives—on the one hand, his self-oblivious wish for the good of those who are knit to him by common faith and worship; on the other, his loving reverence for the sacred house of Jehovah. That house hallowed every stone in the city. To wish for the prosperity of Jerusalem, forgetting that the Temple was in it, would have been mere earthly patriotism, a very questionable virtue. To wish and struggle for the growth of an external organisation called a Church, disregarding the Presence which gives it all its sanctity, is no uncommon fault in some who think that they are actuated by "zeal for the Lord," when it is a much more earthly flame that burns in them.

PSALM CXXIII.

- 1 To Thee lift I mine eyes,
O Thou that art enthroned in the heavens.
- 2 Behold, as the eyes of slaves are towards the
hand of their masters,
As the eyes of a maid are towards the hand of
her mistress.

So [are] our eyes towards Jehovah our God,
Till He be gracious to us.

- 3 Be gracious to us, Jehovah, be gracious to us,
For we are abundantly filled with contempt.
- 4 Abundantly is our soul filled
With the scorn of them that are at ease,
The contempt of the proud.

A SIGH and an upward gaze and a sigh! No period is more appropriate, as that of this psalm, than the early days after the return from exile, when the little community, which had come back with high hopes, found themselves a laughing-stock to their comfortable and malicious neighbours. The contrast of tone with the joy of the preceding psalm is very striking. After the heights of devout gladness have been reached, it is still needful to come down to stern realities of struggle, and these can only be faced when the eye of patient dependence and hope is fixed on God.

That attitude is the great lesson of this brief and perfect expression of wistful yet unfaltering trust joined with absolute submission. The upward look here is like, but also unlike, that in Psalm cxxi., in that this is less triumphant, though not less assured, and has an expression of lowly submission in the appealing gaze. Commentators quote illustrations of the silent observance of the master's look by his rows of slaves; but these are not needed to elucidate the vivid image. It tells its own story. Absolute submission to God's hand, whether it wields a rod or lavishes gifts or points to service, befits those whose highest honour is to be His slaves. They should stand where they can see Him; they should have their gaze fixed upon Him; they should look with patient trust, as well as with eager willingness to start into activity when He indicates His commands.

The sigh for deliverance, in the second half of the psalm, is no breach of that patient submission. Trust and resignation do not kill natural shrinking from contempt and scorn. It is enough that they turn shrinking into supplication and lamentations into appeals to God. He lets His servants make their moan to Him, and tell how full their souls have long been of men's scorn. As a plea with Him the psalmist urges the mockers' "ease." In their security and full-fed complacency, they laughed at the struggling band, as men gorged with material good ever do at enthusiasts; but it is better to be contemned for the difficulties which cleaving to the ruins of God's city brings, than to be the contemners in their selfish abundance. They are further designated as "haughty," by a word which the Hebrew margin reads as two words, meaning "proud ones of the oppressors"; but this is unnecessary, and the text yields a good meaning as it stands, though the word employed is unusual.

This sweet psalm, with all its pained sense of the mockers' gibes and their long duration, has no accent of impatience. Perfect submission, fixed observance, assured confidence that, "till He is gracious," it is best to bear what He sends, befit His servants, and need not hinder their patient cry to Him, nor their telling Him how long and hard their trial has been.

PSALM CXXIV.

- 1 Had not Jehovah been for us,
—Thus let Israel say—
- 2 Had not Jehovah been for us,
When men rose against us:

- 3 Then had they swallowed us alive,
When their wrath blazed out upon us;
4 Then had the waters overwhelmed us,
The torrent had gone over our soul;
5 Then had gone over our soul
The proud waters.
- 6 Blessed be Jehovah,
Who has not given us [as] a prey to their teeth.
7 Our soul is like a bird escaped from the fowlers' snare;
The snare is broken, and we—we are escaped.
8 Our help is in the name of Jehovah,
Maker of heaven and earth.

A SEQUENCE may be traced connecting this with the two adjacent psalms. In Psalm cxxiii. patient resignation sighed for deliverance, which here has been received and has changed the singer's note into jubilant and wondering praise; while, in the next little lyric, we have the escaped Israel established in Jerusalem, and drawing omens of Divine guardianship from its impregnable position, on a mountain girt by mountains. This psalm is an outgush of the first rapture of astonishment and joy for deliverance so sudden and complete. It is most naturally taken as the expression of the feelings of the exiles on their restoration from Babylon. One thought runs through it all, that the sole actor in their deliverance has been Jehovah. No human arm has been bared for them; no created might could have rescued them from the rush of the swelling deluge. Like a bird in a net panting with fear and helplessness, they waited the fowler's grasp; but, lo, by an unseen Power the net was broken, and they are free to wing their flight to their nest. So, triumphantly they ring out at last the Name which has been their help, abjuring any share in their own rescue, and content to owe it all to Him.

The step-like structure is very obvious in this psalm. As Delitzsch puts it, "In order to take a step forward, it always goes back half a step." But the repetitions are not mere artistic embellishments; they beautifully correspond to the feelings expressed. A heart running over with thankful surprise at its own new security and freedom cannot but reiterate the occasion of its joy. It is quite as much devotion as art which says twice over that Jehovah was on the singers' side, which twice recalls how nearly they had been submerged in the raging torrent, and twice remembers their escape from the closely wrapping but miraculously broken snare. A suppliant is not guilty of vain repetitions though he asks often for the same blessing, and thanksgiving for answered petitions should be as persistent as the petitions were. That must be a shallow gratitude which can be all poured out at one gush.

The psalmist's metaphors for Israel's danger are familiar ones. "They had swallowed us alive" may refer to the open jaws of Sheol, as in other psalms, but more probably is simply a figure drawn from beasts of prey, as in ver. 6. The other image of a furious swollen torrent sweeping over the heads (or, as here, over the soul) recalls the grand contrast drawn by Isaiah between the gently flowing "waters of Siloam" and the devastating rush of the "river," symbolising the King of Assyria, which, like some winter torrent swollen by the rains, suddenly rises and bears on its tawny bosom to the sea the ruins of men's works and the corpses of the workers.

The word rendered "proud" is a rare word,

coming from a root meaning *to boil over*, and may be used here in its literal sense, but is more probably to be taken in its metaphorical meaning of haughty, and applied rather to the persons signified by the waters than to the flood itself. Vv. 6 and 7 are an advance on the preceding inasmuch as those described rather the imminence of danger, and these magnify the completeness of Jehovah's delivering mercy. The comparison of the soul to a bird is beautiful (Psalm xi. 1). It hints at tremors and feebleness, at alternations of feeling like the flutter of some weak-winged songster, at the utter helplessness of the panting creature in the toils. One hand only could break the snare, and then the bruised wings were swiftly spread for flight once more, and up into the blue went the ransomed joy, with a song instead of harsh notes of alarm. "We—we are escaped." That is enough: we are out of the net. Whither the flight may be directed does not concern the singer in the first bliss of recovered freedom. All blessedness is contained in the one word "escaped," which therefore he reiterates, and with which the song closes, but for that final ascription of the glory of the escape to the mighty Name of Him who made heaven and earth.

PSALM CXXV.

- 1 They who trust in Jehovah
Are like Mount Zion [which] cannot be moved,
For ever it shall sit steadfast.
2 Jerusalem—mountains are round her,
And Jehovah is round His people
From now and for ever.
3 For the sceptre of the wicked shall not rest on
the lot of the righteous ones,
Lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.
- 4 Do good, Jehovah, to the good,
And to the upright in their hearts.
5 And those who warp their crooked paths,
Jehovah shall make them go with the workers
of iniquity.
Peace be upon Israel!

THE references to the topography of Jerusalem in vv. 1, 2, do not absolutely require, though they recommend, the supposition, already mentioned, that this psalm completes a triad which covers the experience of the restored Israel from the time just prior to its deliverance up till the period of its return to Jerusalem. The strength of the city perched on its rocky peninsula, and surrounded by guardian heights, would be the more impressive to eyes accustomed to the plains of Babylon, where the only defence of cities was artificial. If this hypothesis as to the date of the psalm is accepted, its allusions to a foreign domination and to half-hearted members of the community, as distinguished from manifest workers of evil, fall in with the facts of the period. The little band of faithful men was surrounded by foes, and there were faint hearts among themselves, ready to temporise and "run with the hare," as well as "hunt with the hounds." In view of deliverance accomplished and of perils still to be faced, the psalmist sings this strong brief song of commendation of the excellence of Trust, anticipates as already fulfilled the complete emancipation of the land from alien rule, and proclaims, partly in prayer and partly

in prediction, the great law of retribution—certain blessedness for those who are good, and destruction for the faithless.

The first of the two grand images in vv. 1, 2, sets forth the stability of those who trust in Jehovah. The psalmist pictures Mount Zion somewhat singularly as "sitting steadfast," whereas the usual expression would be "stands firm." But the former conveys still more forcibly the image and impression of calm effortless immobility. Like some great animal couched at ease, the mountain lies there, in restful strength. Nothing can shake it, except One Presence, before which the hills "skip like young rams." Thus quietly steadfast and lapped in repose, not to be disturbed by any external force, should they be who trust in Jehovah, and shall be in the measure of their trust.

But trust could not bring such steadfastness, unless the other figure in ver. 2 represented a fact. The steadfastness of the trustful soul is the consequence of the encircling defence of Jehovah's power. The mountain fortress is girdled by mountains; not, indeed, as if it was ringed about by an unbroken circle of manifestly higher peaks; but still Olivet rises above Zion on the east, and a spur of higher ground runs out thence and overlooks it on the north, while the levels rise to the west, and the so-called Hill of Evil Counsel is on the south. They are not conspicuous summits, but they hide the city from those approaching, till their tops are reached. Perhaps the very inconspicuousness of these yet real defences suggested to the poet the invisible protection which to purblind eyes looked so poor, but was so valid. The hills of Bashan might look scornfully across Jordan to the humble heights round Jerusalem; but they were enough to guard the city. The psalmist uses no words of comparison, but lays his two facts side by side: the mountains round Jerusalem—Jehovah round His people. That circumvallation is their defence. They who have the everlasting hills for their bulwark need not trouble themselves to build a wall such as Babylon needed. Man's artifices for protection are impertinent when God flings His hand round His people. Zechariah, the prophet of the Restoration, drew that conclusion from the same thought, when he declared that Jerusalem should be "inhabited as villages without walls," because Jehovah would be "unto her a wall of fire round about" (Zech. ii. 4. 5).

Ver. 3 seems at first sight to be appended to the preceding in defiance of logical connection, for its "for" would more naturally have been "therefore," since the deliverance of the land from foreign invaders is a consequence of Jehovah's protection. But the psalmist's faith is so strong that he regards that still further deliverance as already accomplished, and adduces it as a confirmation of the fact that Jehovah ever guards His people. In the immediate historical reference this verse points to a period when the lot of the righteous—*i.e.*, the land of Israel—was, as it were, weighed down by the crushing sceptre of some alien power that had long lain on it. But the psalmist is sure that that is not going to last, because his eyes are lifted to the hills whence his aid comes. With like tenacity and longsightedness, Faith ever looks onward to the abolition of present evils, however stringent may be their grip, and however heavy may be the sceptre which Evil in possession of the heritage of God wields. The rod of the oppressor shall be broken, and one more

proof given that they dwell safely who dwell encircled by God.

The domination of evil, if protracted too long, may tempt good men, who are righteous because they trust, to lose their faith and so to lose their righteousness, and make common cause with apparently triumphant iniquity. It needs Divine wisdom to determine how long a trial must last in order that it may test faith, thereby strengthening it, and may not confound faith, thereby precipitating feeble souls into sin. He knows when to say, It is enough.

So the psalm ends with prayer and prediction, which both spring from the insight into Jehovah's purposes which trust gives. The singer asks that the good may receive good, in accordance with the law of retribution. The expressions describing these are very noticeable, especially when connected with the designation of the same persons in ver. 1 as those who trust in Jehovah. Trust makes righteous and good and upright in heart. If these characteristics are to be distinguished, *righteous* may refer to action in conformity with the law of God, *good* to the more gentle and beneficent virtues, and *upright in heart* to inward sincerity. Such persons will get "good" from Jehovah, the God of recompenses, and that good will be as various as their necessities and as wide as their capacities. But the righteous Protector of those who trust in Him is so, partly because He smites as well as blesses, and therefore the other half of the law of retribution comes into view, not as a petition, but as prediction. The psalmist uses a vivid image to describe half-hearted adherents to the people of Jehovah: "they bend their ways," so as to make them crooked. Sometimes the tortuous path points towards one direction, and then it swerves to almost the opposite. "Those crooked, wandering ways," in which irresolute men, who do not clearly know whether they are for Jehovah or for the other side, live lives miserable from vacillation, can never lead to steadfastness or to any good. The psalmist has taken his side. He knows whom he is for; and he knows, too, that there is at bottom little to choose between the coward who would fain be in both camps and the open antagonist. Therefore they shall share the same fate.

Finally the poet, stretching out his hands over all Israel, as if blessing them like a priest, embraces all his hopes, petitions, and wishes in the one prayer "Peace be upon Israel!" He means the true Israel of God (Gal. vi. 16), upon whom the Apostle, with a reminiscence possibly of this psalm, invokes the like blessing, and whom he defines in the same spirit as the psalmist does, as those who walk according to this rule, and not according to the crooked paths of their own devising.

PSALM CXXVI.

- 1 When Jehovah brought back the captives of Zion,
We were like as if dreaming.
- 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongues with joyful cries;
Then said they among the nations,
Jehovah has done great things with these
[people].
- 3 Jehovah has done great things with us;
We were glad.
- 4 Bring back, Jehovah, our captives,
Like watercourses in the Southland.

- 5 They who sow with tears
 With joyful cries shall reap.
 6 [The husbandman] goes, going and weeping,
 [While] bearing the handful of seed;
 He shall surely come with joyful cries,
 [When] bearing his sheaves.

As in Psalm lxxxv., the poet's point of view here is in the midst of a partial restoration of Israel. In vv. 1-3 he rejoices over its happy beginning, while in vv. 4-6 he prays for and confidently expects its triumphant completion. Manifestly the circumstances fit the period to which most of these pilgrim psalms are to be referred—namely, the dawn of the restoration from Babylon. Here the pressure of the difficulties and hostility which the returning exiles met is but slightly expressed. The throb of wondering gratitude is still felt; and though tears mingle with laughter, and hard work which bears no immediate result has to be done, the singer's confidence is unflinching. His words set a noble example of the spirit in which inchoate deliverances should be welcomed, and toil for their completion encountered with the light-heartedness which is folly if it springs from self-trust, but wisdom and strength if its ground is the great things which Jehovah has begun to do.

The word in ver. 1 rendered *captives* is capable of other meanings. It is an unusual form, and is probably an error for the more common word which occurs in ver. 4. It is most probable that the expressions should be identical in both instances, though small changes in a refrain are not infrequent. But if this correction is adopted, there is room for difference of opinion as to the meaning of the phrase. Cheyne, with the support of several other commentators, takes the phrase to mean "turn the fortunes" (lit., a turning), but allows that the "debate is not absolutely closed" (Critical Note on Psalm xiv. 7). The ordinary rendering is, however, more natural, "captivity" being the mass of captives. Others would regard the two words in vv. 1 and 4 as different, and render the former "those who return" (Delitzsch) or "the returned" (Perowne).

Sudden and great revolutions for the better have for their first effect bewilderment and a sense of unreality. Most men have some supreme moment of blessedness in their memories with which they were stunned; but, alas! it is oftener the rush of unexpected miseries that makes them wonder whether they are awake or dreaming. It is not lack of faith, but slowness in accommodating oneself to surprising new conditions, which makes these seem unreal at first. "The sober certainty of waking bliss" is sweeter than the first raptures. It is good to have had such experience of walking, as it were, on air; but it is better to plant firm feet on firm ground.

The mood of the first part of this little psalm is momentary; but the steadfast toil amid discouragements, not uncheered by happy confidence, which is pictured in the second part, should be the permanent temper of those who have once tasted the brief emotion. The jubilant laughter and ringing cries with which the exiles streamed forth from bondage, and made the desert echo as they marched, witnessed to the nations that Jehovah had magnified His dealings with them. Their extorted acknowledgment is caught up triumphantly by the singer. He, as it were, thanks the Gentiles for teaching him that word. There is a world of restrained feeling, all the more im-

pressive for the simplicity of the expression, in that quiet "We became glad." When the heathen attested the reality of the deliverance, Israel became calmly conscious of it. These exclamations of envious onlookers sufficed to convince the returning exiles that it was no dream befooling them. Tumultuous feeling steadied itself into conscious joy. There is no need to say more. The night of weeping was past, and Joy was their companion in the fresh morning light.

But the work was but partly done. Difficulties and hardships were not abolished from the world, as Israel had half expected in the first flush of joy. We all are apt to think so, when some long wished and faintly hoped-for good is ours at last. But not such is the Divine purpose for any life here. He gives moments of untroubled joy, when no cloud stains the blue and all the winds are still, in order to prepare us for toil amid tempests and gloomy skies. So the second half of the psalm breathes petitions for the completion of the Restoration, and animates the returned exiles with assurances that, whatever may be their toils, and however rough the weather in which they have to sow the seed, and however heavy the hearts with which they do it, "the slow result of winter showers" is sure. Lessons of persevering toil, of contented doing of preparatory work, of confidence that no such labour can fail to be profitable to the doer and to the world, have been drawn for centuries from the sweet words of this psalm. Who can tell how many hearts they have braced, how much patient toil they have inspired? The psalmist was sowing seed, the fruit of which he little dreamed of, when he wrote them, and his sheaves will be an exceeding weight indeed.

The metaphor in ver. 4 brings before the imagination the dried torrent-beds in the arid Negeb, or Southland, which runs out into the Arabian desert. Dreary and desolate as these dried wadies lie bleaching in the sunshine, so disconsolate and lonely had the land been without inhabitants. The psalmist would fain see, not the thin trickle of a streamlet, to which the returned captives might be compared, but a full, great rush of rejoicing fellow-countrymen coming back, like the torrents that fill the silent watercourses with flashing life.

He prays, and he also prophesies. "They who sow with tears" are the pioneers of the return, to whom he belonged. Vv. 6, 7, merely expand the figure of ver. 5 with the substitution of the image of a single husbandman for the less vivid, clear-cut plural. The expression rendered "handful of seed" means literally a "draught of seed"—i.e., the quantity taken out of the basket or cloth at one grasp, in order to be sown. It is difficult to convey the force of the infinitives in combination with participles and the finite verb in ver. 6. But the first half of the verse seems to express repeated actions on the part of the husbandman, who often goes forth to sow, and weeps as he goes; while the second half expresses the certainty of his glad coming in with his arms full of sheaves. The meaning of the figure needs no illustration. It gives assurances fitted to animate to toil in the face of dangers without, and in spite of a heavy heart—namely, that no seed sown and watered with tears is lost; and further, that, though it often seems to be the law for earth that one soweth and another reapeth, in deepest truth "every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour," inasmuch as, hereafter, if not now, whatsoever of faith and toil and holy endeavour a man soweth, trusting to God to bless

the springing thereof, that shall he also reap. In the highest sense and in the last result the prophet's great words are ever true: "They shall not plant, and another eat . . . for My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. lxxv. 22).

PSALM CXXVII.

- 1 If Jehovah build not a house,
Vainly do its builders toil upon it;
If Jehovah keeps not a city,
Vainly wakes the keeper.
- 2 Vain is it for you, ye that make early [your]
rising and your sitting down late,
That eat the bread of painful toil;
Even so He gives [it] to His beloved while in
sleep.
- 3 Behold, sons are an heritage^e from Jehovah,
The fruit of the womb is [His] reward.
- 4 Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man,
So are sons of [a father's] youth.
- 5 Happy the man who has filled his quiver with
them,
They shall not be ashamed
When they speak with enemies in the gate.

THIS pure expression of conscious dependence on God's blessing for all well-being may possibly have special reference to the Israel of the Restoration. The instances of vain human effort and care would then have special force, when the ruins of many generations had to be rebuilt and the city to be guarded. But there is no need to seek for specific occasion, so general is this psalm. It sings in a spirit of happy trust the commonplace of all true religion, that God's blessing prospers all things, and that effort is vain without it. There is no sweeter utterance of that truth anywhere, till we come to our Lord's parallel teaching, lovelier still than that of our psalm, when He points us to the flowers of the field and the fowls of the air, as our teachers of the joyous, fair lives that can be lived, when no carking care mars their beauty.

In ver. 1 the examples chosen by the singer are naturally connected. The house when built is one in the many that make the city. The owner's troubles are not over when it is built, since it has to be watched. It is as hard to keep as to acquire earthly goods. The psalmist uses the past tenses in describing the vanity of building and watching unblessed by God. "They" have built in vain, and watched in vain. He, as it were, places us at the point of time when the failure is developed,—the half-built house a ruin, the city sacked and in flames.

Ver. 2 deals with domestic life within the built house and guarded city. It is vain to eke out the laborious day by early beginning and late ending. Long hours do not mean prosperous work. The evening meal may be put off till a late hour; and when the toil-worn man sits down to it, he may eat bread made bitter by labour. But all is in vain without God's blessing. The last clause of the verse must be taken as presenting a contrast to the futile labour reprehended in the former clauses; and therefore the beautiful rendering of the A.V. must be abandoned, though it has given many sweet thoughts to trustful souls, and none sweeter than in Mrs. Browning's pathetic lines. But clearly the contrast is between labour which effects nothing, but is like spinning ropes out of sea-sand, and God's gift of the good which the

vain toil had aimed at, and which He gives to His beloved in their sleep. "So" seems here to be equivalent to "Even so," and the thought intended is probably that God's gift to His beloved secures to them the same result as is ineffectually sought by godless struggles.

This is no preaching of laziness masquerading as religious trust. The psalmist insists on one side of the truth. Not work, but self-torturing care and work, without seeking God's blessing, are pronounced vanity.

The remainder of the psalm dwells on one special instance of God's gifts, that of a numerous family, which in accordance with the Hebrew sentiment, is regarded as a special blessing. But the psalmist is carried beyond his immediate purpose of pointing out that that chief earthly blessing, as he and his contemporaries accounted it, is God's gift, and he lingers on the picture of a father surrounded in his old age by a band of stalwart sons born unto him in his vigorous youth, and so now able to surround him with a ring of strong protectors of his declining days. "They shall speak with their enemies in the gate." Probably "they" refers to the whole band, the father in the midst and his sons about him. The gate was the place where justice was administered, and where was the chief place of concourse. It is therefore improbable that actual warfare is meant; rather, in the disputes which might arise with neighbours, and in the intercourse of city life, which would breed enmities enough, the man with his sons about him could hold his own. And such blessing is God's gift.

The lesson of the psalm is one that needs to be ever repeated. It is so obvious that it is unseen by many, and apt to be unnoticed by all. There are two ways of going to work in reference to earthly good. One is that of struggling and toiling, pushing and snatching, fighting and envying, and that way comes to no successful issue; for if it gets what it has wriggled and wrestled for, it generally gets in some way or other an incapacity to enjoy the good won, which makes it far less than the good pursued. The other way is the way of looking to God and doing the appointed tasks with quiet dependence on Him, and that way always succeeds; for, with its modest or large outward results, there is given likewise a quiet heart set on God, and therefore capable of finding water in the desert and extracting honey from the rock. The one way is that of "young lions," who, for all their claws and strength, "do lack and suffer hunger"; the other is that of "them that seek the Lord," who "shall not want any good."

PSALM CXXVIII.

- 1 Happy is every one that fears Jehovah,
That walks in His ways.
- 2 The labour of thy hands shalt thou surely eat,—
Happy art thou, and it is well with thee.
- 3 Thy wife [shall be] like a fruitful vine in the
inmost chambers of thy house
Thy children like young olive plants round thy
table.
- 4 Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears Jehovah.
- 5 Jehovah bless thee out of Zion!
And mayest thou look on the prosperity of Jeru-
salem
All the days of thy life.
- 6 And see children to thy children!
Peace be upon Israel!

THE preceding psalm traced all prosperity and domestic felicity to God's giving hand. It painted in its close the picture of a father surrounded by his sons able to defend him. This psalm presents the same blessings as the result of a devout life, in which the fear of Jehovah leads to obedience and diligence in labour. It presents the inner side of domestic happiness. It thus doubly supplements the former, lest any should think that God's gift superseded man's work, or that the only blessedness of fatherhood was that it supplied a corps of sturdy defenders. The first four verses describe the peaceful, happy life of the God-fearing man, and the last two invoke on him the blessing which alone makes such a life his. Blended with the sweet domesticity of the psalm is glowing love for Zion. However blessed the home, it is not to weaken the sense of belonging to the nation.

No purer, fairer idyll was ever penned than this miniature picture of a happy home life. But its calm simple beauty has deep foundations. The poet sets forth the basis of all noble, as of all tranquil, life when he begins with the fear of Jehovah, and thence advances to practical conformity with His will, manifested by walking in the paths which He traces for men. Thence the transition is easy to the mention of diligent labour, and the singer is sure that such toil done on such principles and from such a motive cannot go unblessed. Outward prosperity does not follow good men's work so surely as the letter of the psalm teaches, but the best fruits of such work are not those which can be stored in barns or enjoyed by sense; and the labourer who does his work "heartily, as to the Lord," will certainly reap a harvest in character and power and communion with God, whatever transitory gain may be attained or missed.

The sweet little sketch of a joyous home in ver. 3 is touched with true grace and feeling. The wife is happy in her motherhood, and ready, in the inner chambers (literally *sides*) of the house, where she does her share of work, to welcome her husband returning from the field. The family gathers for the meal won and sweetened by his toil; the children are in vigorous health, and growing up like young "layered" olive plants. It may be noted that this verse exhibits a home in the earlier stages of married life, and reflects the happy hopes associated with youthful children, all still gathered under the father's roof; while, in the latter part of the psalm, a later stage is in view, when the father sits as a spectator rather than a worker, and sees children born to his children. Ver. 4 emphatically dwells once more on the foundation of all as laid in the fear of Jehovah. Happy a nation whose poets have such ideals and sing of such themes! How wide the gulf separating this "undisturbed song" of pure home joys from the foul ideals which baser songs try to adorn! Happy the man whose ambition is bounded by its limits, and whose life is

"True to the kindred points of heaven and home"!

Israel first taught the world how sacred the family is; and Christianity recognises "a church in the house" of every wedded pair whose love is hallowed by the fear of Jehovah.

In vv. 5, 6, petitions take the place of assurances, for the singer knows that none of the good which he has been promising will come without that blessing of which the preceding psalm had

spoken. All the beautiful and calm joys just described must flow from God, and be communicated from that place which is the seat of His self-revelation. The word rendered above "mayest thou look" is in the imperative form, which seems here to be intended to blend promise, wish, and command. It is the duty of the happiest husband and father not to let himself be so absorbed in the sweets of home as to have his heart beat languidly for the public weal. The subtle selfishness which is but too commonly the accompaniment of such blessings is to be resisted. From his cheerful hearth the eyes of a lover of Zion are to look out, and be gladdened when they see prosperity smiling on Zion. Many a Christian is so happy in his household that his duties to the Church, the nation, and the world are neglected. This ancient singer had a truer conception of the obligations flowing from personal and domestic blessings. He teaches us that it is not enough to "see children's children," unless we have eyes to look for the prosperity of Jerusalem, and tongues which pray not only for those in our homes, but for "peace upon Israel."

PSALM CXXIX.

- 1 So sorely have they oppressed me from my youth,
Let Israel now say,
- 2 So sorely have they oppressed me from my youth,
But they have not also prevailed against me.
- 3 On my back the ploughers ploughed,
They made their furrows long.
- 4 Jehovah the righteous
Has cut the cord of the wicked.
- 5 Let them be shamed and turned back,
All they who hate Zion.
- 6 Let them be as the grass of the housetops,
Which, before it shoots forth, withers:
- 7 With which the mower fills not his hand,
Nor the sheaf-binder his bosom;
- 8 And the passers-by say not,
"The blessing of Jehovah be to you!"
"We bless you in the name of Jehovah!"

THE point of view here is the same as in Psalm cxxiv., with which the present psalm has much similarity both in subject and in expression. It is a retrospect of Israel's past, in which the poet sees a uniform exemplification of two standing facts—sore affliction and wonderful deliverance. The bush burned, *nectamen consumebatur*. "Cast down but not destroyed," is the summary of the Church's history. No doubt the recent deliverance from captivity underlies this, as most of the pilgrim psalms. The second part (vv. 5-8) blends confidence and wish, founded on the experience recorded in the first part, and prophecies and desires the overthrow of Israel's foes. The right use of retrospect is to make it the ground of hope. They who have passed unscathed through such afflictions may well be sure that any to-morrow shall be as the yesterdays were, and that all future assaults will fail as all past ones have failed.

The words which Israel is called upon to say twice with triumphant remembrance are the motto of the *Ecclesia pressa* in all ages. Ever there is antagonism; never is there overthrow. Israel's "youth" was far back in the days of Egyptian bondage; and many an affliction has he since met, but he lives still, and his existence proves that "they have not prevailed against" him. Therefore the backward look is gladsome, though it sees

so many trials. Survived sorrows yield joy and hope, as gashes in trees exude precious gums.

Ver. 3 expresses Israel's oppressions by a strong metaphor, in which two figures are blended—a slave under the lash, and a field furrowed by ploughing. Cruel lords had laid on the whip, till the victim's back was scored with long wounds, straight and parallel, like the work of a ploughman. The Divine deliverance follows in ver. 4. The first words of the verse do not stand in the usual order, if rendered "Jehovah is righteous," and are probably to be taken as above; "righteous" standing in apposition to "Jehovah," and expressing the Divine characteristic which guaranteed and, in due time, accomplished Israel's deliverance. God could not but be true to His covenant obligations. Therefore He cut the "cord of the wicked." The figure is here changed to one occasioned by the former. Israel is now the draught ox harnessed to the plough; and thus both sides of his bondage are expressed—cruel treatment by the former, and hard toil by the latter, figure. The same act which, in the parallel 124th Psalm, is described as breaking the fowler's snare, is in view here; and the restoration from Babylon suits the circumstances completely.

The story of past futile attempts against Israel animates the confidence and vindicates the wish breathed in the latter half of the psalm. To hate Zion, which Jehovah so manifestly loves and guards, must be suicidal. It is something far nobler than selfish vengeance which desires and foresees the certain failure of attempts against it. The psalmist is still under the influence of his earlier metaphor of the ploughed field, but now has come to think of the harvest. The graphic image of the grass on flat housetops of clay, which springs quickly because it has no depth of earth, and withers as it springs, vividly describes the short-lived success and rapid extinction of plots against Zion and of the plotters. The word rendered above "shoots forth" is by some translated "is plucked up," and that meaning is defensible, but grass on the housetops would scarcely be worth plucking, and the word is used elsewhere for unsheathing a sword. It may, therefore, be taken here to refer to the shooting out of the spikelets from their covering. The psalmist dilates upon his metaphor in ver. 7, which expresses the fruitlessness of assaults on God's chosen. No harvest is to be reaped from such sowing. The enemies may plot and toil, and before their plans have had time to bud they are smitten into brown dust; and when the contrivers come expecting success, there is nothing to mow or gather. "They look for much, and behold little." So it has been; so it shall be; so it should be; so may it be, wishes the psalmist; and true hearts will say Amen to his aspiration.

Such reapers have no joy in harvest, and no man can invoke Jehovah's blessing on their bad work. Ver. 8 brings up a lovely little picture of a harvest field, where passers-by shout their good wishes to the glad toilers, and are answered by these with like salutations. It is doubtful whether ver. 8 c is spoken by the passers-by or is the reapers' responsive greeting. The latter explanation gives animation to the scene. But in any case the verse suggests by contrast the gloomy silence of Israel's would-be destroyers, who find, as all who set themselves against Jehovah's purposes do find, that He blasts their plans with His breath, and makes their "harvest an heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow."

PSALM CXXX.

- 1 Out of the depths have I cried to Thee, Jehovah.
- 2 Lord, hearken to my voice,
Be Thine ears attent
To the voice of my supplications.
- 3 If Thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?—
- 4 For with Thee is forgiveness,
That Thou mayest be feared.
- 5 I have waited for Jehovah,
And in His word have I hoped.
- 6 My soul [hopes] for the Lord
More than watchers for the morning,
—Watchers for the morning.
- 7 Let Israel hope in Jehovah,
For with Jehovah is lovingkindness,
And in abundance with Him is redemption.
- 8 And He—He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.

IN a very emphatic sense this is a song of ascents, for it climbs steadily from the abyss of penitence to the summits of hope. It falls into two divisions of four verses each, of which the former breathes the prayer of a soul penetrated by the consciousness of sin, and the latter the peaceful expectance of one that has tasted God's forgiving mercy. These two parts are again divided into two groups of two verses, so that there are four stages in the psalmist's progress from the depths to the sunny heights.

In the first group we have the psalmist's cry. He has called, and still calls. He reiterates in ver. 2 the prayer that he had long offered and still presents. It is not only quotation, but is the cry of present need. What are these "depths" from which his voice sounds, as that of a man fallen into a pit and sending up a faint call? The expression does not merely refer to his creatural lowliness, nor even to his troubles, nor even to his depression of spirit. There are deeper pits than these—those into which the spirit feels itself going down, sick and giddy, when it realises its sinfulness. Unless a man has been down in that black abyss, he has scarcely cried to God as he should do. The beginning of true personal religion is the sense of personal sin. A slight conception of the gravity of that fact underlies inadequate conceptions of Christ's nature and work, and is the mother of heresies in creed and superficialities and deadnesses in practice. A religion that sits lightly upon its professor, impelling to no acts of devotion, flashing out in no heroisms, rising to no heights of communion—that is to say, the average Christianity of great masses of so-called Christians—bears proof, in its languor, that the man knows nothing about the depths, and has never cried to God from them. Further, if out of the depths we cry, we shall cry ourselves out of the depths. What can a man do who finds himself at the foot of a beetling cliff, the sea in front, the wall of rock at his back, without foothold for a mouse, between the tide at the bottom and the grass at the top? He can do but one thing: he can shout, and perhaps may be heard, and a rope may come dangling down that he can spring at and clutch. For sinful men in the miry pit the rope is already let down, and their grasping it is the same act as the psalmist's cry. God has let down His forgiving love in Christ, and we need but the faith

which accepts while it asks, and then we are swung up into the light and our feet set on a rock.

Vv. 3, 4, are the second stage. A dark fear shadows the singer's soul, and is swept away by a joyful assurance. The word rendered above "mark" is literally *keep* or *watch*, as in ver. 6, and here seems to mean to *take account of*, or *retain* in remembrance, in order to punish. If God should take man's sin into account in His dispositions and dealings, "O Lord, who shall stand?" No man could sustain that righteous judgment. He must go down before it like a flimsy hut before a whirlwind, or a weak enemy before a fierce charge. That thought comes to the psalmist like a blast of icy air from the north, and threatens to chill his hope to death and to blow his cry back into his throat. But its very hypothetical form holds a negation concealed in it. Such an implied negative is needed in order to explain the "for" of ver. 4. The singer springs, as it were, to that confidence by a rebound from the other darker thought. We must have tremblingly entertained the contrary dread possibility before we can experience the relief and gladness of its counter-truth. The word rendered "forgiveness" is a late form, being found only in two other late passages (Neh. ix. 17; Dan. ix. 9). It literally means *cutting off*, and so suggests the merciful surgery by which the cancerous tumour is taken out of the soul. Such forgiveness is "with God," inherent in His nature. And that forgiveness lies at the root of true godliness. No man reverences, loves, and draws near to God so rapturously and so humbly as he who has made experience of His pardoning mercy, lifting a soul from its abysses of sin and misery. Therefore the psalmist taught by what pardon has done for him in drawing him lovingly near to God, declares that its great purpose is "that Thou mayest be feared," and that not only by the recipient, but by beholders. Strangely enough, many commentators have found a difficulty in this idea, which seems sun-clear to those whose own history explains it to them. Grätz, for instance, calls it "completely unintelligible." It has been very intelligible to many a penitent who has been by pardon transformed into a reverent lover of God.

The next stage in the ascent from the depths is in vv. 5, 6, which breathe peaceful, patient hope. It may be doubtful whether the psalmist means to represent that attitude of expectance as prior to and securing forgiveness or as consequent upon it. The latter seems the more probable. A soul which has received God's forgiveness is thereby led into tranquil, continuous, ever-rewarded waiting on Him, and hope of new gifts springs ever fresh in it. Such a soul sits quietly at His feet, trusting to His love, and looking for light and all else needed, to flow from Him. The singleness of the object of devout hope, the yearning which is not impatience, characterising that hope at its noblest, are beautifully painted in the simile of the watchers for morning. As they who have outwatched the long night look eagerly to the flush that creeps up in the east, telling that their vigil is past, and heralding the stir and life of a new day with its wakening birds and fresh morning airs, so this singer's eyes had turned to God and to Him only. Ver. 6 does not absolutely require the supplement "hopes." It may read simply "My soul is towards Jehovah"; and that translation gives still more emphatically the notion of complete turning of the whole being to God. Consciousness of sin was as a dark night; forgiveness

flushed the Eastern heaven with prophetic twilight. So the psalmist waits for the light, and his soul is one aspiration towards God.

In vv. 7, 8 the psalmist becomes an evangelist, inviting Israel to unite in his hope, that they may share in his pardon. In the depths he was alone, and felt as if the only beings in the universe were God and himself. The consciousness of sin isolates, and the sense of forgiveness unites. Whoever has known that "with Jehovah is pardon" is impelled thereby to invite others to learn the same lesson in the same sweet way. The psalmist has a broad gospel to preach, the generalisation of his own history. He had said in ver. 4 that "with Jehovah is forgiveness" (lit. *the forgiveness*, possibly meaning *the needed forgiveness*), and he thereby had animated his own hope. Now he repeats the form of expression, only that he substitutes for "forgiveness" the lovingkindness which is its spring, and the redemption which is its result; and these he presses upon his fellows as reasons and encouragements for their hope. It is "abundant redemption," or "multiplied," as the word might be rendered. "Seventy times seven"—the perfect numbers seven and ten being multiplied together and their sum increased sevenfold—make a numerical symbol for the unfailing pardons which we are to bestow; and the sum of the Divine pardon is surely greater than that of the human. God's forgiving grace is mightier than all sins, and able to conquer them all.

"He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities"; not only from their consequences in punishment, but from their power, as well as from their guilt and their penalty. The psalmist means something a great deal deeper than deliverance from calamities which conscience declared to be the chastisement of sin. He speaks New Testament language. He was sure that God would redeem from all iniquity; but he lived in the twilight dawn, and had to watch for the morning. The sun is risen for us; but the light is the same in quality, though more in degree: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

PSALM CXXXI.

- 1 Jehovah, not haughty is my heart,
And not lofty are mine eyes;
And I go not into great things,
Nor things too wonderful for me.
- 2 I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with its mother,
Like the weaned child is my soul with me.
- 3 Let Israel hope in Jehovah,
From now, even for evermore.

A QUIET, because self-quieted, heart speaks here in quiet accents, not unlike the "crooning" of the peaceful child on its mother's bosom, to which the sweet singer likens his soul. The psalm is the most perfect expression of the child-like spirit, which, as Christ has taught, is characteristic of the subjects of the kingdom of heaven. It follows a psalm of penitence, in which a contrite soul waited on Jehovah for pardon, and, finding it, exhorted Israel to hope in His redemption from all iniquity. Consciousness of sin and conscious reception of redemption therefrom precede true lowliness, and such lowliness should follow such consciousness.

The psalmist does not pray; still less does he contradict his lowliness in the very act of declaring it, by pluming himself on it. He speaks in that

serene and happy mood, sometimes granted to lowly souls, when fruition is more present than desire, and the child, folded to the Divine heart, feels its blessedness so satisfyingly that fears and hopes, wishes and dreams, are still. Simple words best speak tranquil joys. One note only is sounded in this psalm, which might almost be called a lullaby. How many hearts it has helped to hush!

The haughtiness which the psalmist disclaims has its seat in the heart and its manifestation in supercilious glances. The lowly heart looks higher than the proud one does, for it lifts its eyes to the hills, and fixes them on Jehovah, as a slave on his lord. Lofty thoughts of self naturally breed ambitions which seek great spheres and would intermeddle with things above reach. The singer does not refer to questions beyond solution by human faculty, but to worldly ambitions aiming at prominence and position. He aims low, as far as earth is concerned; but he aims high, for his mark is in the heavens.

Shaking off such ambitions and loftiness of spirit, he has found repose, as all do who clear their hearts of that perilous stuff. But it is to be noted that the calm which he enjoys is the fruit of his own self-control, by which his dominant self has smoothed and stilled the sensitive nature with its desires and passions. It is not the tranquillity of a calm nature which speaks here, but that into which the speaker has entered, by vigorous mastery of disturbing elements. How hard the struggle had been, how much bitter crying and petulant resistance there had been before the calm was won, is told by the lovely image of the weaned child. While being weaned it sobs and struggles, and all its little life is perturbed. So no man comes to have a quiet heart without much resolute self-suppression. But the figure tells of ultimate repose, even more plainly than of preceding struggle. For, once the process is accomplished, the child nestles satisfied on the mother's warm bosom, and wishes nothing more than to lie there. So the man who has manfully taken in hand his own weaker and more yearning nature, and directed its desires away from earth by fixing them on God, is freed from the misery of hot desire, and passes into calm. He that ceases from his own works enters into rest. If a man thus compels his "soul" to cease its cravings for what earth can give, he will have to disregard its struggles and cries, but these will give place to quietness: and the fruition of the blessedness of setting all desires on God will be the best defence against the recurrence of longings once silenced.

The psalmist would fain have all Israel share in his quietness of heart, and closes his tender snatch of song with a call to them to hope in Jehovah, whereby they, too, may enter into peace. The preceding psalm ended with the same call; but there God's mercy in dealing with sin was principally in question, while here His sufficiency for all a soul's wants is implied. The one secret of forgiveness and deliverance from iniquity is also the secret of rest from tyrannous longings and disturbing desires. Hope in Jehovah brings pardon, purity, and peace.

PSALM CXXXII.

- 1 Remember, Jehovah, to David
All the pains he took,
- 2 Who swore to Jehovah,
[And] vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

- 3 "I will not go into the tent of my house,
I will not go up to the bed of my couch,
- 4 I will not give sleep to mine eyes,
To mine eyelids slumber,
- 5 Till I find a place for Jehovah,
A habitation for the Mighty One of Jacob."
- 6 Behold, we heard [of] it at Ephrathah,
We found it in the Fields of the Wood.
- 7 Let us come to His habitation,
Let us bow ourselves at His footstool.
- 8 Arise, Jehovah, to Thy rest,
Thou and the Ark of Thy strength.
- 9 Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness,
And Thy favoured ones utter shrill cries of joy.
- 10 For the sake of David Thy servant,
Turn not away the face of Thine anointed.
- 11 Jehovah has sworn to David,
It is truth—He will not go back from it—
"Of the fruit of thy body will I set on thy throne.
- 12 If thy sons keep My covenant
And My testimonies which I will teach them,
Their sons also for ever and aye
Shall sit on thy throne."
- 13 For Jehovah has chosen Zion,
He has desired it for His dwelling.
- 14 "This is My rest for ever and aye,
Here will I abide, for I have desired it.
- 15 Her provision blessing I will bless,
Her poor will I satisfy with bread.
- 16 Her priests also will I clothe with salvation,
And her favoured ones uttering will utter shrill
cries of joy.
- 17 There will I cause a horn to sprout for David,
I have trimmed a lamp for Mine anointed.
- 18 His enemies will I clothe with shame,
But upon himself shall his crown glitter."

THE continuance of "the sure mercies of David" to his descendants for his sake is first besought from God, and is then promised, for his sake, by God Himself, speaking in the singer's spirit. The special blessing sought for is Jehovah's dwelling in His house, which is here contemplated as reared after long toil. Expositors differ, as usual, in regard to the date and occasion of this psalm. Its place among the pilgrim psalms raises a presumption in favour of a post-exilic date, and one class of commentators refers it confidently to the period of the rebuilding of the Temple. But the mention of the Ark (which disappeared after the destruction of Solomon's Temple) can be reconciled with that supposed date only by a somewhat violent expedient. Nor is it easy to suppose that the repeated references to David's descendants as reigning in accordance with God's promise could have been written at a time when there was no king in Israel. Zerubabel has indeed been suggested as "the anointed" of this psalm; but he was not king, and neither in fact nor in idea was he anointed. And could a singer in Israel, in the post-exilic period, have recalled the ancient promises without some passing sigh for their apparent falsification in the present? Psalm lxxxix. is often referred to as the "twin" of this psalm. Its wailings over the vanished glories of the Davidic monarchy have nothing corresponding to them here. These considerations are against a post-exilic date, for which the chief argument is the inclusion of the psalm in the collection of pilgrim songs.

If, on the other hand, we disregard its place in

the Psalter and look at its contents, it must be admitted that they perfectly harmonise with the supposition that its occasion was the completion of Solomon's Temple. The remembrance of David's long-cherished purpose to build the House, of the many wanderings of the Ark, the glad summons to enter the courts to worship, the Divine promises to David, which were connected with his design of building a Temple, all fit in with this view of the occasion of the psalm. Singularly enough, some advocates of later dates than even the building of the second Temple catch in the psalm tones of depression, and see indications of its having been written when the glowing promises which it quotes appeared to have failed. It is not in reference to "Nature" only that "we receive but what we give." To other ears, with perhaps equal though opposite bias, glad confidence in a promise, of which the incipient fulfilment was being experienced, sounds in the psalm. To some it is plain that it was written when Ark and king had been swept away; to others it is equally clear that it presupposes the existence of both. The latter view is to the present writer the more probable.

The psalm is not divided into regular strophes. There is, however, a broad division into two parts, of which vv. 1-10 form the first, the pleading of Israel with Jehovah; and vv. 11-18 the second, the answer of Jehovah to Israel. The first part is further divided into two: vv. 1-5 setting forth David's vow; vv. 6-10 the congregation's glad summons to enter the completed sanctuary and its prayer for blessings on the worshipping nation with its priests and king. The second part is Jehovah's renewed promises, which take up and surpass the people's prayer. It is broken by a single verse (13), which is an interjected utterance of Israel's.

"One remembers anything to another, when one requites him for what he has done, or when one performs for him what one has promised him" (Delitzsch). David's earnest longing to find a fixed place for the Ark, his long-continued and generous amassing of treasure for the purpose of building the Temple, are regarded as a plea with God. The solidarity of the family, which was so vividly realised in old times, reaches its highest expression in the thought that blessings to David's descendants are as if given to him, sleeping in the royal tomb. Beautifully and humbly the singer, as representing the nation, has nothing to say of the toil of the actual builders. Not the hand which executes, but the heart and mind which conceived and cherished the plan, are its true author. The psalmist gives a poetic version of David's words in 2 Sam. vii. 2. "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth in curtains," contains in germ all which the psalmist here draws out of it. He, the aged king, was almost ashamed of his own ease. "God gave him rest from his enemies," but he will not "give sleep to his eyes" till he finds out a place for Jehovah. Wearied with a stormy life, he might well have left it to others to care for the work which the prophet had told him that he was not to be permitted to begin. But not so does a true man reason. Rather, he will consecrate to God his leisure and his old age, and will rejoice to originate work which he cannot hope to see completed, and even to gather materials which happier natures and times may turn to account. He will put his own comfort second, God's service first.

Such devotedness does make a plea with God. The psalmist's prayer goes on that supposition, and God's answer endorses it as valid. He does not require perfect faithfulness in His servants ere He prospers their work with His smile. Stained offerings, in which much of the leaven of earthly motives may be fermenting, are not therefore rejected.

Vv. 6-10 are the petitions grounded on the preceding plea, and asking that Jehovah would dwell in the sanctuary and bless the worshippers. Ver. 6 offers great difficulties. It seems clear, however, that it and the next verse are to be taken as very closely connected (note the "we" and "us" occurring in them for the only time in the psalm). They seem to describe continuous actions, of which the climax is entrance into the sanctuary. The first question as to ver. 6 is what the "it" is, which is spoken of in both clauses; and the most natural answer is—the Ark, alluded to here by anticipation, though not mentioned till ver. 8. The irregularity is slight and not unexampled. The interpretation of the verse mainly depends on the meaning of the two designations of locality, "Ephrathah" and "the fields of the Wood." Usually the former is part of the name of Bethlehem, but the Ark in all its wanderings is never said to have been there. Most probably Shiloh, in which the Ark did remain for a time, is intended. But why should Shiloh be called Ephrathah? The answer usually given, but not altogether satisfactory, is that Shiloh lay in the territory of Ephraim, and that we have instances in which an Ephraimite is called an "Ephrathite" (Judg. xii. 5; 1 Sam. i. 1; 1 Kings xi. 26), and therefore it may be presumed that the territory of Ephraim was called Ephrathah. "The fields of the Wood," on the other hand, is taken to be a free poetic variation of the name of Kirjath-jearim (the city of the woods), where the Ark long lay, and whence it was brought up to Jerusalem by David. In this understanding of the verse, the two places where it remained longest are brought together and the meaning of the whole verse is, "We heard that it lay long at Shiloh, but we found it in Kirjath-jearim." Delitzsch, followed by Cheyne, takes a different view, regarding "Ephrathah" as a name for the district in which Kirjath-jearim lay. He finds this explanation on the genealogies in 1 Chron. ii. 19, 50, according to which Caleb's wife, Ephrath, was the mother of Hur, the ancestor of the Bethlehemites, and whose son Shobal was the ancestor of the people of Kirjath-jearim; Ephrathah was thus a fitting name for the whole district, which included both Bethlehem and Kirjath-jearim. In this understanding of the names, the verse means, "We heard that the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim, and there we found it."

Ver. 7 must be taken as immediately connected with the preceding. If the same persons who found the Ark still speak, the "tabernacle" into which they encourage each other to enter must be the tent within which, as David said, it dwelt "in curtains"; and the joyful utterance of an earlier age will then be quoted by the still happier generation who, at the moment while they sing, see the sacred symbol of the Divine Presence enshrined within the Holy Place of the Temple. At all events, the petitions which follow are most naturally regarded as chanted forth at that supreme moment, though it is possible that the same feeling of the solidity of the nation in all generations, which, as applied to the reigning family, is seen

in ver. 1, may account for the worshippers in the new Temple identifying themselves with the earlier ones who brought up the Ark to Zion. The Church remains the same, while its individual members change.

The first of the petitions is partly taken from the invocation in Numb. x. 35, when "the Ark set forward"; but there it was a prayer for guidance on the march; here, for Jehovah's continuance in His fixed abode. It had wandered far and long. It had been planted in Shiloh, but had deserted that sanctuary which He had once loved. It had tarried for awhile at Mizpeh and at Bethel. It had been lost on the field of Aphek, been borne in triumph through Philistine cities, and sent back thence in terror. It had lain for three months in the house of Obed-edom, and for twenty years been hidden at Kirjath-jearim. It had been set with glad acclaim in the tabernacle provided by David, and now it stands in the Temple. There may it abide and go no more out! Solomon and Hiram and all their workmen may have done their best, and the result of their toils may stand gleaming in the sunlight in its fresh beauty; but something more is needed. Not till the Ark is in the Shrine does the Glory fill the house. The lesson is for all ages. Our organisations and works are incomplete without that quickening Presence. It will surely be given if we desire it. When His Church prays, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy strength." His answer is swift and sure. "Lo, I am with you always."

From this petition all the others flow. If "the Ark of Thy strength" dwells with us, we too shall be strong, and have that Might for our inspiration as well as our shield. "Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness." The pure vestments of the priests were symbols of stainless character, befitting the ministers of a holy God. The psalmist prays that the symbol may truly represent the inner reality. He distinguishes between priests and the mass of the people; but in the Church to-day, as indeed in the original constitution of Israel, all are priests, and must be clothed in a righteousness which they receive from above. They do not weave that robe, but they must "put on" the garment which Christ gives them. Righteousness is no hazy, theological virtue, having little to do with every-day life and small resemblance to secular morality. To be good, gentle, and just, self-forgetting and self-ruling, to practise the virtues which all men call "lovely and of good report," and to consecrate them all by reference to Him in whom they dwell united and complete, is to be righteous; and that righteousness is the garb required of, and given by God to, all those who seek it and minister in His Temple.

"Let Thy favoured ones utter shrill cries of joy." Surely, if they dwell in the Temple, gladness will not fail them. True religion is joyful. If a man has only to lift his eyes to see the Ark, what but averted eyes should make him sad? True, there are enemies, but we are close to the fountain of strength. True, there are sins, but we can receive the garment of righteousness. True, there are wants, but the sacrifice whereof "the meek shall eat and be satisfied" is at hand. There is much unreached as yet, but there is a present God. So we may "walk all the day in the light of His countenance," and realise the truth of the paradox of always rejoicing, though sometimes we sorrow.

The final petition is for the anointed king, that his prayers may be heard. To "turn away the

face" is a graphic expression, drawn from the attitude of one who refuses to listen to a suppliant. It is harsh in the extreme to suppose that the king referred to is David himself, though Hupfeld and others take that view. The reference to Solomon is natural.

Such are the psalmist's petitions. The answers follow in the remainder of the psalm, which, as already noticed, is parted in two by an interjected verse (ver. 13), breaking the continuity of the Divine Voice. The shape of the responses is determined by the form of the desires, and in every case the answer is larger than the prayer. The Divine utterance begins with a parallel between the oath of David and that of God. David "swore to Jehovah." Yes, but "Jehovah has sworn to David." That is grander and deeper. With this may be connected the similar parallel in vv. 13 and 14 with ver. 5. David had sought to "find a habitation" for Jehovah. But He Himself had chosen His habitation long ago. He is throned there now, not because of David's choice or Solomon's work, but because His will had settled the place of His feet. These correspondences of expression point to the great truth that God is His own all-sufficient reason. He is not won to dwell with men by their importunity, but in the depths of His unchangeable love lies the reason why He abides with us unthankful. The promise given in ver. 12, which has respect to the closing petition of the preceding part, is substantially that contained in 2 Sam. vii. Similar references to that fundamental promise to David are found in Psalm lxxxix., with which this psalm is sometimes taken to be parallel; but that psalm comes from a time when the faithful promise seemed to have failed for evermore, and breathes a sadness which is alien to the spirit of this song.

Ver. 13 appears to be spoken by the people. It breaks the stream of promises. God has been speaking, but now, for a moment, He is spoken of. His choice of Zion for His dwelling is the glad fact, which the congregation feels so borne in on its consciousness that it breaks forth into speech. The "For" at the beginning of the verse gives a striking sequence, assigning, as it does, the Divine selection of Zion for His abode, as the reason for the establishment of the Davidic monarchy. If the throne was set up in Jerusalem, because there God would dwell, how solemn the obligation thereby laid on its occupant to rule as God's viceroy, and how secure each in turn might feel, if he discharged the obligations of his office, that God would grant to the kingdom an equal date with the duration of His own abode! Throne and Temple are indissolubly connected.

With ver. 14 the Divine Voice resumes, and echoes the petitions of the earlier part. The psalmist asked God to arise into His rest, and He answers by granting the request with the added promise of perpetuity: "Here will I dwell *for ever*." He adds a promise which had not been asked—abundance for all, and bread to fill even the poor. The psalmist asked that the priests might be clothed in righteousness, and the answer promises robes of *salvation*, which is the perfecting and most glorious issue of righteousness. The psalmist asked that God's favoured ones might utter shrill cries of joy, and God replies with an emphatic reduplication of the word, which implies the exuberance and continuance of the gladness. The psalmist asked for favour to the anointed, and God replies by expanded and magnificent promises. The "horn" is an emblem of power.

It shall continually "sprout"—*i.e.*, the might of the royal house shall continually increase. The "lamp for Mine anointed" may be simply a metaphor for enduring prosperity and happiness, but many expositors take it to be a symbol of the continuance of the Davidic house, as in 1 Kings xv. 4, where, however, the word employed is not the same as that used here, though closely connected with it. The promise of perpetuity to the house of David does not fit into the context as well as that of splendour and joy, and it has already been given in ver. 12. Victory will attend the living representative of David, his foes being clothed by Jehovah with shame—*i.e.*, being foiled in their hostile attempts—while their confusion is as a dark background, against which the radiance of his diadem sparkles the more brightly. These large promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, of the seed of David; and the psalm is Messianic, as presenting the ideal which it is sure shall be realised, and which is so in Him alone.

The Divine promises teach the great truth that God over-answers our desires, and puts to shame the poverty of our petitions by the wealth of His gifts. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," for the measure of His doing is none other than "according to the Power that worketh in us," and the measure of that Power is none other than "the working of the strength of His might, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places."

PSALM CXXXIII.

- 1 Behold, how good and how pleasant [it is]
That brethren dwell in unity!
- 2 Like the precious oil on the head,
Flowing down on the beard,
[Even] Aaron's beard,
That flows down on the opening of his garments.
- 3 Like the dew of Hermon, that flows down on
the mountains of Zion.
For there Jehovah has commanded the blessing,
Life for evermore.

It is natural to suppose that this psalm was occasioned by, or at least refers to, the gathering of the pilgrims or restored exiles in Jerusalem. The patriot-poet's heart glows at the sight of the assembled multitudes, and he points with exultation to the good and fair sight. Like the other short psalms in this group, this one is the expression of a single thought—the blessing of unity, and that not merely as shown in the family, but in the church-state of the restored Israel. The remembrance of years of scattering among the nations, and of the schism of the Northern tribes, makes the sight of an united Israel the more blessed, even though its numbers are small.

The psalm begins with a "Behold," as if the poet would summon others to look on the goodly spectacle which, in reality or in imagination, is spread before him. Israel is gathered together, and the sight is good, as securing substantial benefits, and "pleasant," as being lovely. The original in ver. 1 *b* runs, "That brethren dwell *also* together." The "*also*" suggests that, in addition to local union, there should be heart harmony, as befits brothers. To speak in modern dialect, the psalmist cares little for external unity, if the spirit of oneness does not animate the corporate whole.

His two lovely metaphors or parables set forth

the same thought—namely, the all-diffusive, all-blessing nature of such inward concord. The repetition in both figures of the same word, "flows down," is not merely due to the "step-like" structure common to this with other of the pilgrim psalms, but is the key to its meaning.

In the first emblem, the consecrating oil, poured on Aaron's head, represents the gracious spirit of concord between brethren. The emblem is felicitous by reason of the preciousness, the fragrance, and the manifold uses of oil; but these are only to be taken into account in a subordinate degree, if at all. The one point of comparison is the flow of the oil from the priestly head on to the beard and thence to the garments. It is doubtful whether ver. 2 *d* refers to the oil or to the beard of the high priest. The latter reference is preferred by many, but the former is more accordant with the parallelism, and with the use of the word "flows down," which can scarcely be twice used in regard to oil and dew, the main subjects in the figures, and be taken in an entirely different reference in the intervening clause. The "opening" (*lit. mouth*) of the robe is the upper edge or collar, the aperture through which the wearer's head was passed.

The second figure illustrates the same thought of the diffusive blessing of concord, but it presents some difficulty. How can the dew of Hermon in the far north fall on the mountains of Zion? Some commentators, as Delitzsch, try to make out that "an abundant dew in Jerusalem might rightly be accounted for by the influence of the cold current of air sweeping down from the north over Hermon." But that is a violent supposition; and there is no need to demand meteorological accuracy from a poet. It is the one dew which falls on both mountains; and since Hermon towers high above the lower height of Zion, and is visited with singular abundance of the nightly blessing, it is no inadmissible poetic licence to say that the loftier hill transmits it to the lesser. Such community of blessing is the result of fraternal concord, whereby the high serve the lowly, and no man grudgingly keeps anything to himself, but all share in the good of each. Dew, like oil, is fitted for this symbolic use, by reason of qualities which, though they do not come prominently into view, need not be wholly excluded. It refreshes the thirsty ground and quickens vegetation; so fraternal concord, falling gently on men's spirits, and linking distant ones together by a mysterious chain of transmitted good, will help to revive failing strength and refresh parched places.

That brotherly unity is blessed, not only because it diffuses itself, and so blesses all in whose hearts it dwells, but also because it is the condition on which still higher gifts are spread among brethren by their brethren's mediation. God Himself pours on men the sacred anointing of His Divine Spirit and the dew of His quickening influences. When His servants are knit together, as they should be, they impart to one another the spiritual gifts received from above. When Christians are truly one as brethren, God's grace will fructify through each to all.

Ver. 3 *b, c*, seem to assign the reason why the dew of Hermon will descend on Zion—*i. e.*, why the blessings of brotherly concord should there especially be realised. There God has appointed to be stored His blessing of life; therefore it becomes those who, dwelling there, receive that blessing, to be knit together in closest bonds, and to impart to their brethren what they receive from

the Fountain of all good. That Zion should not be the home of concord, or that Jerusalem should not be the city of peace, contradicts both the name of the city and the priceless gift which Jehovah has placed there for all its citizens.

PSALM CXXXIV.

- 1 Behold, bless Jehovah, all ye servants of Jehovah,
Who stand in the house of Jehovah in the night seasons.
- 2 Lift up your hands to the sanctuary,
And bless Jehovah.
- 3 Jehovah bless thee out of Zion,
The maker of heaven and earth!

THIS fragment of song closes the pilgrim psalms after the manner of a blessing. It is evidently antiphonal, vv. 1, 2, being a greeting, the givers of which are answered in ver. 4 by a corresponding salutation from the receivers. Who are the parties to the little dialogue is doubtful. Some have thought of two companies of priestly watchers meeting as they went their rounds in the Temple; others, more probably, take vv. 1, 2, to be addressed by the congregation to the priests, who had charge of the nightly service in the Temple, while ver. 3 is the response of the latter, addressed to the speakers of vv. 1, 2. 1 Chron. ix. 33 informs us that there was such a nightly service, of the nature of which, however, nothing is known. The designation "servants of Jehovah" here denotes not the people, but the priests, for whose official ministrations "stand" is a common term. They are exhorted to fill the night with prayer as well as watchfulness, and to let their hearts go up in blessing to Jehovah. The voice of praise should echo through the silent night and float over the sleeping city. The congregation is about to leave the crowded courts at the close of a day of worship, and now gives this parting salutation and charge to those who remain.

The answer in ver. 3 is addressed to each individual of the congregation—"Jehovah bless thee!" and it invokes on each a share in the blessing which, according to the preceding psalm, "Jehovah has commanded" in Zion. The watchers who remain in the sanctuary do not monopolise its blessings. These stream out by night, as by day, to all true hearts; and they are guaranteed by the creative omnipotence of Jehovah, the thought of which recurs so often in these pilgrim psalms, and may be due to the revulsion from idolatry consequent on the Captivity and Restoration.

With this sweet interchange of greeting and exhortation to continual worship, this group of psalms joyously ends.

PSALM CXXXV.

- 1 Hallelujah!
Praise the name of Jehovah.
Praise, ye servants of Jehovah,
- 2 Who stand in the house of Jehovah,
In the courts of the house of our God.
- 3 Praise Jah, for Jehovah is good;
Harp to His name, for it is pleasant.
- 4 For Jah has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel for His own possession.

- 5 For I—I know that Jehovah is great,
And [that] our Lord is above all gods.
- 6 Whatsoever Jehovah wills He has done,
In the heaven and in the earth,
In the seas and all depths;
- 7 Who makes the vapours go up from the end
of the earth,
He makes lightnings for the rain,
Who brings forth wind from His storehouses.
- 8 Who smote the first-born of Egypt,
Both of man and of cattle;
- 9 He sent signs and wonders into thy midst, O
Egypt,
On Pharaoh and all his servants.
- 10 Who smote many nations,
And slew mighty kings;
- 11 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
And Og, king of Bashan;
- 12 And gave their land [as] an inheritance,
An inheritance to Israel His people.
- 13 Jehovah. Thy name [endures] for ever,
Jehovah, Thy memorial [endures] to generation
after generation
- 14 For Jehovah will right His people,
And will relent concerning His servants.
- 15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
The work of the hands of men.
- 16 A mouth is theirs—and they cannot speak;
Eyes are theirs—and they cannot see;
- 17 Ears are theirs—and they cannot give ear;
Yea, there is no breath at all in their mouths.
- 18 Like them shall those who make them be,
[Even] every one that trusts in them.
- 19 House of Israel, bless ye Jehovah;
House of Aaron, bless ye Jehovah;
- 20 House of Levi, bless ye Jehovah;
Ye who fear Jehovah, bless ye Jehovah.
- 21 Blessed be Jehovah from Zion,
Who dwells in Jerusalem!
Hallelujah!

LIKE psalms xcvii. and xcvi., this is a cento, or piece of mosaic work, apparently intended as a call to worship Jehovah in the Temple. His greatness, as manifested in Nature, and especially in His planting Israel in its inheritance, is set forth as the reason for praise; and the contemptuous contrast of the nothingness of idols is repeated from Psalm cxv., and followed, as there, by an exhortation to Israel to cleave to Him. We have not here to do with a song which gushed fresh from the singer's heart, but with echoes of many strains which a devout and meditative soul had made its own. The flowers are arranged in a new bouquet, because the poet had long delighted in their fragrance. The ease with which he blends into a harmonious whole fragments from such diverse sources tells how familiar he was with these, and how well he loved them.

Vv. 1-4 are an invocation to praise Jehovah, and largely consist of quotations or allusions. Thus Psalm cxxxiv. 1 underlies vv. 1, 2. But here the reference to nightly praises is omitted, and the summons is addressed not only to those who stand in the house of Jehovah, but to those who stand in its courts. That expansion may mean that the call to worship is here directed to the people as well as to the priests (so in ver. 19). Ver. 3 closely resembles Psalm cxlvii. 1, but the question of priority may be left undecided. Since the act of

praise is said to be "pleasant" in Psalm cxlvii. 1. it is best to refer the same word here to the same thing, and not, as some would do, to the Name, or to take it as an epithet of Jehovah. To a loving soul praise is a delight. The songs which are not winged by the singer's joy in singing will not rise high. True worship pours out its notes as birds do theirs—in order to express gladness which, unuttered, loads the heart. Ver. 4 somewhat passes beyond the bounds of the invocation proper, and anticipates the subsequent part of the psalm. Israel's prerogative is so great to this singer that it forces utterance at once, though "out of season," as correct critics would say. But the throbs of a grateful heart are not always regular. It is impossible to keep the reasons for praise out of the summons to praise. Ver. 4 joyfully and humbly accepts the wonderful title given in Deut. vii. 6.

In vv. 5-7 God's majesty as set forth in Nature is hymned. The psalmist says emphatically in ver. 5 "I—I know," and implies the privilege which he shared, in common with his fellow-Israelites (who appear in the "our" of the next clause), of knowing what the heathen did not know—how highly Jehovah was exalted above all their gods. Ver. 6 is from Psalm cxv. 3, with the expansion of defining the all-inclusive sphere of God's sovereignty. Heaven, earth, seas, and depths cover all space. The enumeration of the provinces of His dominion prepares for that of the phases of His power in Nature, which is quoted with slight change from Jer. x. 13. li. 16. The mysterious might which gathers from some unknown region the filmy clouds which grow, no man knows how, in the clear blue; the power which weds in strange companionship the fire of the lightning flash and the torrents of rain; the controlling hand which urges forth the invisible wind,—these call for praise.

But while the psalmist looks on physical phenomena with a devout poet's eye, he turns from these to expatiate rather on what Jehovah has done for Israel. Psalmists are never weary of drawing confidence and courage for to-day from the deeds of the Exodus and the Conquest. Ver. 8 is copied from Exod. xiii. 15, and the whole section is saturated with phraseology drawn from Deuteronomy. Ver. 13 is from Exod. iii. 15, the narrative of the theophany at the Bush. That Name, proclaimed then as the basis of Moses' mission and Israel's hope, is now, after so many centuries and sorrows, the same, and it will endure for ever. Ver. 14 is from Deut. xxxii. 36. Jehovah will right His people—*i. e.*, deliver them from oppressors—which is the same thing as "relent concerning His servants," since His wrath was the reason of their subjection to their foes. That judicial deliverance of Israel is at once the sign that His Name, His revealed character, continues the same, unexhausted and unchanged for ever, and the reason why the Name shall continue as the object of perpetual adoration and trust.

Vv. 15-20 are taken bodily from Psalm cxv., to which the reader is referred. Slight abbreviations and one notable difference occur. In ver. 17 *b*, "Yea, there is no breath at all in their mouths," takes the place of "A nose is theirs—and they cannot smell." The variation has arisen from the fact that the particle of strong affirmation (*yea*) is spelt like the noun "nose," and that the word for "breath" resembles the verb "smell." The psalmist plays upon his original, and by his variation makes the expression of the idols' lifelessness stronger.

The final summons to praise, with which the end of the psalm returns to its beginning, is also moulded on Psalm cxv. 9-11, with the addition of "the house of Levi" to the three groups mentioned there, and the substitution of a call to "bless" for the original invitation to "trust." Ver. 21 looks back to the last verse of the preceding psalm, and significantly modifies it. There, as in Psalm cxviii., Jehovah's blessing comes out of Zion to His people. Here the people's blessing in return goes from Zion and rises to Jehovah. They gathered there for worship, and dwelt with Him in His city and Temple. Swift interchange of the God-given blessing, which consists in mercies and gifts of gracious deliverance, and of the human blessing, which consists in thanksgiving and praise, fills the hours of those who dwell with Jehovah, as guests in His house, and walk the streets of the city which He guards and Himself inhabits.

PSALM CXXXVI.

- 1 Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 2 Give thanks to the God of gods,
For his lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 4 To Him who alone does great wonders,
For his lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 5 To Him who made the heavens by understanding,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 6 To Him who spread the earth above the waters,
For his lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 7 To Him who made great lights,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 8 The sun to rule by day,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 9 The moon and stars to rule by night,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 10 To Him who smote the Egyptians in their first-born,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 11 And brought forth Israel from their midst,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 12 With mighty strong hand and outstretched arm,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 13 To Him that cut the Red Sea into parts,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 14 And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 15 And shook out Pharaoh and his host into the Red Sea,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 16 To Him who led His people in the wilderness,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
- 17 To Him who smote great kings,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 18 And slew mighty kings,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 19 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 20 And Og, king of Bashan,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 21 And gave their land for an inheritance,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
- 22 An inheritance to Israel His servant,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.

- 23 Who in our low estate remembered us,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever;
24 And tore us from the grasp of our adversaries,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
25 Who gives bread to all flesh,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.
26 Give thanks to the God of heaven,
For His lovingkindness endures for ever.

THIS psalm is evidently intended for liturgic use. It contains reminiscences of many parts of Scripture, and is especially based on the previous psalm, which it follows closely in vv. 10-18, and quotes directly in vv. 19-22. Delitzsch points out that if these quoted verses are omitted, the psalm falls into triplets. It would then also contain twenty-two verses, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The general trend of thought is like that of Psalm cxxxv.; but the addition in each verse of the refrain gives a noble swing and force to this exulting song.

The first triplet is a general invocation to praise, coloured by the phraseology of Deuteronomy. Vv. 2 *a* and 3 *a* quote Deut. x. 17. The second and third triplets (vv. 4-9) celebrate Jehovah's creative power. "Doeth great wonders" (ver. 4) is from Psalm lxxii. 18. The thought of the Divine Wisdom as the creative agent occurs in Psalm civ. 24, and attains noble expression in Prov. iii. In ver. 6 the word rendered *spread* is from the same root as that rendered "firmament" in Genesis. The office of the heavenly bodies to rule day and night is taken from Gen. i. But the psalm looks at the story of Creation from an original point of view, when it rolls out in chorus, after each stage of that work, that its motive lay in the eternal lovingkindness of Jehovah. Creation is an act of Divine love. That is the deepest truth concerning all things visible. They are the witnesses, as they are the result, of lovingkindness which endures for ever.

Vv. 10-22 pass from world-wide manifestations of that creative lovingkindness to those specially affecting Israel. If vv. 19-22 are left out of notice, there are three triplets in which the Exodus, desert life, and conquest of Caanan are the themes;—the first (vv. 10-12) recounting the departure; the second (vv. 13-15) the passage of the Red Sea; the third (vv. 16-18) the guidance during the forty years and the victories over enemies. The whole is largely taken from the preceding psalm, and has also numerous allusions to other parts of Scripture. Ver. 12 *a* is found in Deut. iv. 34, etc. The word for dividing the Red Sea is peculiar. It means to hew in pieces or in two, and is used for cutting in halves the child in Solomon's judgment (1 Kings iii. 25); while the word "parts" is a noun from the same root, and is found in Gen. xv. 17, to describe the two portions into which Abraham clave the carcasses. Thus, as with a sword, Jehovah hewed the sea in two, and His people passed between the parts, as between the halves of the covenant sacrifice. In ver. 15 the word describing Pharaoh's destruction is taken from Exod. xiv. 27, and vividly describes it as a "shaking out," as one would vermin or filth from a robe.

In the last triplet (vv. 23-25) the singer comes to the Israel of the present. It, too, had experienced Jehovah's remembrance in its time of need, and felt the merciful grasp of His hand plucking it, with loving violence, from the claws of the lion. The word for "low estate" and that for "tore us from the grasp" are only found besides in late

writings—the former in Eccles. x. 6, and the latter in Lam. v. 8.

But the song will not close with reference only to Israel's blessings. "He gives bread to all flesh." The lovingkindness which flashes forth even in destructive acts, and is manifested especially in bringing Israel back from exile, stretches as wide in its beneficence as it did in its first creative acts, and sustains all flesh which it has made. Therefore the final call to praise, which rounds off the psalm by echoing its beginning, does not name Him by the Name which implied Israel's special relation, but by that by which other peoples could and did address Him, "the God of heaven," from whom all good comes down on all the earth.

PSALM CXXXVII.

- 1 By the streams of Babylon, there we sat, yea,
wept,
When we remembered Zion.
- 2 On the willows in the midst thereof
We hung our harps.
- 3 For there our captors required of us words of
song,
And our plunderers [required of us] mirth;
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
- 4 How can we sing Jehovah's songs
In a strange land?
- 5 If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget!
- 6 May my tongue cleave to my palate,
If I remember thee not,
If I set not Jerusalem
Above the summit of my joy!
- 7 Remember, Jehovah, to the children of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Lay bare, lay bare,
To the foundation therein."
- 8 Daughter of Babylon, thou that art laid waste,
Happy he that requites thee
Thy doing which thou hast done to us!
- 9 Happy he that seizes and dashes thy little ones
Against the rock!

THE captivity is past, as the tenses in vv. 1-3 show, and as is manifest from the very fact that its miseries have become themes for a psalm. Grief must be somewhat removed before it can be sung. But the strains of triumph heard in other psalms are wanting in this, which breathes passionate love for Jerusalem, tinged with sadness still. The date of the psalm is apparently the early days of the Return, when true-hearted patriots still felt the smart of recent bondage and sadly gazed on the dear ruins of the city. The singer passes in brief compass from tender music breathing plaintive remembrance of the captives' lot, to passionate devotion, and at last to an outburst of vehement imprecation, magnificent in its fiery rush, amply explicable by Israel's wrongs and Babylon's crimes, and yet to be frankly acknowledged as moving on a lower plane of sentiment than is permissible to those who have learned to repay scorn with gentleness, hate with love, and injuries with desires for the injurer's highest good. The coals of fire which this psalmist scatters among Israel's foes are not those which Christ's servants are bidden to heap on their enemies' heads.

Nothing sweeter or sadder was ever written than that delicate, deeply felt picture of the exiles in the early verses of the psalm. We see them

sitting, as too heavy-hearted for activity, and half noting, as adding to their grief, the unfamiliar landscape round them, with its innumerable canals, and the monotonous "willows" (rather, a species of poplar) stretching along their banks. How unlike this flat, tame fertility to the dear home-land, with its hills and glens and rushing streams! The psalmist was probably a Temple singer, but he did not find solace even in "the harp, his sole remaining joy." No doubt many of the exiles made themselves at home in captivity, but there were some more keenly sensitive or more devout, who found that it was better to remember Zion and weep than to enjoy Babylon. "Alas, alas! how much less it is to hold converse with others than to remember thee!" So they sat, like Michael Angelo's brooding figure of Jeremiah in the Sistine Chapel, silent, motionless, lost in bitter-sweet memories.

But there was another reason than their own sadness for hanging their idle harps upon the willows. Their coarse oppressors bade them sing to make mirth. They wished entertainment from the odd sounds of foreign music, or they were petulantly angry that such dumb hang-dog people should keep sullen faces, like un-illuminated windows, when their masters were pleased to be merry. So, like tipsy revellers, they called out "Sing!" The request drove the iron deeper into sad hearts, for it came from those who had made the misery. They had led away the captives, and now they bid them make sport.

The word rendered *plunderers* is difficult. The translation adopted here is that of the LXX. and others. It requires a slight alteration of reading, which is approved by Hupfeld (as an alternative), Perowne, Baethgen, Graetz, etc. Cheyne follows Halevy in preferring another conjectural alteration which gives "dancers" ("and of our dancers, festive glee"), but admits that the other view is "somewhat more natural." The roystering Babylonians did not care what kind of songs their slaves sang—Temple music would do as well as any other; but the devout psalmist and his fellows shrank from profaning the sacred songs that praised Jehovah by making them parts of a heathen banquet. Such sacrilege would have been like Belshazzar's using the Temple vessels for his orgy. "Give not that which is holy to dogs." And the singers were not influenced by superstition, but by reverence and by sadness, when they could not sing these songs in that strange land. No doubt it was a fact that the Temple music fell into desuetude during the Captivity. There are moods and there are scenes in which it is profanation to utter the deep music which may be sounding on perpetually in the heart. "Songs unheard" are sometimes not only "sweetest," but the truest worship.

The psalmist's remembrances of Babylon are suddenly broken off. His heart burns as he broods on that past, and then lifts his eyes to see how forlorn and forgotten-like Jerusalem stands, as if appealing to her sons for help. A rush of emotion sweeps over him, and he breaks into a passion of vowed loyalty to the mother city. He has Jerusalem written on his heart. It is noteworthy that her remembrance *was* the exiles' crown of sorrow; it now becomes the apex of the singer's joy. No private occasion for gladness so moves the depths of a soul, smitten with the noble and ennobling love of the city of God, as does its prosperity. Alas that the so-called citizens of the true city of God should have so tepid interest in its welfare,

and be so much more keenly touched by individual than by public prosperity or adversity! Alas that so often they should neither weep when they remember its bondage nor exult in its advancement!

Ver. 5 *b* is emphatic by its incompleteness. "May my right hand forget!" What? Some word like "power," "cunning," or "movement" may be supplied. It would be as impossibly unnatural for the poet to forget Jerusalem as for his hand to forget to move or cease to be conscious of its connection with his body.

Ver. 6 *d* reads literally "Above the head of my joy": an expression which may either mean the summit of my joy—*i. e.*, my greatest joy; or the sum of my joy—*i. e.*, my whole joy. In either case the well-being of Jerusalem is the psalmist's climax of gladness; and so utterly does he lose himself in the community founded by God, that all his springs of felicity are in her. He had chosen the better part. Unselfish gladness is the only lasting bliss; and only they drink of an unfailing river of pleasures whose chiefest delight lies in beholding and sharing in the rebuilding of God's city on earth.

The lightning flashes of the last part of the psalm need little commenting. The desire for the destruction of Zion's enemies, which they express, is not the highest mood of the loyal citizen of God's city, and is to be fully recognised as not in accordance with Christian morality. But it has been most unfairly judged, as if it were nothing nobler than ferocious thirsting for vengeance. It is a great deal more. It is desire for retribution, heavy as the count of crimes which demands it is heavy. It is a solemn appeal to God to sweep away the enemies of Zion, who, in hating her, rebelled against Him. First, the psalmist turns to the treacherous kinsmen of Israel, the Edomites, who had, as Obadiah says, "rejoiced over the children of Judah in the days of their destruction" (Obad. 12), and stimulated the work of rasing the city. Then the singer turns to Babylon, and salutes her as already laid waste; for he is a seer as well as a singer, and is so sure of the judgment to be accomplished that it is as good as done. The most repellent part of the imprecation, that which contemplates the dreadful destruction of tender infants, has its harshness somewhat softened by the fact that it is the echo of Isaiah's prophecy concerning Babylon (Isa. xiii. 16-18), and still further by the consideration that the purpose of the apparently barbarous cruelty was to make an end of a "seed of evil-doers," whose continuance meant misery for wide lands.

Undoubtedly, the words are stern, and the temper they embody is harsh discord, when compared with the Christian spirit. But they are not the utterances of mere ferocious revenge. Rather they proclaim God's judgments, not with the impassiveness, indeed, which best befits the executors of such terrible sentences, but still less with the malignant gratification of sanguinary vengeance which has been often attributed to them. Perhaps, if some of their modern critics had been under the yoke from which this psalmist has been delivered, they would have understood a little better how a good man of that age could rejoice that Babylon was fallen and all its race extirpated. Perhaps, it would do modern tender-heartedness no harm to have a little more iron infused into its gentleness, and to lay to heart that the King of Peace must first be King of Righteousness, and that Destruction of evil is the complement of Preservation of Good.

PSALM CXXXVIII.

- 1 I will thank Thee, Jehovah, with my whole heart,
In presence of the gods will I harp to Thee.
- 2 I will worship toward Thy holy Temple,
And will thank Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and for Thy truth,
For Thou hast magnified Thy promise above all Thy name.
- 3 In the day [when] I called Thou answeredst me,
Thou didst make me bold—in my soul [welled up] strength.
- 4 Jehovah, all the kings of the earth shall thank Thee,
When they have heard the words of Thy mouth.
- 5 And they shall sing of the ways of Jehovah,
For great is the glory of Jehovah.
- 6 For Jehovah is high, and the lowly He regards,
And the lofty from afar off He knows.
- 7 If I walk in the midst of trouble Thou wilt revive me,
Against the wrath of mine enemies Thou wilt stretch forth Thy hand,
And Thy right hand shall save me.
- 8 Jehovah will complete [all] that concerns me;
Jehovah, Thy lovingkindness [endures] for ever;
The works of Thy hands abandon not.

THIS is the first of a group of eight psalms attributed to David in the superscriptions. It precedes the closing hallelujah psalms, and thus stands where a "find" of Davidic psalms at a late date would naturally be put. In some cases, there is no improbability in the assigned authorship; and this psalm is certainly singularly unlike those which precede it, and has many affinities with the earlier psalms ascribed to David.

In reading it, one feels the return to familiar thoughts and tones. The fragrance it exhales wakes memories of former songs. But the resemblance may be due to the imitative habit so marked in the last book of the Psalter. If it is a late psalm, the speaker is probably the personified Israel, and the deliverance which seems to the singer to have transcended all previous manifestations of the Divine name is the Restoration, which has inspired so many of the preceding psalms. The supporters of the Davidic authorship, on the other hand, point to the promise to David by Nathan of the perpetuity of the kingdom in his line, as the occasion of the psalmist's triumph.

The structure of the psalm is simple. It falls into three parts, of which the two former consist of three verses each, and the last of two. In the first, the singer vows praise and recounts God's wondrous dealings with him (vv. 1-3); in the second, he looks out over all the earth in the confidence that these blessings, when known, will bring the world to worship (vv. 4-6); and in the third, he pleads for the completion to himself of mercies begun (vv. 7, 8).

The first part is the outpouring of a thankful heart for recent great blessing, which has been the fulfilment of a Divine promise. So absorbed in his blessedness is the singer that he neither names Jehovah as the object of his thanks, nor specifies what has set his heart vibrating. The great Giver and the great gift are magnified by being unspoken.

To whom but Jehovah could the current of the psalmist's praise set? He feels that Jehovah's mercy to him requires him to become the herald of His name; and therefore he vows, in lofty consciousness of his mission, that he will ring out God's praises in presence of false gods, whose worshippers have no such experience to loose their tongues. Dead gods have dumb devotees; the servants of the living Jehovah receive His acts of power, that they may proclaim His name.

The special occasion for this singer's praise has been some act, in which Jehovah's faithfulness was very conspicuously shown. "Thou hast magnified Thy promise above all Thy name." If the history of David underlies the psalm, it is most natural to interpret the "promise" as that of the establishment of the monarchy. But the fulfilment, not the giving, of a promise is its magnifying, and hence one would incline to take the reference to be to the great manifestation of God's truth in restoring Israel to its land. In any case the expression is peculiar, and has induced many attempts at emendation. Baethgen would strike out "Thy name" as a dittograph from the previous clause, and thus gets the reading "done great things beyond Thy word"—*i. e.*, transcended the promise in fulfilment—which yields a good sense. Others make a slight alteration in the word "Thy name," and read it "Thy heavens," supposing that the psalmist is making the usual comparison between the manifestation of Divine power in Nature and in Revelation, or in the specific promise in question. But the text as it stands, though peculiar, is intelligible, and yields a meaning very appropriate to the singer's astonished thankfulness. A heart amazed by the greatness of recent blessings is ever apt to think that they, glittering in fresh beauty, are greater, as they are nearer and newer, than the mercies which it has only heard of as of old. To-day brings growing revelations of Jehovah to the waiting heart. The psalmist is singing, not dissertating. It is quite true that if his words are measured by the metaphysical theologian's foot-rule, they are inaccurate, for "the name of God cannot be surpassed by any single act of His, since every single act is but a manifestation of that name"; but thankfulness does not speak by rule, and the psalmist means to say that, so great has been the mercy given to him and so signal its confirmation of the Divine promise, that to him, at all events, that whole name blazes with new lustre, and breathes a deeper music. So should each man's experience be the best teacher of what God is to all men.

In ver. 3 *b* the psalmist uses a remarkable expression, in saying that Jehovah had made him bold, or, as the word is literally, *proud*. The following words are a circumstantial or subsidiary clause, and indicate how the consciousness of in-breathed strength welling up in his soul gave him lofty confidence to confront foes.

The second part (vv. 4-6) resembles many earlier psalms in connecting the singer's deliverance with a world-wide manifestation of God's name. Such a consciousness of a vocation to be the world's evangelist is appropriate either to David or the collective Israel. Especially is it natural, and, as a fact, occurs in post-exilic psalms. Here "the words of Thy mouth" are equivalent to the promise already spoken of, the fulfilment of which has shown that Jehovah the High has regard to the lowly—*i. e.*, to the psalmist; and "knows the lofty"—*i. e.*, his oppressors—"afar off." He reads their characters thoroughly, without, as it

were, needing to approach for minute study. The implication is that He will thwart their plans and judge the plotters. This great lesson of Jehovah's providence, care for the lowly, faithfulness to His word, has exemplification in the psalmist's history; and when it is known, the lofty ones of the earth shall learn the principles of Jehovah's ways, and become lowly recipients of His favours and adoring singers of His great glory.

The glowing vision is not yet fulfilled; but the singer was cherishing no illusions when he sang. It is true that the story of God's great manifestation of Himself in Christ, in which He has magnified His Word above all His name, is one day to win the world. It is true that the revelation of a God who regards the lowly is the conquering Gospel which shall bow all hearts.

In the third part (vv. 7, 8), the psalmist comes back to his own needs, and takes to his heart the calming assurance born of his experience, that he bears a charmed life. He but speaks the confidence which should strengthen every heart that rests on God. Such an one may be girdled about by troubles, but he will have an inner circle traced round him, within which no evil can venture. He may walk in the valley of the shadow of death unfearing, for God will hold his soul in life. Foes may pour out floods of enmity and wrath, but one strong hand will be stretched out against (or over) the wild deluge, and will draw the trustful soul out of its rush on to the safe shore. So was the psalmist assured; so may and should those be who have yet greater wonders for which to thank Jehovah.

That last prayer of the psalm blends very beautifully confidence and petition. Its central clause is the basis of both the confidence in its first, and the petition in its last, clause. Because Jehovah's lovingkindness endures for ever, every man on whom His shaping Spirit has begun to work, or His grace in any form to bestow its gifts, may be sure that no exhaustion or change of these is possible. God is not as the foolish tower-builder, who began and was not able to finish. He never stops till He has completed His work; and nothing short of the entire conformity of a soul to His likeness and the filling of it with Himself can be the termination of His loving purpose, or of His achieving grace. Therefore the psalmist "found it in his heart to pray" that God would not abandon the works of His own hands. The prayer appeals to His faithfulness and to His honour. It sets forth the obligations under which God comes by what He has done. It is a prayer which goes straight to His heart; and they who offer it receive the old answer, "I will not leave thee till I have done unto thee that which I have spoken to thee of."

PSALM CXXXIX.

- 1 Jehovah, Thou hast searched me and known [me].
- 2 Thou, Thou knowest my down-sitting and my up-rising,
Thou understandest my thought afar off.
- 3 My walking and my lying down Thou sittest,
And with all my ways Thou art familiar.
- 4 For there is not a word on my tongue,
—Behold, Thou, Jehovah, knowest it all.
- 5 Behind and before Thou hast shut me in,
And hast laid upon me Thy hand.
- 6 [Such] knowledge is too wonderful for me,
Too high, I am not able for it.

- 7 Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?
And whither from Thy face shall I flee?
- 8 If I climb heaven, there art Thou,
Or make Sheol my bed, lo, Thou [art there].
- 9 [If] I lift up the wings of the dawn,
[If] I dwell at the farthest end of the sea,
- 10 Even there Thy hand shall lead me,
And Thy right hand shall hold me.
- 11 And [if] I say, "Only let darkness cover me,
And the light about me be [as] night,"
- 12 Even darkness darkens not to Thee,
And night lightens like day;
As is the darkness, so is the light.
- 13 For Thou, Thou hast formed my reins,
Thou hast woven me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 I will thank Thee for that in dread fashion I
am wondrously made.
Wondrous are Thy works,
And my soul knows [it] well.
- 15 My bones were not hid from Thee,
When I was made in secret,
[And] wrought like embroidery [as] in the
depths of the earth.
- 16 Thine eyes saw my shapeless mass,
And in Thy book were they all written,
The days [that] were fashioned,
And yet there was not one among them.
- 17 And to me how precious are Thy thoughts, O
God,
How great is their sum!
- 18 Would I reckon them, they outnumber the
sand;
I awake—and am still with Thee.
- 19 Oh, if Thou wouldest smite the wicked, O
God!
—And [ye] men of blood, depart from me,
- 20 Who rebel against Thee with wicked deeds,
They lift up [themselves] against Thee
vainly (?)
- 21 Do not I hate them which hate Thee, Jehovah?
And am not I grieved with those who rise
against Thee?
- 22 With perfect hatred I hate them,
They are counted for enemies to me.
- 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart,
Try me and know my thoughts,
- 24 And see if there be any way of grief in me,
And lead me in a way everlasting.

THIS is the noblest utterance in the Psalter of pure contemplative theism, animated and not crushed by the thought of God's omniscience and omnipresence. No less striking than the unequalled force and sublimity with which the psalm hymns the majestic attributes of an all-filling, all-knowing, all-creating God, is the firmness with which the singer's personal relation to that God is grasped. Only in the last verses is there reference to other men. In the earlier parts of the psalm, there are but two beings in the universe—God and the psalmist. With impressive reiteration, God's attributes are gazed on in their bearing on him. Not mere omniscience, but a knowledge which knows *him* altogether, not mere omnipresence, but a presence which *he* can nowhere escape, not mere creative power, but a power which shaped *him*, fill and thrill the psalmist's soul. This is no cold theism, but vivid religion. Conscience and the consciousness of individual relation to God penetrate and vitalise the whole. Hence the sudden

turn to prayer against evil men and for the singer's direction in the right way, which closes the hymn, is natural, however abrupt.

The course of thought is plain. There are four strophes of six verses each,—of which the first (vv. 1-6) magnifies God's omniscience; the second (v. 7-12), His omnipresence; the third (vv. 13-18), His creative act, as the ground of the preceding attributes; and the fourth (vv. 19-24) recoils from men who rebel against such a God, and joyfully submits to the searching of His omniscient eye, and the guidance of His ever-present hand.

The psalmist is so thoroughly possessed by the thought of his personal relation to God that his meditation spontaneously takes the form of address to Him. That form adds much to the impressiveness, but is no rhetorical or poetic artifice. Rather, it is the shape in which such intense consciousness of God cannot but utter itself. How cold and abstract the awestruck sentences become, if we substitute "He" for "Thou," and "men" for "I" and "me"! The first overwhelming thought of God's relation to the individual soul is that He completely knows the whole man. "Omniscience" is a pompous word, which leaves us unaffected by either awe or conscience. But the psalmist's God was a God who came into close touch with him, and the psalmist's religion translated the powerless generality of an attribute referring to the Divine relation to the universe into a continually exercised power having reference to himself. He utters his reverent consciousness of it in ver. 1 in a single clause, and expands that verse in the succeeding ones. "Thou hast searched me" describes a process of minute investigation; "and known [me]," its result in complete knowledge.

That knowledge is then followed out in various directions, and recognised as embracing the whole man in all his modes of action and repose, in all his inner and outward life. Vv. 2 and 3 are substantially parallel. "Down-sitting" and "uprising" correspond to "walking" and "lying down," and both antitheses express the contrast between action and rest. "My thought" in ver. 2 corresponds to "my ways" in ver. 3,—the former referring to the inner life of thought, purpose, and will; the latter to the outward activities which carry these into effect. Ver. 3 is a climax to ver. 2, in so far as it ascribes a yet closer and more accurate knowledge to God. "Thou siftest" or *winnowest* gives a picturesque metaphor for careful and judicial scrutiny which discerns wheat from chaff. "Thou art familiar" implies intimate and habitual knowledge. But thought and action are not the whole man. The power of speech, which the Psalter always treats as solemn and a special object of Divine approval or condemnation, must also be taken into account. Ver. 4 brings it, too, under God's cognisance. The meaning may either be that "There is no word on my tongue [which] Thou dost not know altogether"; or, "The word is not yet on my tongue, [but] lo! Thou knowest," etc. "Before it has shaped itself on the tongue, [much less been launched from it], thou knowest all its secret history" (Kay).

The thought that God knows him through and through blends in the singer's mind with the other, that God surrounds him on every side. Ver. 5 thus anticipates the thought of the next strophe, but presents it rather as the basis of God's knowledge, and as limiting man's freedom. But the

psalmist does not feel that he is imprisoned, or that the hand laid on him is heavy. Rather, he rejoices in the defence of an encompassing God, who shuts off evil from him, as well as shuts him in from self-willed and self-determined action; and he is glad to be held by a hand so gentle as well as strong. "Thou God seest me" may either be a dread or a blessed thought. It may paralyse or stimulate. It should be the ally of conscience, and, while it stirs to all noble deeds, should also emancipate from all slavish fear. An exclamation of reverent wonder and confession of the limitation of human comprehension closes the strophe.

Why should the thought that God is ever with the psalmist be put in the shape of vivid pictures of the impossibility of escape from Him? It is the sense of sin which leads men to hide from God, like Adam among the trees of the garden. The psalmist does not desire thus to flee, but he supposes the case, which would be only too common if men realised God's knowledge of all their ways. He imagines himself reaching the extremities of the universe in vain flight, and stunned by finding God there. The utmost possible height is coupled with the utmost possible depth. Heaven and Sheol equally fail to give refuge from that moveless Face, which confronts the fugitive in both, and fills them as it fills all the intervening dim distances. The dawn flushes the east, and swiftly passes on roseate wings to the farthest bounds of the Mediterranean, which, to the psalmist, represented the extreme west, a land of mystery. In both places and in all the broad lands between, the fugitive would find himself in the grasp of the same hand (compare ver. 5).

Darkness is the friend of fugitives from men; but is transparent to God. In ver. 11 the language is somewhat obscure. The word rendered above "cover" is doubtful, as the Hebrew text reads "bruise," which is quite unsuitable here. Probably there has been textual error, and the slight correction which yields the above sense is to be adopted, as by many moderns. The second clause of the verse carries on the supposition of the first, and is not to be regarded, as in the A. V., as stating the result of the supposition, or, in grammatical language, the apodosis. That begins with ver. 12, and is marked there, as in ver. 10, by "even."

The third strophe (vv. 13-18) grounds the psalmist's relation to God on God's creative act. The mysteries of conception and birth naturally struck the imagination of non-scientific man, and are to the psalmist the direct result of Divine power. He touches them with poetic delicacy and devout awe, casting a veil of metaphor over the mystery, and losing sight of human parents in the clear vision of the Divine Creator. There is room for his thought of the origin of the individual life, behind modern knowledge of embryology. In ver. 13 the word rendered in the A. V. "possessed" is better understood in this context as meaning "formed," and that rendered there "covered" (as in Psalm cxi. 7) here means to *plait* or *weave together*, and picturesquely describes the interlacing bones and sinews, as in Job x. 11. But description passes into adoration in ver. 14. Its language is somewhat obscure. The verb rendered "wondrously made" probably means here "selected" or "distinguished," and represents man as the *chef d'œuvre* of the Divine Artificer. The psalmist cannot contemplate his own frame. God's workmanship, without breaking into thanks, nor without being touched with awe. Every man car-

rics in his own body reasons enough for reverent gratitude.

The word for "bones" in ver. 15 is a collective noun, and might be rendered "bony framework." The mysterious receptacle in which the unborn body takes shape and grows is delicately described as "secret" and likened to the hidden region of the underworld, where are the dead. The point of comparison is the mystery enwrapping both. The same comparison occurs in Job's pathetic words, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." It is doubtful whether the word rendered above "wrought like embroidery" refers to a pattern wrought by weaving or by needlework. In any case, it describes "the variegated colour of the individual members, especially of the viscera" (Delitzsch). The mysteries of ante-natal being are still pursued in ver. 16, which is extremely obscure. It is, however, plain that *a* sets forth the Divine knowledge of man in his first rudiments of corporeity. "My shapeless mass" is one word, meaning anything rolled up in a bundle or ball. But in *b* it is doubtful what is referred to in "they all." Strictly, the word should point back to something previously mentioned; and hence the A. V. and R. V. suppose that the "shapeless mass" is thought of as resolved into its component parts, and insert "my members"; but it is better to recognise a slight irregularity here, and to refer the word to the "days" immediately spoken of, which existed in the Divine foreknowledge long before they had real objective existence in the actual world. The last clause of the verse is capable of two different meanings, according as the Hebrew text or margin is followed. This is one of a number of cases in which there is a doubt whether we should read "not" or "to him" (or "it"). The Hebrew words having these meanings are each of two letters, the initial one being the same in both, and both words having the same sound. Confusion might easily therefore arise, and as a matter of fact there are numerous cases in which the text has the one and the margin the other of these two words. Here, if we adhere to the text, we read the negative, and then the force of the clause is to declare emphatically that the "days" were written in God's book, and in a real sense "fashioned," when as yet they had not been recorded in earth's calendars. If, on the other hand, the marginal reading is preferred, a striking meaning is obtained: "And for it [*i. e.*, for the birth of the shapeless mass] there was one among them [predestined in God's book]."

In vv. 17, 18, the poet gathers together and crowns all his previous contemplations by the consideration that this God, knowing him altogether, ever near him, and Former of his being, has great "thoughts" or purposes affecting him individually. That assurance makes omniscience and omnipresence joys, and not terrors. The root meaning of the word rendered "precious" is *weighty*. The singer would weigh God's thoughts towards him, and finds that they weigh down his scales. He would number them, and finds that they pass his enumeration. It is the same truth of the transcendent greatness and graciousness of God's purposes as is conveyed in Isaiah's "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are . . . My thoughts than your thoughts." "I awake, and am still with Thee,"—this is an artless expression of the psalmist's blessedness in realising God's continual nearness. He awakes from sleep, and is conscious of glad wonder to find that, like a tender mother by

her slumbering child, God has been watching over him, and that all the blessed communion of past days abides as before.

The fiery hatred of evil and evil men which burns in the last strophe offends many and startles more. But while the vehement prayer that "Thou wouldest slay the wicked" is not in a Christian tone, the recoil from those who could raise themselves against such a God is the necessary result of the psalmist's delight in Him. Attraction and repulsion are equal and contrary. The measure of our cleaving to that which is good, and to Him who is good, settles the measure of our abhorrence of that which is evil. The abrupt passing from petition in ver. 19 *a* to command in *b* has been smoothed away by a slight alteration which reads, "And that men of blood would depart from me"; but the variation in tense is more forcible, and corresponds with the speaker's strong emotion. He cannot bear companionship with rebels against God. His indignation has no taint of personal feeling, but is pure zeal for God's honour.

Ver. 20 presents difficulties. The word rendered in the A. V. and R. V. (text) "speak against Thee" is peculiarly spelt if this is its meaning, and its construction is anomalous. Probably, therefore, the rendering should be as above. That meaning does not require a change of consonants, but only of vowel points. The difficulty of the last clause lies mainly in the word translated in the A. V. *adversaries*; and in the R. V. *"enemies."* That meaning is questionable; and if the word is the nominative to the verb in the clause, the construction is awkward, since the preceding "who" would naturally extend its influence to this clause. Textual emendation has been resorted to; the simplest form of which is to read "against Thee" for "Thine adversaries," a change of one letter. Another form of emendation, which is adopted by Cheyne and Graetz, substitutes "Thy name," and reads the whole, "And pronounce Thy name for falsehoods." Delitzsch adheres to the reading "adversaries," and by a harsh ellipsis makes the whole to run, "Who pronounce [Thy name] deceitfully—Thine adversaries."

The vindication of the psalmist's indignation lies in vv. 21, 22. That soul must glow with fervent love to God which feels wrong done to His majesty with as keen a pain as if it were itself struck. What God says to those who love Him, they in their degree say to God: "He that toucheth Thee toucheth the apple of mine eye." True, hate is not the Christian requital of hate, whether that is directed against God or God's servant. But recoil there must be, if there is any vigour of devotion; only, pity and love must mingle with it, and the evil of hatred be overcome by their good.

Very beautifully does the lowly prayer for searching and guidance follow the psalmist's burst of fire. It is easier to glow with indignation against evil-doers than to keep oneself from doing evil. Many secret sins may hide under a cloak of zeal for the Lord. So the psalmist prays that God would search him, not because he fancies that there is no lurking sin to be burned by the light of God's eye, like vermin that nestle and multiply under stones and shrivel when the sunbeams strike them, but because he dreads that there is, and would fain have it cast out. The psalm began with declaring that Jehovah had searched and known the singer, and it ends with asking for that searching knowledge.

It makes much difference, not indeed in the reality or completeness of God's knowledge of us,

but in the good we derive therefrom, whether we welcome and submit to it, or try to close our trembling hearts, that do not wish to be cleansed of their perilous stuff, from that loving and purging gaze. God will cleanse the evil which He sees, if we are willing that He should see it. Thoughts of the inner life and "ways" of the outer are equally to be submitted to Him. There are two "ways" in which men can walk. The one is a "way of grief or pain," because that is its terminus. All sin is a blunder. And the inclination to such ways is "in me," as every man who has dealt honestly with himself knows. The other is "a way everlasting," a way which leads to permanent good, which continues uninterrupted through the vicissitudes of life, and even (though that was not in the psalmist's mind) through the darkness of death, and with ever closer approximation to its goal in God, through the cycles of eternity. And that way is not "in me," but I must be led into and in it by the God who knows me altogether and is ever with me, to keep my feet in the way of life, if I hold the guiding hand which He lays upon me.

PSALM CXL.

- 1 Deliver me, Jehovah, from the evil man,
From the man of violence guard me,
- 2 Who plot evils in heart,
Every day they stir up wars.
- 3 They have sharpened their tongue like a serpent,
Adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.
- 4 Keep me, Jehovah, from the hands of the wicked man,
From the man of violences guard me,
Who have plotted to overthrow my steps.
- 5 The proud have hidden a snare for me and cords,
They have spread a net hard by the path,
They have set gins for me. Selah.
- 6 I said to Jehovah, My God art Thou,
Give ear, Jehovah, to the voice of my supplications.
- 7 Jehovah, Lord, my stronghold of salvation!
Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.
- 8 Grant not, Jehovah, the desires of the wicked,
Further not his plan. Selah.
- 9 They who compass me about lift up the head—
The mischief of their own lips cover them!
- 10 [Jehovah] rain hot coals on them! (?)
Let Him cause them to fall into fire,
Into floods, that they rise no more!
- 11 The man with a [slandrous] tongue shall not continue on earth;
The man of violence—evil shall hunt him with blow upon blow.
- 12 I know that Jehovah will maintain the cause of the afflicted,
The right of the needy.
- 13 Surely the righteous shall thank Thy name,
The upright shall dwell with Thy face.

In tone and contents this psalm has many parallels in the earlier books, especially among the psalms ascribed to David. Its originality lies principally in its use of peculiar words, and in the extreme obscurity of a part of it. The familiar situation of a man ringed about by slanderous

enemies, the familiar metaphors of snares and traps, the familiar venture of faith flinging itself into God's arms for refuge, the familiar prayers for retribution, are all here. One cannot argue about impressions, but the present writer receives the impression strongly from the psalm that it is cast in the Davidic manner by a later singer, and is rather an echo than an original voice, while, no doubt, the feelings expressed, both of distress and of confidence, are none the less felt by the singer, though he falls back on familiar forms for their expression.

The arrangement is in four strophes of approximately equal length, the first and third of which consist of three verses of two clauses each, while the fourth is abnormally elongated by having three clauses in ver. 10, and the second (vv. 4, 5) has two verses of three clauses each. Selah again appears as dividing the strophes, but is omitted at the end of the fourth, to which a closing strophe of two verses is appended.

The first two strophes (vv. 1-3 and 4, 5) cover the same ground. Both set forth the psalmist's need, and plead for deliverance. The first verse of the second strophe (ver. 4) is almost identical with ver. 1. Both paint the psalmist's enemies as evil and violent, plotting against him privily. The only difference in the two strophes is in the metaphors describing the foes and their devices, and in the prominence given in the first to their slanderous and sharp tongues. The forms of their malice are like those in earlier psalms. A characteristic of the Psalter is the prominence given to hostility which has but bitter speech for its weapon (Psalm x. 7, lviii. 4). The slanderer's tongue is sharp, like a serpent's, with which the popular opinion supposed that the venom was injected. The particular kind of serpent meant in ver. 3 *a* is doubtful, as the word is only found here.

The figures for hostility in the second strophe are the other equally familiar ones of setting snares and traps. The contrivers are here called "proud" since their hostility to God's servant implies haughty antagonism to God. But they are not too proud to resort to tricks. Cunning and pride do not go well together, but they are united in these enemies, who spread a net "by the hand of the path."

In the third strophe, Faith rouses itself to lay hold on God. The psalmist turns from contemplating what his foes are doing, to realise what Jehovah is to him, and is wont to do for him. Since He is the singer's God and protects him in all conflict, he "finds it in his heart" to ask confidently that the plots of the foe may be wrecked. Consciousness of danger drove the poet in the former strophes to prayer; Jehovah's character and loving relations to him draw him, in this one.

"The day of battle" is literally "the day of armour"—when weapons clash and helmets are fitting wear. Then Jehovah will be as a head-piece to him, for He always gives the shape to His help which is required at the moment. The words in ver. 8 for "desires" and "plan" are found here only.

The text here is evidently in some disorder, and the word which is now awkwardly attached to the end of ver. 8 is by most commentators carried over to ver. 9. The change of position clears away difficulties in both verses, but a considerable crop remains in this fourth strophe. The language becomes gnarled and obscure under the stress of the poet's emotion, as he prays for the destruction of his persecutors. If the transference of the word

from ver. 8 to ver. 9 is accepted, that verse describes in vivid fashion what in prose would have been cast into the form of, "*When my compassers lift up the head [i. e., in proud assault], then,*" etc. The psalmist omits the particles which would give a hypothetical form, and prefers to set the two things side by side, and leave sympathetic readers to feel their connection. Ver. 10 is very obscure. According to the Hebrew text, the first clause would have to be rendered, "Let coals be thrown on them"; but such a rendering is "contrary to the usage of the language." The Hebrew margin, therefore, corrects into, "Let them [i. e., men indefinitely] cast down coals"; but this is harsh, and the office is strange as one attributed to men. The emendation which finds favour with most moderns substitutes for the inappropriate verb of the present text that which is used in precisely the same connection in Psalm xi. 6, and gives the reading, "Let Him [i. e., Jehovah] rain coals on them." The following clause then swiftly adds another element of horror. Fire rains down from above; fire yawns below. They are beaten down by the burning storm, and they fall into a mass of flame. The noun in ver. 10 *c* is found only here, and is by some rendered "pits," by others "floods," and by others is corrected into "nets." If "floods" is taken as the meaning, destruction by water is set by the side of that by fire, as if the antagonistic elements forgot their opposition and joined in strange amity to sweep the wicked from the earth. The terrible strophe ends with the assured declaration of the Divinely appointed transiency of the evil-doers, especially of the slanderers against whom the psalmist took refuge in Jehovah. They shall be soon cut off, and the hunters (ver. 5) shall become the hunted. "Evil"—i. e., the punishment of their evil deeds—shall dog their heels, and with stroke after stroke chase them as dogs would follow vermin.

In vv. 13, 14, the poet comes back to brighter thoughts, and his words become limpid again with his change of mood. He "knows," as the result of meditation and experience, that not only he, but all the afflicted and needy, who are righteous and upright, have God on their side. He will stand by their side in their hour of distress; He will admit them to dwell by His side, in deep, still communion, made more real and sweet by the harassments of earth, which drive them for shelter and peace to His breast. That confidence is a certitude for the psalmist. He announces it with an "I know," and seals it with a "surely." Such is the issue of trouble which was spread before Jehovah, and vented itself in prayer.

PSALM CXLI.

- 1 Jehovah, I have called on Thee; haste to me,
Give ear to my voice when I call to Thee.
- 2 Let my prayer appear before Thee [as] incense,
The lifting up of my hands [as] an evening sacrifice.
- 3 Set a watch, Jehovah, before my mouth,
Keep guard over the door of my lips.
- 4 Incline not my heart to any evil thing,
To practice wicked practices with men that
work iniquity;
And let me not eat of their dainties.
- 5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and
reprove me,
[Such] oil for the head shall not my head re-
fuse.

- For so is it that my prayer shall continue in
their wickednesses. (?)
- 6 Their judges are thrown down by the sides of
the cliff, (?)
And they hear my sayings, that they are
sweet. (?)
 - 7 As a man ploughing and cleaving the earth,
Our bones are strewn at the mouth of Sheol.
 - 8 For toward Thee, Jehovah, Lord, are mine eyes
[turned];
In Thee do I take refuge—pour not out my
soul.
 - 9 Keep me from the hands of the snare which
they have laid for me,
And from the gins of the doers of iniquity.
 - 10 May the wicked fall into their own nets,
Whilst at the same time I pass by!

PART of this psalm is hopelessly obscure, and the connection is difficult throughout. It is a prayer of a harassed soul, tempted to slacken its hold on God, and therefore betaking itself to Him. Nothing more definite as to author or occasion can be said with certainty.

The allusions in vv. 6, 7, are dark to us, and the psalm must, in many parts, remain an enigma. Probably Baethgen and Cheyne are wise in giving up the attempt to extract any intelligible meaning from ver. 5 *c* and ver. 6 as the words stand, and falling back on asterisks. Delitzsch regards the psalm as being composed as suitable to "a Davidic situation," either by David himself, or by some one who wished to give expression in strains like David's to David's probable mood. It would thus be a "Dramatic Idyll," referring, according to Delitzsch, to Absalom's revolt. Ver. 2 is taken by him to allude to the king's absence from the sanctuary, and the obscure ver. 6, to the fate of the leaders of the revolt and the return of the mass of the people to loyal submission. But this is a very precarious reference.

The psalm begins with the cry to God to hear, which so often forms the introduction to psalms of complaint and supplications for deliverance. But here a special colouring is given by the petition that the psalmist's prayers may be equivalent to incense and sacrifice. It does not follow that he was shut out from outward participation in worship, but only that he had learned what that worship meant. "Appear" might be rendered "established." The word means to be set firm, or, reflexively, to station oneself, and hence is taken by some as equivalent to "appear" or "come" before Thee: while others give prominence rather to the notion of stability in the word, and take it to mean *continue*—i. e., be accepted. There may be a reference to the morning sacrifice in the "incense," so that both morning and evening ritual would be included; but it is more natural to think of the evening incense, accompanying the evening "meal offering," and to suppose that the psalm is an evening prayer. The penetrating insight into the realities of spiritual worship which the singer has gained is more important to note than such questions about the scope of his figures.

The prayer in vv. 3, 4, is for deliverance not from dangers, but from temptation to sin in word or deed. The psalmist is not suffering from the hostility of the workers of iniquity, but dreads becoming infected with their sin. This phase of trial was not David's in Absalom's revolt, and the prominence given to it here makes Delitzsch's view of the psalm very doubtful. An earlier

psalmist had vowed to "put a muzzle on his mouth," but a man's own guard over his words will fail, unless God keeps the keeper, and, as it were, sets a sentry to watch the lips. The prayer for strength to resist temptation to wrong acts, which follows that against wrong speech, is curiously loaded with synonymous terms. The psalmist asks that his heart, which is but too apt to feel the risings of inclination to fall in with the manners around him, may be stiffened into wholesome loathing of every evil—"To practise practices in wickedness with men [perhaps, *great men*] who work iniquity." The clause rather drags, and the proposed insertion of "Let me not sit" before "with men that work iniquity" lightens the weight, and supplies a good parallel with "Let me not eat of their dainties." It is, however, purely conjectural, and the existing reading is intelligible, though heavy. The psalmist wishes to keep clear of association with the corrupt society around him, and desires to be preserved from temptations to fall in with its luxurious sensuality, lest thereby he should slide into imitation of its sins. He chose plain living, because he longed for high thinking, and noble doing, and grave, reverend speech. All this points to a period when the world fought against goodness by proffering vulgar delights, rather than by persecution. Martyrs have little need to pray that they may not be tempted by persecutors' feasts. This man "scorned delights" and chose to dwell with good men.

The connection of ver. 5 with the preceding seems to be that in it the psalmist professes his preference for the companionship of the righteous, even if they reprove him. It is better, in his judgment, to have the wholesome correction of the righteous than to feast with the wicked. But while this is the bearing of the first part of the verse, the last clause is obscure, almost to unintelligibility, and even the earlier ones are doubtful. If the Hebrew accents are adhered to, the rendering above must be adopted. The division of clauses and rendering adopted by Hupfeld and many others, and in the A. V. and R. V., gives vividness, but requires "it shall be" to be twice supplied. The whole sentence seems to run more smoothly, if the above translation is accepted. "Oil for the head" is that with which the head is anointed as for a feast and there is probably a tacit suggestion of a better festival, spread in the austere abodes of the righteous poor, than on the tables loaded with the dainties of the wicked rich.

But what is the meaning and bearing of the last clause of ver. 5? No wholly satisfactory answer has been given. It is needless here to travel through the various more or less violent and unsuccessful attempts to unravel the obscurities of this clause and of the next verse. One sympathises with Hupfeld's confession that it is an unwelcome (*sauer*) task to him to quote the whirl of varying conjectures. The rendering adopted above, as, on the whole, the least unlikely, is substantially Delitzsch's. It means that the psalmist "will oppose no weapon but prayer to his enemies' wickedness, and is therefore in the spiritual mood susceptible to well-meaning reproof." The logic of the clause is not very clear, even with this explanation. The psalmist's continuance in prayer against the wicked is not very obviously a reason for his accepting kindly rebuke. But no better explanation is proposed.

The darkness thickens in ver. 6. The words indeed are all easily translatable; but what the whole sentence means, or what an allusion to the

destruction of some unnamed people's rulers has to do here, or who they are who hear the psalmist's words, are questions as yet unanswered. To cast men down "by the sides [lit., *hands*] of a rock" is apparently an expression for the cruel punishment mentioned as actually inflicted on ten thousand of the "children of Seir" (2 Chron. xxv. 12). Those who, with Delitzsch, take the revolt under Absalom to be the occasion of the psalm, find in the casting down of these judges an imaginative description of the destruction of the leaders of the revolt, who are supposed to be hurled down the rocks by the people whom they had misled while the latter, having again come to their right mind, attend to David's word and find it pleasant and beneficent. But this explanation requires much supplementing of the language, and does not touch the difficulty of bringing the verse into connection with the preceding.

Nor is the connection with what follows more clear. A various reading substitutes "Their" for "Our" in ver. 7, and so makes the whole verse a description of the bones of the ill-fated "judges" lying in a litter at the base of the precipice. But apparently the reading is merely an attempt to explain the difficulty. Clearly enough the verse gives an extraordinarily energetic and graphic picture of a widespread slaughter. But who are the slain, and what event or events in the history of Israel are here imaginatively reproduced, is quite unknown. All that is certain is the tremendous force of the representation, the Æschylean ruggedness of the metaphor, and the desperate condition to which it witnesses. The point of the figure lies in the resemblance of the bones strewn at the mouth of Sheol to broken clods turned up by a plough. *Sheol* seems here to waver between the meanings of the unseen world of souls and the grave. The unburied bones of slaughtered saints "lie scattered," as unregarded as the lumps of soil behind the ploughman.

In vv. 8-10 the familiar psalm-tone recurs, and the language clears itself. The stream has been foaming among rocks in a gorge, but it has emerged into sunlight, and flows smoothly. Only the "For" at the beginning of ver. 8 is difficult, if taken to refer to the immediately preceding verses. Rather, it overleaps the obscure middle part of the psalm, and links on to the petitions of vv. 1-4. Patient, trustful expectance is the psalmist's temper, which gazes not interrogatively, but with longing which is sure of satisfaction, towards God, from amidst the temptations or sorrows of earth. The reason for that fixed look of faith lies in the Divine names, so rich in promise, which are here blended in an unusual combination. The devout heart pleads its own act of faith in conjunction with God's names, and is sure that, since He is Jehovah, Lord, it cannot be vain to hide oneself in Him. Therefore, the singer prays for preservation from destruction. "Pour not out my soul" recalls Isa. liii. 12, where the same vivid metaphor is used. The prayer of the earlier verses was for protection from temptation; here, circumstances have darkened, and the psalmist's life is in danger. Possibly the "snares" and "gins" of ver. 9 mean both temptations and perils.

The final petition in ver. 10 is like many in earlier psalms. It was a fundamental article of faith for all the psalmists that a great *Lex Talionis* was at work, by which every sin was avenged in kind; and if one looks deeper than the outside of life, the faith is eternally warranted. For nothing is more certain than that, whomsoever else

a man may harm by his sin, he harms himself most. Nets woven and spread for others may or may not ensnare them, but their meshes cling inextricably round the feet of their author, and their tightening folds will wrap him helpless, like a fly in a spider's web. The last clause presents some difficulties. The word rendered above "at the same time" is literally "together," but seems to be used here, as in Psalm iv. 8 (*at once*), with the meaning of *simultaneously*. The two things are co-temporaneous—the enemies' ensnaring and the psalmist's escape. The clause is abnormal in its order of words. It stands thus: "At the same time I, while [until] I pass by." Probably the irregularity arose from a desire to put the emphatic word "at the same time" in the prominent place. It is doubtful whether we should translate "while" or "until." Authorities are divided, and either meaning is allowable. But though the rendering *until* gives picturesqueness to the representation of the snared foe restrained and powerless, until his hoped-for prey walks calmly through the toils, the same idea is conveyed by "while," and that rendering avoids the implication that the snaring lasted only as long as the time taken for the psalmist's escape. What is uppermost in the psalmist's mind is, in any case, not the destruction of his enemies, but their being made powerless to prevent his "passing by" their snares uncaptured.

PSALM CXLII.

- 1 With my voice to Jehovah will I cry,
With my voice to Jehovah will I make supplication.
- 2 I will pour out before Him my complaint,
My straits before Him will I declare.
- 3 When my spirit wraps itself in gloom upon me,
Then Thou—Thou knowest my path;
In the way wherein I have to go
They have hidden a snare for me.
- 4 Look on the right hand and see,
There is none that knows me,
Shelter is perished from me,
There is no one that makes inquiry after my soul.
- 5 I have cried unto Thee, Jehovah,
I have said, Thou art my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.
- 6 Attend to my shrill cry,
For I am become very weak;
Deliver me from my pursuers,
For they are too strong for me.
- 7 Bring out from prison my soul,
That I may thank Thy name;
In me shall the righteous glory,
For Thou dealest bountifully with me.

THE superscription not only calls this a psalm of David's, but specifies the circumstances of its composition. It breathes the same spirit of mingled fear and faith which characterises many earlier psalms, but one fails to catch the unmistakable note of freshness, and there are numerous echoes of preceding singers. This psalmist has as deep sorrows as his predecessors, and as firm a grasp of Jehovah, his helper. His song runs naturally in well-worn channels, and is none the less genuine and acceptable to God because it does. Trouble and lack of human sympathy or help have done their best work on him, since they have driven him to God's breast. He has cried in vain to man; and now he has gathered himself up

in a firm resolve to cast himself upon God. Men may take offence that they are only appealed to as a last resort, but God does not. The psalmist is too much in earnest to be content with unspoken prayers. His voice must help his thoughts. Wonderful is the power of articulate utterance in defining, and often in diminishing, sorrows. Put into words, many a burden shrinks. Speaking his grief, many a man is calmed and braced to endure. The complaint poured out before God ceases to flood the spirit; the straits told to Him begin to grip less tightly.

Ver. 1 resembles Psalm lxxvii. 1, and ver. 3 has the same vivid expression for a spirit swathed in melancholy as Psalm lxxvii. 3. Hupfeld would transfer ver. 3 *a* to ver. 2, as being superfluous in ver. 3, and, in connection with the preceding, stating the situation or disposition from which the psalmist's prayer flows. If so taken, the copula (And) introducing *b* will be equivalent to "But," and contrasts the omniscience of God with the psalmist's faintheartedness. If the usual division of verses is retained, the same contrast is presented still more forcibly, and the copula may be rendered "Then." The outpouring of complaint is not meant to tell Jehovah what He does not know. It is for the complainer's relief, not for God's information. However a soul is wrapped in gloom, the thought that God knows the road which is so dark brings a little creeping beam into the blackness. In the strength of that conviction the psalmist beseeches Jehovah to behold what He does behold. That is the paradox of faithful prayer, which asks for what it knows that it possesses, and dared not ask for unless it knew. The form of the word rendered above "Look" is irregular, a "hybrid" (Delitzsch); but when standing beside the following "see," it is best taken as an imperative of petition to Jehovah. The old versions render both words as first person singular, in which they are followed by Baethgen, Graetz, and Cheyne. It is perhaps more natural that the psalmist should represent himself as looking round in vain for help, than that he should ask God to look; and, as Baethgen remarks, the copula before "There is none" in ver. 4 *b* favours this reading, as it is superfluous with an imperative. In either case the drift of ver. 4 is to set forth the suppliant's forlorn condition. The "right hand" is the place for a champion or helper, but this lonely sufferer's is unguarded, and there is none who knows him, in the sense of recognising him as one to be helped (Ruth ii. 10, 19). Thus abandoned, friendless, and solitary, confronted by foes, he looks about for some place to hide in; but that too has failed him (Job xi. 20; Jer. xxv. 35; Amos ii. 14). There is no man interested enough in him to make inquiry after his life. Whether he is alive or dead matters not a straw to any.

Thus utterly naked of help, allies, and earthly hidingplace, what can a man do but fling himself into the arms of God? This one does so, as the rest of the psalm tells. He had looked all round the horizon in vain for a safe cranny to creep into and escape. He was out in the open, without a bush or rock to hide behind, on all the dreary level. So he looks up, and suddenly there rises by his side an inexpugnable fortress, as if a mountain sprang at once from the flat earth. "I have said, Thou art my refuge!" Whoso says thus has a shelter, Some One to care for him, and the gloom begins to thin off from his soul. The psalmist is not only safe in consequence of his prayer, but rich; for the soul which, by strong resolve, even

in the midst of straits, claims God as its portion will at once realise its portion in God.

The prayer for complete deliverance in vv. 6, 7, passes into calmness, even while it continues fully conscious of peril and of the power of the pursuers. Such is the reward of invoking Jehovah's help. Agitation is soothed, and, even before any outward effect has been manifest, the peace of God begins to shed itself over heart and mind. The suppliant still spreads his needs before God, is still conscious of much weakness, of strong persecutors, and feels that he is, as it were, in prison (an evident metaphor, though Graetz, with singular prosaicism, will have it to be literal); but he has hold of God now, and so is sure of deliverance, and already begins to shape his lips for songs of praise, and to anticipate the triumph which his experience will afford to those who are righteous, and so are his fellows. He was not, then, so utterly solitary as he had wailed that he was. There were some who would joy in his joy, even if they could not help his misery. But the soul that has to wade through deep waters has always to do it alone; for no human sympathy reaches to full knowledge of, or share in, even the best loved one's grief. We have companions in joy; sorrow we have to face by ourselves. Unless we have Jesus with us in the darkness, we have no one.

The word rendered above "shall glory" is taken in different meanings. According to some, it is to be rendered here "surround"—i. e., with congratulations; others would take the meaning to be "shall crown themselves"—i. e., "triumph on my account" (Delitzsch, etc.). Graetz suggests a plausible emendation, which Cheyne adopts, reading "glory in," the resulting meaning being the same as that of Delitzsch. The notion of participation in the psalmist's triumph is evidently intended to be conveyed; and any of these renderings preserves that. Possibly *surround* is most in accordance with the usage of the word. Thus the psalmist's plaints end, as plaints which are prayers ever do, in triumph anticipated by faith, and one day to be realised in experience.

PSALM CXLIIL.

- 1 Jehovah, hear my prayer, give ear to my supplications,
In Thy faithfulness answer me, in Thy righteousness;
- 2 And enter not into judgment with Thy servant,
For before Thee shall no man living be righteous.
- 3 For the enemy has pursued my soul,
Crushed my life to the ground,
Made me to dwell in dark places, like the dead of long ago.
- 4 Therefore my spirit wraps itself in gloom in me,
Within me is my heart benumbed.
- 5 I remember the days of old,
I muse on all Thy doings,
On the work of Thy hands I brood.
- 6 I spread my hands to Thee,
My soul is towards Thee like a thirsty land.
Selah.
- 7 Make haste, answer me, Jehovah; my spirit faints;
Hide not Thy face from me,
Lest I become like those that descend into the pit.

- 8 Make me hear Thy lovingkindness in the morning,
For in Thee do I trust;
Make me know the way in which I should go,
For to Thee do I lift my soul.
- 9 Deliver me from mine enemies, Jehovah,
For to Thee do I flee for refuge. (?)
- 10 Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God;
Let Thy good spirit lead me in a level land.
- 11 For Thy name's sake, Jehovah, quicken me;
In Thy righteousness bring my soul out of all straits;
- 12 And in Thy lovingkindness cut off my foes,
And destroy all who oppress my soul,
For I am Thy servant.

THIS psalm's depth of sadness and contrition, blended with yearning trust, recalls the earlier psalms attributed to David. Probably this general resemblance in inwardness and mood is all that is meant by the superscription in calling it "a psalm of David." Its copious use of quotations and allusions indicate a late date. But there is no warrant for taking the speaker to be the personified Israel. It is clearly divided into two equal halves, as indicated by the *Selah*, which is not found in Books IV. and V., except here, and in Psalm cxl. The former half (vv. 1-6) is complaint; the latter (vv. 7-12), petition. Each part may again be regarded as falling into two equal portions, so that the complaint branches out into a plaintive description of the psalmist's peril (vv. 1-3), and a melancholy disclosure of his feelings (vv. 4-6); while the prayer is similarly parted into cries for deliverance (vv. 7-9), and for inward enlightenment and help (vv. 10-12). But we are not reading a logical treatise, but listening to the cry of a tried spirit, and so need not wonder if the discernible sequence of thought is here and there broken.

The psalmist knows that his affliction is deserved. His enemy could not have hunted and crushed him (ver. 3) unless God had been thereby punishing him. His peril has forced home the penitent conviction of his sin, and therefore he must first have matters set right between him and God by Divine forgiveness. His cry for help is not based upon any claims of his own, nor even on his extremity of need, but solely on God's character, and especially on the twin attributes of Faithfulness and Righteousness. By the latter is not meant the retributive righteousness which gives according to desert, but that by which He maintains the order of salvation established by His holy love. The prayer anticipates St. John's declaration that God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins." That answer in righteousness is as eagerly desired as God's dealing on the footing of retributive justice is shrunk from. "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant" is not a prayer referring to a future appearance before the Judge of all, but the judgment deprecated is plainly the enmity of men, which, as the next verse complains, is crushing the psalmist's life out of him. His cry is for deliverance from it, but he feels that a more precious gift must precede outward deliverance and God's forgiveness must first be sealed on his soul. The conviction that, when the light of God's face is turned on the purest life, it reveals dark stains which retributive justice cannot but condemn, is not, in the psalmist's mouth, a palliation of his guilt. Rather,

it drives him to take his place among the multitude of offenders, and from that lowly position to cry for pardon to the very Judge whose judgment he cannot meet. The blessedness of contrite trust is that it nestles the closer to God, the more it feels its unworthiness. The child hides its face on the mother's bosom when it has done wrong. God is our refuge from God. A little beam of light steals into the penitent's darkness, while he calls himself God's servant, and ventures to plead that relation, though he has done what was unworthy of it, as a reason for pardon. The significant "For" beginning ver. 3 shows that the enemy's acts were, to the contrite psalmist, those of God's stern justice. Vv. 3 *a, b*, are moulded on Psalm vii. 5, and *c* is verbally identical with Lam. iii. 6. "The dead of long ago" is by some rendered *dead for ever*; but the translation adopted above adds force to the psalmist's sad description of himself, by likening him to those forgotten ones away back in the mists of bygone ages.

In vv. 4-6 the record of the emotions caused by his peril follows. They begin with the natural gloom. As in Psalm cxlii. 3 (with which this has many points of resemblance, possibly indicating identity of author), he describes his "spirit" as swathed in dark robes of melancholy. His heart, too, the centre of personality, was *stunned* or *benumbed*, so that it almost ceased to beat. What should a "servant" of Jehovah's, brought to such a pass, do? If he is truly God's, he will do precisely what this man did. He will compel his thoughts to take another direction, and call Memory in to fight Despair and feed Hope. His own past and God's past are arguments enough to cheer the most gloom-wrapped sufferer. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow" may be "remembering happier things," but the remembrance will be better used to discrown a sorrow which threatens to lord it over a life. Psalm lxxvii. 5, 6, 11, 12, has shaped the expressions here. Both the contrast of present misery with past mercy, and the assurances of present help given by that past mercy, move the psalmist to appeal to God, stretching out his hands in entreaty. Psalm lxiii. 1 echoes in ver. 6 *b*, the pathos and beauty of which need no elucidation. The very cracks in parched ground are like mouths opened for the delaying rains; so the singer's soul was gaping wide in trouble for God's coming, which would refresh and fertilise. Blessed is that weariness which is directed to Him; it ever brings the showers of grace for which it longs. The construction of ver. 6 *b* is doubtful, and the supplement "thirsteth" (A. V. and R. V.) is possibly better than the "is" given above.

The second half of the psalm is purely petition. Vv. 7-9 ask especially for outward deliverance. They abound with reminiscences of earlier psalms. "Make haste, answer me" recalls Psalm lxix. 17; "my spirit faints" is like Psalm lxxxiv. 2; "Hide not Thy face from me" is a standing petition, as in Psalms xxvii. 9, cii. 2, etc.; "Lest I become like those who descend into the pit" is exactly reproduced from Psalm xxviii. 1. The prayer for the manifestation of God's lovingkindness in the morning is paralleled in Psalm xc. 14, and that for illumination as to the way to walk in is like Exod. xxxiii. 13; Psalm xxv. 4. The plea "To Thee do I lift my soul" is found in Psalms xxv. 1, lxxxvi. 4.

The plea appended to the petition in ver. 9 *b* is difficult. Literally, the words run, "To Thee have I covered [myself]," which can best be explained as a pregnant construction, equivalent to

"I have fled to Thee and hid myself in Thee." Much divergence exists in the renderings of the clause. But a slight emendation, adopted by Hupfeld and Cheyne from an ancient Jewish commentator, reads the familiar expression, "I have fled for refuge." Baethgen prefers to read "have waited," which also requires but a trivial alteration; while Graetz reaches substantially the same result by another way, and would render "I have hope."

A glance at these three verses of petition as a whole brings out the sequence of the prayers and of their pleas. The deepest longing of the devout soul is for the shining of God's face, the consciousness of His loving regard, and that not only because it scatters fears and foes, but because it is good to bathe in that sunshine. The next longing is for the dawning of a glad morning, which will bring to a waiting heart sweet whispers of God's lovingkindness, as shown by outward deliverances. The night of fear has been dark and tearful, but joy comes with the morning. The next need is for guidance in the way in which a man should go, which here must be taken in the lower sense of practical direction, rather than in any higher meaning. That higher meaning follows in vv. 10-12; but in ver. 8 the suppliant asks to be shown the path by which he can secure deliverance from his foes. That deliverance is the last of his petitions. His pleas are beautiful as examples of the logic of supplication. He begins with his great need. His spirit faints, and he is on the edge of the black pit into which so much brightness and strength have gone down. The margin is slippery and crumbling; his feet are feeble. One Helper alone can hold him up. But his own exceeding need is not all that he pleads. He urges his trust, his fixing of his desires, hopes, and whole self, by a dead lift of faith, on God. That is a reason for Divine help. Anything is possible rather than that such hope should be disappointed. It cannot be that any man, who has fled for sanctuary to the asylum of God's heart, should be dragged thence and slain before the God whose altar he has vainly clasped.

The last part (vv. 10-12) puts foremost the prayer for conformity of will with God's and, though it closes with recurring prayer for outward deliverance, yet breathes desires for more inward blessings. As in the preceding verses, there are, in these closing ones, many echoes of other psalms. The sequence of petitions and pleas is instructive. To do, not merely to know, God's will is the condition of all blessedness, and will be the deepest desire of every man who is truly God's servant. But that obedience of heart and hand must be taught by God, and He regards our taking Him for our God as establishing a claim on Him to give all illumination of heart and all bending of will and all skill of hand which are necessary to make us doers of His will. His teaching is no mere outward communication of knowledge, but an in-breathing of power to discern, and of disposition and ability to perform, what is His will. Ver. 10 *b* is best taken as a continuous sentence, embodying a prayer for guidance. The plea on which it rests remains the same, though the statement of it as a separate clause is not adopted in our translation. For the fact that God's spirit is "good"—i. e., beneficently self-communicative—heartens us to ask, and binds Him to give, all such direction as is needed. This is not a mere repetition of the prayer in ver. 8, but transcends it. "A level land" (or, according to a possible suggested emendation, *path*) is one in which the psalmist can

freely walk, unhindered in doing God's will. His next petition goes deepest of the three, inasmuch as it asks for that new Divine life to be imparted, without which no teaching to do God's will can be assimilated, and no circumstances, however favourable, will conduce to doing it. He may not have known all the depth which his prayer sounded; but no man who has real desires to conform heart and life to the supreme will of God but must have felt his need of a purer life to be poured into his spirit. As this prayer is deep, so its plea is high. "For Thy name's sake"—nothing can be pleaded of such force as that. God supremely desires the glory of His name; and, for the sake of men whose blessedness depends on their knowing and loving it, will do nothing that can dim its lustre. His name is the record of His past acts, the disclosure of that in Him which is knowable. That name contains the principles of all His future acts. He will be what He has been. He will magnify His name and the humblest, most tormented soul that can say, "Thou art my God," may be sure that Divinely given life will throb in it, and that even its lowliness may contribute to the honour of the name.

The hunted psalmist cannot but come back, in the close of his psalm, to his actual circumstances, for earthly needs do clog the soul's wings. He unites righteousness and lovingkindness as co-operating powers, as in ver. 1 he had united faithfulness and righteousness. And as in the first verses he had blended pleas drawn from God's character with those drawn from his relation to God, so he ends his petitions with pleading that he is God's servant, and, as such, a fit object of God's protection.

PSALM CXLIV.

- 1 Blessed be Jehovah my rock, who trains my hands for battle,
My fingers for war;
- 2 My lovingkindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer,
My shield and He in whom I take refuge,
Who subdues my people under me.
- 3 Jehovah, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him?
The son of frail man, that Thou takest account of him?
- 4 Man—he is like to a breath,
His days are like a shadow passing away.
- 5 Jehovah, bow Thy heavens and come down,
Touch the mountains that they smoke.
- 6 Lighten lightning and scatter them,
Shoot Thy arrows and confound them.
- 7 Stretch Thy hands from on high,
Pluck me [out] and deliver me from many waters,
From the hands of the sons of the alien,
- 8 Whose mouth speaks falsehood,
And whose right hand is a right hand of lies.
- 9 O God, a new song will I sing to Thee,
On a ten-stringed harp will I harp to Thee,
- 10 Who giveth salvation to kings,
Who snatches David His servant from the evil sword.
- 11 Pluck me [out] and deliver me from the hand of the sons of the alien,
Whose mouth speaks falsehood,
And whose right hand is a right hand of lies.

- 12 So that (? or Because) our sons [may be] as plants,
Grown tall in their youth;
Our daughters like corner-pillars,
Carved after the fashion of a palace;
- 13 Our granaries full, giving forth kind after kind [of supply];
Our flocks producing thousands,
Producing tens of thousands in our fields;
- 14 Our kine heavy with young;
No breach and no sally,
And no [battle-] cry in our open spaces.
- 15 Happy the people that is in such a case!
Happy the people whose God is Jehovah!

THE force of compilation could no further go than in this psalm, which is, in the first eleven verses simply a *réchauffé* of known psalms, and in vv. 12-15 is most probably an extract from an unknown one of later date. The junctions are not effected with much skill, and the last is tacked on very awkwardly (ver. 12). It is completely unlike the former part, inasmuch as there the speaker is a warlike king praying for victory, while in the latter the nation sings of the tranquil blessings of peaceful expansion. The language of the later portion is full of late forms and obscurities. But the compiler's course of thought is traceable. He begins by praising Jehovah, who has taught him warlike skill; then adoringly thinks of his own weakness, made strong by God's condescending regard; next prays for complete victory, and vows fresh praises for new mercies; and closes with a picture of the prosperity which follows conquest, and is secured to Israel because Jehovah is its God.

Vv. 1, 2, are echoes of Psalm xviii. 2, 34, 46, with slight variations. The remarkable epithet "My lovingkindness" offends some critics, who emend so as to read "My stronghold"; but it has a parallel in Jonah ii. 9, and is forcible as an emotional abbreviation of the fuller "God of my lovingkindness" (Psalm lix. 10). The original passage reads "people," which is the only appropriate word in this connection, and should probably be read in ver. 2 c.

Psalm viii. supplies the original of vv. 3, 4, with a reminiscence of Psalm xxxix. 5, and of Psalm cii. 11, from which comes the pathetic image of the fleeting shadow. The link between this and the former extract seems to be the recognition of God's condescension in strengthening so weak and transient a creature for conflict and conquest.

The following prayer for further Divine help in further struggles is largely borrowed from the magnificent picture of a theophany in Psalm xviii. 9, 14-16. The energetic "Lighten lightning" is peculiar to this psalm, as is the use of the word for "Pluck out." The description of the enemies as "sons of the alien" is like Psalm xviii. 44, 45. As in many other psalms, the treachery of the foe is signalised. They break their oaths. The right hand which they had lifted in swearing is a lying hand. The vow of new praise recalls Psalms xxxiii. 2, 3, and xcvi. 1, xcvi. 1. Ver. 10 is a reproduction of Psalm xviii. 50. The mention of David's deliverance from the "evil sword" has apparently been the reason for the LXX. referring the psalm to the victory over Goliath—an impossible view. The new song is not here sung; but the psalm drops from the level of praise to renew the petition for deliverance, in the manner of a refrain caught up in ver. 11 from ver. 7. This might make a well-rounded close, and may have originally been the end of the psalm.

The appended fragment (vv. 12-15) is attached to the preceding in a most embarrassing fashion. The first word of ver. 12 is the sign of the relative. The LXX. accordingly translates "Whose sons are," etc., and understands the whole as a description of the prosperity of the enemies, which view necessarily involves the alteration of "our" into "their" in the following clauses. Others supply an antecedent to the relative by inserting *save us* or the like expression at the beginning of the verse. Others, again—*e.g.*, Ewald, followed by Perovne—connect the relative with ver. 15: "We whose sons are," etc. . . . "Happy is the people," etc. Delitzsch takes the relative to signify here "because," and compares Judg. ix. 17; Jer. xvi. 13. The prosperity subsequently described would then be alleged as the occasion of the enemies' envy. Others would slightly emend the text so as to read, "I pronounce happy," or "Happy are we." The latter, which makes all smooth, and corresponds with ver. 15, is Graetz's proposal. The rendering of the A.V., "that" or "in order that," has much in its favour. The word which is the sign of the relative is a component of the full expression usually so rendered, and stands alone as equivalent to it in Deut. iv. 40. Gen. xi. 7. It is true, as Delitzsch objects to this rendering that the following verbs are usually finite, while here they are participles; but that is not a fatal objection. The whole that follows would then be dependent on the petition of ver. 11, and would describe the purpose of the desired deliverance. "This is, in fact, the poet's meaning. He prays for deliverance from enemies, in order that the happy condition pictured in ver. 12 *sqq.* may come to pass" (Baethgen). On the whole, that rendering presents least difficulty, but in any case the seam is clumsy.

The substance of the description includes three things—a vigorous, growing population, agricultural prosperity, and freedom from invasion. The language is obscure, especially in ver. 14, but the general drift is plain. The characteristic Jewish blessing of numerous offspring is first touched on in two figures, of which the former is forcible and obvious, and the latter obscure. The comparison of the virgin daughters of Israel to "corners" is best understood by taking the word to mean "corner-pillars," not necessarily caryatides, as is usually supposed—an architectural decoration unknown in the East. The points of comparison would then be slender uprightness and firm grace. Delitzsch prefers to take the word as meaning *cornices*, such as, to the present day, are found in the angles of Eastern rooms, and are elaborately carved in mazy patterns and brightly coloured. He would also render "variegated" instead of "carved." But such a comparison puts too much stress on gay dresses, and too little on qualities corresponding to those of the "well-grown" youths in the former clause.

The description of a flourishing rural community is full of difficult words. "Granaries" is found only here, and "kind" is a late word. "Fields" is the same word as is usually rendered "streets"; it literally means "places outside," and here obviously must refer to the open pastures without the city, in contrast to the "open spaces" within it, mentioned in the next verse. In that verse almost every word is doubtful. That rendered "kine" is masculine in form, but is generally taken as being applicable to both sexes, and here used for the milky mothers of the herd. The word translated above "heavy with young" means

laden, and if the accompanying noun is masculine, must mean laden with the harvest sheaves; but the parallel of the increasing flocks suggests the other rendering. The remainder of ver. 14 would in form make a complete verse, and it is possible that something has fallen out between the first clause and the two latter. These paint tranquil city life when enemies are far away. "No breach"—*i. e.*, in the defences, by which besiegers could enter; "No going forth"—*i. e.*, sally of the besieged, as seems most probable, though *going forth as captured or surrendering* has been suggested; "No cry"—*i. e.*, of assailants who have forced an entrance, and of defenders who make their last stand in the open places of the city.

The last verse sums up all the preceding picture of growth, prosperity, and tranquillity, and traces it to the guardian care and blessing of Jehovah. The psalmist may seem to have been setting too much store by outward prosperity. His last word not only points to the one Source of it, but sets high above the material consequences of God's favour, joyous as these are, that favour itself, as the climax of human blessedness.

PSALM CXLV.

- 1 ⁸ I will exalt Thee, my God, O King,
And I will bless Thy name for ever and aye.
- 2 ² Every day will I bless Thee,
And I will praise Thy name for ever and aye.
- 3 ² Great is Jehovah and much to be praised,
And of His greatness there is no searching.
- 4 ⁷ Generation to generation shall loudly praise
Thy works
And Thy mighty acts shall they declare.
- 5 ⁷ The splendour of the glory of Thy majesty,
And the records of Thy wonders will I meditate.
- 6 ¹ And the might of Thy dread acts shall they speak,
And Thy greatness will I tell over.
- 7 ¹ The memory of Thy abundant goodness shall they well forth,
And Thy righteousness shall they shout aloud.
- 8 ⁷ Gracious and full of compassion is Jehovah,
Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.
- 9 ² Good is Jehovah to all,
And His compassions are upon all His works.
- 10 ¹ All Thy works thank Thee, Jehovah,
And Thy favoured ones shall bless Thee.
- 11 ² Thy glory of Thy kingdom shall they speak,
And talk of Thy might;
- 12 ² To make known to the sons of men His mighty deeds
And the glory of the splendour of His kingdom.
- 13 ² Thy kingdom is a kingdom for all ages,
And Thy dominion [endures] through every generation after generation.
- 14 ² Jehovah upholds all the falling,
And raises all the bowed down.
- 15 ² The eyes of all look expectantly to Thee,
And Thou givest them their food in its season.
- 16 ² Thou openest Thy hand,
And satisfiest every living thing [with] its desire.
- 17 ² Jehovah is righteous in all His ways,
And loving in all His works.

- 18 p Jehovah is near to all who call on Him,
To all who call on Him in truth.
- 19 r The desire of them that fear Him He will
fulfil,
And their cry He will hear and will save
them.
- 20 w Jehovah keeps all who love Him,
And all the wicked will He destroy.
- 21 n The praise of Jehovah my mouth shall speak,
And let all flesh bless His holy name for ever
and aye.

THIS is an acrostic psalm. Like several others of that kind, it is slightly irregular, one letter (Nun) being omitted. The omission is supplied in the LXX. by an obviously spurious verse inserted in the right place between vv. 13 and 14. Though the psalm has no strophical divisions, it has distinct sequence of thought, and celebrates the glories of Jehovah's character and deeds from a fourfold point of view. It sings of His greatness (vv. 1-6), goodness (vv. 7-10), His kingdom (vv. 11-13), and the universality of His beneficence (vv. 14-21). It is largely coloured by other psalms, and is unmistakably of late origin.

The first group of verses has two salient characteristics—the accumulation of epithets expressive of the more majestic aspects of Jehovah's self-revelation, and the remarkable alternation of the psalmist's solo of song and the mighty chorus, which takes up the theme and sends a shout of praise echoing down the generations.

The psalmist begins with his own tribute of praise, which he vows shall be perpetual. Ver. 1 recalls Psalms xxx. 1 and xxxiv. 1. We "exalt" God, when we recognise that He is King, and worthily adore Him as such. A heart suffused with joy in the thought of God would fain have no other occupation than the loved one of ringing out His name. The singer sets "for ever and aye" at the end of both ver. 1 and ver. 2, and while it is possible to give the expression a worthy meaning as simply equivalent to *continually*, it is more in harmony with the exalted strain of the psalm and the emphatic position of the words to hear in them an expression of the assurance which such delight in God and in the contemplation of Him naturally brings with it, that over communion so deep and blessed, Death has no power. "Every day will I bless Thee"—that is the happy vow of the devout heart. "And I will praise Thy name for ever and ever"—that is the triumphant confidence that springs from the vow. The experiences of fellowship with God are prophets of their own immortality.

Ver. 3 *a* is from Psalm xlviii. 1, and *b* is tinged by Isaiah xl., but substitutes "greatness," the keynote of the first part of this psalm for "understanding." That note having been thus struck, is taken up in vv. 4-6, which set forth various aspects of that greatness, as manifested in works which are successively described as "mighty"—*i.e.*, instinct with conquering power such as a valiant hero wields; as, taken together, constituting the "splendour of the glory of Thy majesty," the flashing brightness with which, when gathered, as it were, in a radiant mass, they shine out, like a great globe of fire; as "wonders," not merely in the narrower sense of miracles, but as being productive of lowly astonishment in the thoughtful spectator; and as being "dread acts"—*i.e.*, such as fill the beholder with holy awe. In ver. 5 *b* the phrase rendered above "records of His won-

ders" is literally "words of His wonders," which some regard as being like the similar phrase in Psalm lxxv. 3 (words or matters of iniquities), a pleonasm, and others would take as they do the like expression in Psalm cv. 27, as equivalent to "*deeds* of the Divine wonders" (Delitzsch). But "words" may very well here retain its ordinary sense, and the poet represents himself as meditating on the records of God's acts in the past as well as gazing on those spread before his eyes in the present.

His passing and repassing from his own praise in vv. 1, 2, to that of successive generations in ver. 4, and once more to his own in ver. 5, and to that of others in ver. 6, is remarkable. Does he conceive of himself as the chorus leader, teaching the ages his song? Or does he simply rejoice in the less lofty consciousness that his voice is not solitary? It is difficult to say, but this is clear, that the Messianic hope of the world's being one day filled with the praises which were occasioned by God's manifestation in Israel burned in this singer's heart. He could not bear to sing alone, and this hymn would lack its highest note, if he did not believe that the world was to catch up the song.

But greatness, majesty, splendour, are not the Divinest parts of the Divine nature, as this singer had learned. These are but the fringes of the central glory. Therefore the song rises from greatness to celebrate better things, the moral attributes of Jehovah (vv. 7-10). The psalmist has no more to say of himself, till the end of his psalm. He gladly listens rather to the chorus of many voices which proclaims Jehovah's widespread goodness. In ver. 7 the two attributes which the whole Old Testament regards as inseparable are the themes of the praise of men. Goodness and righteousness are not antithetic, but complementary, as green and red rays blend in white light. The exuberance of praise evoked by these attributes is strikingly represented by the two strong words describing it: of which the former, "well forth," compares its gush to the clear waters of a spring bursting up into sunlight, dancing and flashing, musical, and living, and the other describes it as like the shrill cries of joy raised by a crowd on some festival, or such as the women trilled out when a bride was brought home. Ver. 8 rests upon Exod. xxxiv. 6 (compare Psalm ciii. 8). It is difficult to de-synonymise "gracious" and "full of compassion." Possibly the former is the wider, and expresses love in exercise towards the lowly in its most general aspect, while the latter specialises graciousness as it reveals itself to those afflicted with any evil. As "slow to anger," Jehovah keeps back the wrath which is part of His perfection, and only gives it free course after long waiting and wooing. The contrast in ver 8 *b* is not so much between anger and lovingkindness, which to the psalmist are not opposed, as between the slowness with which the one is launched against a few offenders and the plenitude of the other. That thought of abundant lovingkindness is still further widened, in ver. 9, to universality. God's goodness embraces all, and His compassions warm over all His works, as the broad wing and warm breast of the mother eagle protect her brood. Therefore the psalmist hears a yet more multitudinous voice of praise from all creatures; since their very existence, and still more their various blessednesses, give witness to the all-gladdening Mercy which encompasses them. But Creation's anthem is a song without words, and needs to be made articulate by the conscious thanksgivings of those who,

being blessed by possession of Jehovah's loving-kindness, render blessing to Him with heart and lip.

The Kingship of God was lightly touched in ver. 1. It now becomes the psalmist's theme in vv. 11-13. It is for God's favoured ones to *speake*, while Creation can but *be*. It is for men who can recognise God's sovereign Will as their law, and know Him as Ruler, not only by power, but by goodness, to proclaim that kingdom which psalmists knew to be "righteousness, peace, and joy." The purpose for which God has lavished His favour on Israel is that they might be the heralds of His royalty to "the sons of men." The recipients of His grace should be the messengers of His grace. The aspects of that kingdom which fill the psalmist's thoughts in this part of his hymn, correspond with that side of the Divine nature celebrated in vv. 1-6—namely, the more majestic—while the graciousness magnified in vv. 7-10 is again the theme in the last portion (vv. 14-20). An intentional parallelism between the first and third parts is suggested by the recurrence in ver. 12 of part of the same heaped-together phrase which occurs in ver. 5. There we read of "the splendour of the glory of Thy majesty"; here of "the glory of the splendour of Thy kingdom,"—expressions substantially identical in meaning. The very glory of the kingdom of Jehovah is a pledge that it is eternal. What corruption or decay could touch so radiant and mighty a throne? Israel's monarchy was a thing of the past; but as, "in the year that King Uzziah died," Isaiah saw the true King of Israel throned in the Temple, so the vanishing of the earthly head of the theocracy seems to have revealed with new clearness to devout men in Israel the perpetuity of the reign of Jehovah. Hence the psalms of the King are mostly post-exilic. It is blessed when the shattering of earthly goods or the withdrawal of human helpers and lovers makes more plain the Unchanging Friend and His abiding power to succour and suffice.

The last portion of the psalm is marked by a frequent repetition of "all," which occurs eleven times in these verses. The singer seems to delight in the very sound of the word, which suggests to him boundless visions of the wide sweep of God's universal mercy, and of the numberless crowd of dependents who wait on and are satisfied by Him. He passes far beyond national bounds.

Ver. 14 begins the grand catalogue of universal blessings by an aspect of God's goodness which, at first sight, seems restricted, but is only too wide, since there is no man who is not often ready to fall and needing a strong hand to uphold him. The universality of man's weakness is pathetically testified by this verse. Those who are in the act of falling are upheld by Him; those who have fallen are helped to regain their footing. Universal sustaining and restoring grace are His. The psalmist says nothing of the conditions on which that grace in its highest forms is exercised; but these are inherent in the nature of the case, for, if the falling man will not lay hold of the outstretched hand, down he must go. There would be no place for restoring help, if sustaining aid worked as universally as it is proffered. The word for "raises" in ver. 14 *b* occurs only here and in Psalm cxlvi. 8. Probably the author of both psalms is one. In vv. 15, 16, the universality of Providence is set forth in language partly taken from Psalm civ. 27, 28. The petitioners are all creatures. They mutely appeal to God, with ex-

pectant eyes fixed on Him, like a dog looking for a crust from its master. He has but to "open His hand" and they are satisfied. The process is represented as easy and effortless. Ver. 16 *b* has received different explanations. The word rendered "desire" is often used for "favour"—i. e., God's—and is by some taken in that meaning here. So Cheyne translates "fillest everything that lives with goodwill." But seeing that the same word recurs in ver. 19, in an obvious parallel with this verse, and has there necessarily the meaning of *desire*, it is more natural to give it the same signification here. The clause then means that the opening of God's hand satisfies every creature, by giving it that which it desires in full enjoyment.

These common blessings of Providence avail to interpret deeper mysteries. Since the world is full of happy creatures nourished by Him, it is a reasonable faith that His work is all of a piece, and that in all His dealings the twin attributes of righteousness and lovingkindness rule. There are enough plain tokens of God's character in plain things to make us sure that mysterious and apparently anomalous things have the same character regulating them. In ver. 17 *b* the word rendered *loving* is that usually employed of the objects of lovingkindness, God's "favoured ones." It is used of God only here and in Jer. iii. 12, and must be taken in an active sense, as *One who exercises lovingkindness*. The underlying principle of all His acts is Love, says the psalmist, and there is no antagonism between that deepest motive and Righteousness. The singer has indeed climbed to a sun-lit height, from which he sees far and can look down into the deep of the Divine judgments and discern that they are a clear-obscure.

He does not restrict this universal beneficence when he goes on to lay down conditions on which the reception of its highest forms depend. These conditions are not arbitrary; and within their limits, the same universality is displayed. The lower creation makes its mute appeal to God, but men have the prerogative and obligation of calling upon Him with real desire and trust. Such suppliants will universally be blessed with a nearness of God to them, better than His proximity through power, knowledge, or the lower manifestations of His lovingkindness, to inferior creatures. Just as the fact of life brought with it certain wants, which God is bound to supply, since He gives it, so the fear and love of Him bring deeper needs, which He is still more (if that were possible) under pledge to satisfy. The creatures have their desires met. Those who fear Him will certainly have theirs; and that, not only in so far as they share physical life with worm and bee, whom their heavenly Father feeds, but in so far as their devotion sets in motion a new series of aspirations, longings, and needs, which will certainly not be left unfulfilled. "Food" is all the boon that the creatures crave, and they get it by an easy process. But man, especially man who fears and loves God, has deeper needs, sadder in one aspect, since they come from perils and ills from which he has to be saved, but more blessed in another, since every need is a door by which God can enter a soul. These sacred necessities and more wistful longings are not to be satisfied by simply opening God's hand. More has to be done than that. For they can only be satisfied by the gift of Himself, and men need much disciplining before they will to receive Him into their hearts. They who love and fear Him will desire

Him chiefly, and that desire can never be balked. There is a region, and only one, in which it is safe to set our hearts on unattained good. They who long for God will always have as much of God as they long for and are capable of receiving.

But notwithstanding the universality of the Divine lovingkindness, mankind still parts into two sections, one capable of receiving the highest gifts, one incapable, because not desiring them. And therefore the One Light, in its universal shining, works two effects, being lustre and life to such as welcome it, but darkness and death to those who turn from it. It is man's awful prerogative that he can distil poison out of the water of life, and can make it impossible for himself to receive from tender, universal Goodness anything but destruction.

The singer closes his song with the reiterated vow that his songs shall never close, and, as in the earlier part of the psalm, rejoices in the confidence that his single voice shall, like that of the herald angel at Bethlehem, be merged in the notes of "a multitude praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest."

PSALM CXLVI.

- 1 Hallelujah!
Praise Jehovah, my soul.
- 2 I will praise Jehovah while I live,
I will harp to Jehovah as long as I exist.
- 3 Trust not in nobles,
In a son of Adam, who has no deliverance [to give].
- 4 His spirit goes forth, he returns to his earth,
In that same day his schemes perish.
- 5 Blessed he who has the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope is on Jehovah his God!
- 6 Who made heaven and earth,
The sea—and all that is in them;
Who keeps troth for ever;
- 7 Who executes judgment for the oppressed;
Who gives bread to the hungry.
Jehovah looses captives;
- 8 Jehovah opens the eyes of the blind;
Jehovah raises the bowed down;
Jehovah loves the righteous;
- 9 Jehovah preserves the strangers;
Orphans and widows He sets up;
But the way of the wicked He thwarts.
- 10 Jehovah shall be King for ever,
Thy God, O Zion, to generation after generation.

Hallelujah!

THE long-drawn music of the Psalter closes with five Hallelujah psalms, in which, with constantly swelling diapason, all themes of praise are pealed forth, until the melodious thunder of the final psalm, which calls on everything that has breath to praise Jehovah. Possibly the number of these psalms may have reference to the five books into which the Psalter is divided.

This is the first of the five. It is largely coloured by earlier songs, but still throbs with fresh emotion. Its theme is the blessedness of trust in Jehovah, as shown by His character and works. It deals less with Israel's special prerogatives than its companions do, while yet it claims the universally beneficent Ruler as Israel's God.

The singer's full heart of thanksgiving must first pour itself out in vows of perpetual praise, before he begins to woo others to the trust which blesses him. Exhortations are impotent unless enforced by example. Ver. 2 is borrowed with slight variation from Psalm civ. 33.

The negative side of the psalmist's exhortation follows in vv. 3, 4, which warn against wasting trust on powerless men. The same antithesis between men and God as objects of confidence occurs in many places of Scripture, and here is probably borrowed from Psalm cxviii. 8. The reason assigned for the dehortation is mainly man's mortality. However high his state, he is but a "son of Adam" (the earth-born), and inherits the feebleness and fleetingness which deprive him of ability to help. "He has no salvation" is the literal rendering of the last words of ver. 3 b. Psalm lx. 11 gives the same thought, and almost in the same words. Ver. 4 sets forth more fully man's mortality, as demonstrating the folly of trusting in him. His breath or spirit escapes; he goes back to "his earth," from which he was created; and what becomes of all his busy schemes? They "perish" as he does. The psalmist has a profound sense of the phantasmal character of the solid-seeming realities of human glory and power. But it wakes no bitterness in him, nor does it breathe any sadness into his song. It only teaches him to cling the more closely to the permanent and the real. His negative teaching, if it stood alone, would be a gospel of despair, the reduction of life to a torturing cheat; but taken as the prelude to the revelation of One whom it is safe to trust, there is nothing sad in it. So the psalm springs up at once from these thoughts of the helplessness of mortal man, to hymn the blessedness of trust set upon the undying God, like a song-bird from its lair in a grave-yard, which pours its glad notes above the grassy mounds, as it rises in spirals towards the blue, and at each gives forth a more exultant burst of music.

The exclamation in ver. 5 is the last of the twenty-five "Blesseds" in the Psalter. Taken together, as any concordance will show, beginning with Psalm i., they present a beautiful and comprehensive ideal of the devout life. The felicity of such a life is here gathered up into two comprehensive considerations, which supplement each other. It is blessed to have the God of Jacob on our side; but it is not enough for the heart to know that He bore a relation to another in the far-off past or to a community in the present. There must be an individualising bond between the soul and God, whereby the "God of Jacob" becomes the God who belongs to the single devout man, and all the facts of whose protection in the past are renewed in the prosaic present. It is blessed to have Jehovah for one's "help," but that is only secured when, by the effort of one's own will, He is clasped as one's "hope." Such hope is blessed, for it will never be put to shame, nor need to shift its anchorage. It brings into any life the all-sufficient help which is the ultimate source of all felicity, and makes the hope that grasps it blessed, as the hand that holds some fragrant gum is perfumed by the touch.

But the psalmist passes swiftly from celebrating trust to magnify its object, and sets forth in an impressive series the manifold perfections and acts which witness that Jehovah is worthy to be the sole Confidence of men.

The nine Divine acts, which invite to trust in Him, are divided into two parts, by a change in

construction. There is, first, a series of participles (vv. 6-7 *b*), and then a string of brief sentences enumerating Divine deeds (vv. 7 *c*-9). No very clear difference in thought can be established as corresponding to this difference in form. The psalmist begins with God's omnipotence as manifested in creation. The first requisite for trust is assurance of power in the person trusted. The psalmist calls heaven and earth and sea, with all their inhabitants as witnesses that Jehovah is not like the son of man, in whom there is no power to help.

But power may be whimsical, changeable, or may shroud its designs in mystery; therefore, if it is to be trusted, its purposes and methods must be so far known that a man may be able to reckon on it. Therefore the psalm adds unchangeable faithfulness to His power. But Power, however faithful, is not yet worthy of trust, unless it works according to righteousness, and has an arm that wars against wrong; therefore to creative might and plighted troth the psalmist adds the exercise of judgment. Nor are these enough, for the conception which they embody may be that of a somewhat stern and repellent Being, who may be revered, but not approached with the warm heart of trust; therefore the psalmist adds beneficence, which ministers their appropriate food to all desires, not only of the flesh, but of the spirit. The hungry hearts of men, who are all full of needs and longing, may turn to this mighty, faithful, righteous Jehovah, and be sure that He never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them. All our various kinds of hunger are doors for God to come into our spirits.

The second series of sentences deals mainly with the Divine beneficence in regard to man's miseries. The psalmist does not feel that the existence of these sad varieties of sorrow clouds his assurance in God's goodness. To him they are occasions for the most heart-touching display of God's pitying, healing hand. If there is any difference between the two sets of clauses descriptive of God's acts, the latter bring into clearer light His personal agency in each case of suffering. This mighty, faithful, righteous, beneficent Jehovah, in all the majesty which that name suggests, comes down to the multitude of burdened ones and graciously deals with each, having in His heart the knowledge of, and in His hand the remedy for, all their ills. The greatness of His nature expressed by His name is vividly contrasted with the tenderness and lowliness of His working. Captives, blind persons, and those bowed down by sorrows or otherwise appeal to Him by their helplessness, and His strong hand breaks the fetters, and His gentle touch opens without pain the closed eyes and quickens the paralysed nerve to respond to the light, and His firm, loving hold lifts to their feet and establishes the prostrate. All these classes of afflicted persons are meant to be regarded literally, but all may have a wider meaning and be intended to hint at spiritual bondage, blindness, and abjectness.

The next clause (ver. 8 *c*) seems to interrupt the representation of forms of affliction, but it comes in with great significance in the centre of that sad catalogue; for its presence here teaches that not merely affliction, whether physical or other, secures Jehovah's gracious help, but that there must be the yielding of heart to Him, and the effort at conformity of life with His precepts and pattern, if His aid is to be reckoned on in men's sorrows. The prisoners will still languish in chains, the

blind will grope in darkness, the bowed down will lie prone in the dust, unless they are righteous.

The series of afflictions which God alleviates is resumed in ver. 9 with a pathetic triad — strangers, widows, and fatherless. These are forlorn indeed, and the depth of their desolation is the measure of the Divine compassion. The enumeration of Jehovah's acts, which make trust in God blessed in itself, and the sure way of securing help which is not vain, needs but one more touch for completion, and that is added in the solemn thought that He, by His providences and in the long run, turns aside (*i. e.* from its aim) the way of the wicked. That aspect of God's government is lightly handled in one clause, as befits the purpose of the psalm. But it could not be left out. A true likeness must have shadows. God were not a God for men to rely on, unless the trend of His reign was to crush evil and thwart the designs of sinners.

The blessedness of trust in Jehovah is gathered up into one great thought in the last verse of the psalm. The sovereignty of God to all generations suggests the swift disappearance of earthly princes, referred to in ver. 4. To trust in fleeting power is madness; to trust in the Eternal King is wisdom and blessedness, and in some sense makes him who trusts a sharer in the eternity of the God in whom is his hope, and from whom is his help.

PSALM CXLVII.

1 Hallelujah !

- For it is good to harp unto our God,
For it is pleasant: praise is comely.
- 2 Jehovah is the builder up of Jerusalem,
The outcasts of Israel He gathers together;
- 3 The healer of the broken-hearted,
And He binds their wounds;
- 4 Counting a number for the stars,
He calls them all by names.
- 5 Great is our Lord and of vast might,
To His understanding there is no number.
- 6 Jehovah helps up the afflicted,
Laying low the wicked to the ground.
- 7 Sing to Jehovah with thanksgiving,
Harp to our God on the lyre,
- 8 Covering heaven with clouds,
Preparing rain for the earth;
Making the mountains shoot forth grass,
- 9 Giving to the beast its food,
To the brood of the raven which croak.
- 10 Not in the strength of the horse does He delight,
Not in the legs of a man does He take pleasure.
- 11 Jehovah takes pleasure in them that fear Him,
Them that wait for His lovingkindness.
- 12 Extol Jehovah, O Jerusalem,
Praise thy God, O Zion.
- 13 For He has strengthened the bars of thy gates,
He has blessed thy children in thy midst.
- 14 Setting thy borders in peace,
With the fat of wheat He satisfies thee;
- 15 Sending forth His commandment on the earth,
Swiftly runs His word;
- 16 Giving snow like wool,
Hoar frost He scatters like ashes;
- 17 Flinging forth His ice like morsels,
Before His cold who can stand ?
- 18 He sends forth His word and melts them,
He causes His wind to blow—the waters flow;
- 19 Declaring His word to Jacob,
His statutes and judgments to Israel.

20 He has not dealt thus to any nation;
And His judgments—they have not known them.

THE threefold calls to praise Jehovah (vv. 1, 7, 12) divide this psalm into three parts, the two former of which are closely connected, inasmuch as the first part is mainly occupied with celebrating God's mercy to the restored Israel, and the second takes a wider outlook, embracing His beneficence to all living things. Both these points of view are repeated in the same order in the third part (vv. 12-20), which the LXX. makes a separate psalm. The allusions to Jerusalem as rebuilt, to the gathering of the scattered Israelites, and to the fortifications of the city naturally point to the epoch of the Restoration, whether or not, with Delitzsch and others, we suppose that the psalm was sung at the feast of the dedication of the new walls. In any case, it is a hymn of the restored people, which starts from the special mercy shown to them, and rejoices in the thought that "Our God" fills the earth with good and reigns to bless, in the realm of Nature as in that of special Revelation. The emphasis placed on God's working in nature, in this and others of these closing psalms, is probably in part a polemic against the idolatry which Israel had learned to abhor, by being brought face to face with it in Babylon, and in part a result of the widening of conceptions as to His relation to the world outside Israel which the Exile had also effected. The two truths of His special relation to His people and of His universal loving-kindness have often been divorced, both by His people and by their enemies. This psalm teaches a more excellent way.

The main theme of vv. 1-6 is God's manifestation of transcendent power and incalculable wisdom, as well as infinite kindness, in building up the ruined Jerusalem and collecting into a happy band of citizens the lonely wanderers of Israel. For such blessings praise is due, and the psalm summons all who share them to swell the song. Ver. 1 is somewhat differently construed by some, as Hupfeld, who would change one letter in the word rendered above "to harp," and, making it an imperative, would refer "good" and "pleasant" to God, thus making the whole to read, "Praise Jehovah, for He is good; harp to our God, for He is pleasant: praise is comely." This change simplifies some points of construction, but labors under the objection that it is contrary to usage to apply the adjective "pleasant" to God; and the usual rendering is quite intelligible and appropriate. The reason for the fittingness and delightsomeness of praise is the great mercy shown to Israel in the Restoration, which mercy is in the psalmist's thoughts throughout this part. He has the same fondness for using participles as the author of the previous psalm, and begins vv. 2, 3, 4, and 6 with them. Possibly their use is intended to imply that the acts described by them are regarded as continuous, not merely done once for all. Jehovah is ever building up Jerusalem, and, in like manner, uninterruptedly energising in providence and nature. The collocation of Divine acts in ver. 2 bears upon the great theme that fills the singer's heart and lips. It is the outcasts of Israel of whom he thinks, while he sings of binding up the broken-hearted. It is they who are the "afflicted," helped up by that strong, gentle clasp; while their oppressors are the wicked, flung prone by the very wind of God's hand. The beautiful and profound juxtaposition of gentle healing and omnipotence in vv. 3, 4, is meant to signalise the work of restoring

Israel as no less wondrous than that of marshalling the stars, and to hearten faith by pledging that incalculable Power to perfect its restoring work. He who stands beside the sick-bed of the broken-hearted, like a gentle physician, with balm and bandage, and lays a tender hand on their wounds, is He who sets the stars in their places and tells them as a shepherd his flock or a commander his army. The psalmist borrows from Isa. xl. 26-29, where several of his expressions occur. "Counting a number for the stars" is scarcely equivalent to numbering them as they shine. It rather means determining how many of them there shall be. Calling them all by names (lit., He calls names to them all) is not giving them designations, but summoning them as a captain reading the muster-roll of his band. It may also imply full knowledge of each individual in their countless hosts. Ver. 5 is taken from the passage in Isaiah already referred to, with the change of "no number" for "no searching," a change which is suggested by the preceding reference to the number of the stars. These have a number, though it surpasses human arithmetic; but His wisdom is measureless. And all this magnificence of power, this minute particularising knowledge, this abyss of wisdom, are guarantees for the healing of the broken-hearted. The thought goes further than Israel's deliverance from bondage. It has a strong voice of cheer for all sad hearts, who will let Him probe their wounds that He may bind them up. The mighty God of Creation is the tender God of Providence and of Redemption. Therefore "praise is comely," and fear and faltering are unbecoming.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 7-11) passes out from the special field of mercy to Israel, and comes down from the glories of the heavens, to magnify God's universal goodness manifested in physical changes, by which lowly creatures are provided for. The point of time selected is that of the November rains. The verbs in vv. 8, 9, 11, are again participles, expressive of continuous action. The yearly miracle which brings from some invisible storehouse the clouds to fill the sky and drop down fatness, the answer of the brown earth which mysteriously shoots forth the tender green spikelets away up on the mountain flanks, where no man has sown and no man will reap, the loving care which thereby provides food for the wild creatures, owned by no one, and answers the hoarse croak of the callow fledglings in the ravens' nests—these are manifestations of God's power and revelations of His character worthy to be woven into a hymn which celebrates His restoring grace, and to be set beside the apocalypse of His greatness in the mighty heavens. But what has ver. 10 to do here? The connection of it is difficult to trace. Apparently, the psalmist would draw from the previous verses, which exhibit God's universal goodness and the creatures' dependence on Him, the lesson that reliance on one's own resources or might is sure to be smitten with confusion, while humble trust in God, which man alone of earth's creatures can exercise, is for him the condition of his receiving needed gifts. The beast gets its food, and it is enough that the young ravens should croak, but man has to "fear Him" and to wait on His "lovingkindness." Ver. 10 is a reminiscence of Psalm xxxiii. 16, 17, and ver. 11 of the next verse of the same psalm.

The third part (vv. 12-20) travels over substantially the same ground as the two former, beginning with the mercy shown to the restored Israel, and passing on to the wider manifestations of

God's goodness. But there is a difference in this repeated setting forth of both these themes. The fortifications of Jerusalem are now complete, and their strength gives security to the people gathered into the city. Over all the land once devastated by war peace broods, and the fields that lay desolate now have yielded harvest. The ancient promise (Psalm lxxxi. 16) has been fulfilled, its condition having been complied with, and Israel having hearkened to Jehovah. Protection, blessing, tranquillity, abundance, are the results of obedience, God's gifts to them that fear Him. So it was in the psalmist's experience; so, in higher form, it is still. These Divine acts are continuous, and as long as there are men who trust, there will be a God who builds defences around them, and satisfies them with good.

Again the psalmist turns to the realm of nature; but it is nature at a different season which now yields witness to God's universal power and care. The phenomena of a sharp winter were more striking to the psalmist than to us. But his poet's eye and his devout heart recognise even in the cold, before which his Eastern constitution cowered shivering, the working of God's Will. His "commandment" or Word is personified, and compared to a swift-footed messenger. As ever, power over material things is attributed to the Divine word, and as ever, in the Biblical view of nature, all intermediate links are neglected, and the Almighty cause at one end of the chain and the physical effect at the other are brought together. There is between these two clauses room enough for all that meteorology has to say.

The winter-piece in vv. 16, 17, dashes off the dreary scene with a few bold strokes. The air is full of flakes like floating wool, or the white mantle covers the ground like a cloth; rime lies everywhere, as if ashes were powdered over trees and stones. Hail-stones fall, as if He flung them down from above. They are like "morsels" of bread, a comparison which strikes us as violent, but which may possibly describe the more severe storms, in which flat pieces of ice fall. As by magic, all is changed when He again sends forth His word. It but needs that He should let a warm wind steal gently across the desolation, and every sealed and silent brook begins to tinkle along its course. And will not He who thus changes the face of the earth in like manner breathe upon frost-bound lives and hearts,

"And every winter merge in spring" ?

But the psalm cannot end with contemplation of God's universal beneficence, however gracious that is. There is a higher mode of activity for His word than that exercised on material things. God sends His commandment forth and earth unconsciously obeys, and all creatures, men included, are fed and blessed. But the noblest utterance of His word is in the shape of statutes and judgments, and these are Israel's prerogative. The psalmist is not rejoicing that other nations have not received these, but that Israel has. Its privilege is its responsibility. It has received them that it may obey them, and then that it may make them known. If the God who scatters lower blessings broad-cast, not forgetting beasts and ravens, has restricted His highest gift to His people, the restriction is a clear call to them to spread the knowledge of the treasure entrusted to them. To glory in privilege is sin; to learn that it means responsibility is wisdom. The lesson is needed by those who to-day have been served as heirs to Israel's prerogative, for-

feited by it because it clutched it for itself, and forgot its obligation to carry it as widely as God had diffused His lower gifts.

PSALM CXLVIII.

- 1 Hallelujah!
Praise Jehovah from the heavens,
Praise Him in the heights.
- 2 Praise Him, all His angels,
Praise Him, all His host.
- 3 Praise Him, sun and moon,
Praise Him, all stars of light.
- 4 Praise Him, heavens of heavens,
And waters that are above the heavens—
- 5 Let them praise the name of Jehovah,
For He, He commanded and they were created.
- 6 And He established them for ever and aye,
A law gave He [them] and none transgresses.
- 7 Praise Jehovah from the earth,
Sea-monsters, and all ocean-depths;
- 8 Fire and hail, snow and smoke,
Storm-wind doing His behest;
- 9 Mountains and all hills,
Fruit trees and all cedars;
- 10 Wild beast and all cattle,
Creeping thing and winged fowl;
- 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
Princes and all judges of the earth;
- 12 Young men and also maidens,
Old men with children—
- 13 Let them praise the name of Jehovah,
For His name alone is exalted,
His majesty above earth and heaven.
- 14 And He has lifted up a horn for His people,
A praise for all His beloved,
[Even] for the children of Israel, the people
near to Him.
Hallelujah!

THE mercy granted to Israel (ver. 14) is, in the psalmist's estimation, worthy to call forth strains of praise from all creatures. It is the same conception as is found in several of the psalms of the King (xciii.-c.), but is here expressed with unparalleled magnificence and fervour. The same idea attains the climax of its representation in the mighty anthem from "every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them," whom John heard saying, "Blessing and honour and glory and power unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." It may be maintained that this psalm is only a highly emotional and imaginative rendering of the truth that all God's works praise Him, whether consciously or not, but its correspondence with a line of thought which runs through Scripture from its first page to its last—namely, that, as man's sin subjected the creatures to "vanity," so his redemption shall be their glorifying—leads us to see prophetic anticipation, and not mere poetic rapture, in this summons pealed out to heights and depths, and all that lies between, to rejoice in what Jehovah has done for Israel.

The psalm falls into two broad divisions in the former of which heaven, and in the latter earth, are invoked to praise Jehovah. Ver. 1 addresses generally the subsequently particularised heavenly beings. "From the heavens" and "in the heights" praise is to sound: the former phrase marks the place of origin, and may imply the floating down to a listening earth of that ethereal music; the latter thinks of all the dim distances

as filled with it. The angels, as conscious beings, are the chorus-leaders, and even to "principalities and powers in heavenly places" Israel's restoration reveals new phases of the "manifold wisdom of God." The "host" (or *hosts*, according to the amended reading of the Hebrew margin) are here obviously angels, as required by the parallelism with *a*. The sun, moon, and stars, of which the psalmist knows nothing but that they burn with light and roll in silence through the dark expanse, are bid to break the solemn stillness that fills the daily and nightly sky. Finally, the singer passes in thought through the lower heavens, and would fain send his voice whither his eye cannot pierce, up into that mysterious watery abyss, which, according to ancient cosmography, had the firmament for its floor. It is absurd to look for astronomical accuracy in such poetry as this; but a singer who knew no more about sun, moon, and stars, and depths of space, than that they were all God's creatures and in their silence praised Him, knew and felt more of their true nature and charm than does he who knows everything about them except these facts.

Vv. 5, 6, assign the reason for the praise of the heavens—Jehovah's creative act, His sustaining power and His "law," the utterance of His will to which they conform. Ver. 6 *a* emphatically asserts, by expressing the "He," which is in Hebrew usually included in the verb, that it is Jehovah and none other who "preserves the stars from wrong." "Preservation is continuous creation." The meaning of the close of ver. 6 *b* is doubtful, if the existing text is adhered to. It reads literally "and [it?] shall not pass." The unexpressed nominative is by some taken to be the before-mentioned "law," and "pass" to mean *cease to be in force* or *be transgressed*. Others take the singular verb as being used distributively, and so render "None of them transgresses." But a very slight alteration gives the plural verb, which makes all plain.

In these starry depths obedience reigns; it is only on earth that a being lives who can and will break the merciful barriers of Jehovah's law. Therefore, from that untroubled region of perfect service comes a purer song of praise, though it can never have the pathetic harmonies of that which issues from rebels brought back to allegiance.

The summons to the earth begins with the lowest places, as that to the heavens did with the highest. The psalmist knows little of the uncouth forms that may wallow in ocean depths, but he is sure that they too, in their sunless abodes, can praise Jehovah. From the ocean the psalm rises to the air, before it, as it were, settles down on earth. Ver. 8 may refer to contemporaneous phenomena, and, if so, describes a wild storm hurtling through the lower atmosphere. The verbal arrangement in ver. 8 *a* is that of inverted parallelism, in which "fire" corresponds to "smoke" and "hail" to "snow." Lightning and hail, which often occur together, are similarly connected in Psalm xviii. 12. But it is difficult to explain "snow and smoke," if regarded as accompaniments of the former pair—fire and hail. Rather they seem to describe another set of meteorological phenomena, a winter storm, in which the air is thick with flakes as if charged with smoke, while the preceding words refer to a summer's thunderstorm. The resemblance to the two pictures in the preceding psalm, one of the time of the latter rains and one of bitter winter weather, is noticeable. The storm-wind, which

drives all these formidable agents through the air, in its utmost fury is a servant. As in Psalm cvii. 25, it obeys God's command.

The solid earth itself, as represented by its loftiest summits which pierce the air; vegetable life, as represented by the two classes of fruit-bearing and forest trees; animals in their orders, wild and domestic; the lowest worm that crawls and the light-winged bird that soars,—these all have voices to praise God. The song has been steadily rising in the scale of being from inanimate to animated creatures, and last it summons man, in whom creation's praise becomes vocal and conscious.

All men, without distinction of rank, age, or sex, have the same obligation and privilege of praise. Kings are most kingly when they cast their crowns before Him. Judges are wise when they sit as His vice-gerents. The buoyant vigour of youth is purest when used with remembrance of the Creator; the maiden's voice is never so sweet as in hymns to Jehovah. The memories and feebleness of age are hallowed and strengthened by recognition of the God who can renew failing energy and soothe sad remembrances; and the child's opening powers are preserved from stain and distortion, by drawing near to Him in whose praise the extremes of life find common ground. The young man's strong bass, the maiden's clear alto, the old man's quivering notes, the child's fresh treble, should blend in the song.

Ver. 13 gives the reason for the praise of earth, but especially of man, with very significant difference from that assigned in vv. 5, 6. "His name is exalted." He has manifested Himself to eyes that can see, and has shown forth His transcendent majesty. Man's praise is to be based not only on the Revelation of God in Nature, but on that higher one in His dealings with men, and especially with Israel. This chief reason for praise is assigned in ver. 14 and indeed underlies the whole psalm. "He has lifted up a horn for His people," delivering them from their humiliation and captivity, and setting them again in their land. Thereby He has provided all His favoured ones with occasion for praise. The condensed language of ver. 14 *b* is susceptible of different constructions and meanings. Some would understand the verb from *a* as repeated before "praise," and take the meaning to be "He exalts the praise [*i. e.*, the glory] of His beloved," but it is improbable that praise here should mean anything but that rendered to God. The simplest explanation of the words is that they are in apposition to the preceding clause, and declare that Jehovah, by "exalting a horn to His people," has given them especially occasion to praise Him. Israel is further designated as "a people near to Him." It is a nation of priests, having the privilege of access to His presence; and, in the consciousness of this dignity, "comes forward in this psalm as the leader of all the creatures in their praise of God, and strikes up a hallelujah that is to be joined in by heaven and earth" (Delitzsch).

PSALM CXLIX.

- 1 Sing to Jehovah a new song,
His praise in the congregation of His favoured ones.
- 2 Let Israel rejoice in his Maker,
Let the children of Zion be glad in their King.
- 3 Let them praise His name in [the] dance,
With timbrel and lyre let them play to Him.

- 4 For Jehovah takes pleasure in His people,
He adorns the meek with salvation.
- 5 Let His favoured ones exult in glory,
Let them shout aloud on their beds—
- 6 The high praises of God in their throat,
And a two-edged sword in their hand;
- 7 To execute vengeance on the nations,
Chastisements on the peoples;
- 8 To bind their kings in chains
And their nobles in bonds of iron;
- 9 To execute on them the sentence written—
An honour is this to all His favoured ones.
Hallelujah!

IN the preceding psalm Israel's restoration was connected with the recognition by all creatures and especially by the kings of the earth and their people, of Jehovah's glory. This psalm presents the converse thought, that the restored Israel becomes the executor of judgments on those who will not join in the praise which rings from Israel that it may be caught up by all. The two psalms are thus closely connected. The circumstances of the Restoration accord with the tone of both, as of the other members of this closing group.

The happy recipients of new mercy are, as in Psalms xcvi. and xcvi., summoned to break into new songs. Winter silences the birds; but spring, the new "life re-orient out of dust," is welcomed with music from every budding tree.

Chiefly should God's praise sound out from "the congregation of His favoured ones," the long-scattered captives who owe it to His favour that they *are* a congregation once more. The jubilant psalmist delights in that name for Israel, and uses it thrice in his song. He loves to set forth the various names, which each suggest some sweet strong thought of what God is to the nation and the nation to God—His favoured ones, Israel, the children of Zion, His people, the afflicted. He heaps together synonyms expressive of rapturous joy—rejoice, be glad, exult. He calls for expressions of triumphant mirth in which limbs, instruments, and voices unite. He would have the exuberant gladness well over into the hours of repose and the night be made musical with ringing shouts of joy. "Praise is better than sleep," and the beds which had often been privy to silent tears may well be witnesses of exultation that cannot be dumb.

The psalmist touches very lightly on the reason for this outburst of praise, because he takes it for granted that so great and recent mercy needed little mention. One verse (ver. 4) suffices to recall it. The very absorption of the heart in its bliss may make it silent about the bliss. The bride needs not to tell what makes her glad. Restored Israel requires little reminder of its occasion for joy. But the brief mention of it is very beautiful. It makes prominent, not so much the outward fact, as the Divine pleasure in His people, of which the fact was effect and indication. Their affliction had been the token that God's complacency did not rest on them; their deliverance is the proof that the sunlight of His face shines on them once more. His chastisements rightly borne are ever precursors of deliverance, which adorns the meek afflicted, giving "beauty for ashes." The qualification for receiving Jehovah's help is meekness, and the effect of that help on the lowly soul is to deck it with strange loveliness. Therefore God's favoured ones may well exult in glory—*i. e.*, on account of the glory with which they are invested by His salvation.

The stern close of the psalm strikes a note which

many ears feel to be discordant, and which must be freely acknowledged to stand on the same lower level as the imprecatory psalms, while, even more distinctly than these, it is entirely free from any sentiment of personal vengeance. The picture of God's people going forth to battle, chanting His praises and swinging two-edged swords, shocks Christian sentiment. It is not to be explained away as meaning the spiritual conquest of the world with spiritual weapons. The psalmist meant actual warfare and real iron fetters. But, while the form of his anticipations belongs to the past and is entirely set aside by the better light of Christianity, their substance is true for ever. Those who have been adorned with Jehovah's salvation have the subjugation of the world to God's rule committed to them. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." There are stronger fetters than those of iron, even "the cords of love" and "the bands of a man."

"The judgment written," which is to be executed by the militant Israel on the nations does not seem to have reference either to the commandment to exterminate the Canaanites or to the punishments threatened in many places of Scripture. It is better to take it as denoting a judgment "fixed, settled, . . . written thus by God Himself" (Perowne). Ver. 9 *b* may be rendered (as Hupfeld does) "Honour [or, majesty] is He to all His favoured ones," in the sense that God manifests His majesty to them, or that He is the object of their honouring; but the usual rendering is more in accordance with the context and its high-strung martial ardour. "This"—namely, the whole of the crusade just described—is laid upon all Jehovah's favoured ones, by the fact of their participation in His salvation. They are redeemed from bondage that they may be God's warriors. The honour and obligation are universal.

PSALM CL.

- 1 Hallelujah!
Praise God in His sanctuary,
Praise Him in the firmament of His strength.
- 2 Praise Him for His mighty deeds,
Praise Him according to the abundance of His greatness.
- 3 Praise Him with blast of horn,
Praise Him with psaltery and harp.
- 4 Praise Him with timbrel and dance,
Praise Him with strings and pipe.
- 5 Praise Him with clear-sounding cymbals,
Praise Him with deep-toned cymbals.
- 6 Let everything that has breath praise Jah.
Hallelujah!

THIS noble close of the Psalter rings out one clear note of praise, as the end of all the many moods and experiences recorded in its wonderful sighs and songs. Tears, groans, wailings for sin, meditations on the dark depths of Providence, fainting faith and foiled aspirations, all lead up to this. The psalm is more than an artistic close of the Psalter; it is a prophecy of the last result of the devout life, and, in its unclouded sunniness, as well as in its universality, it proclaims the certain end of the weary years for the individual and for the world. "Everything that hath breath" shall yet praise Jehovah. The psalm is evidently meant for liturgic use, and one may imagine that each instrument began to take part in the concert as it was named, till at last all blended in a mighty torrent of praiseful sound, to which the whirling

dancers kept time. A strange contrast to modern notions of sobriety in worship!

The tenfold "Praise Him" has been often noticed as symbolic of completeness, but has probably no special significance.

In ver. 1 the psalmist calls on earth and heaven to praise. The "sanctuary" may, indeed, be either the Temple, or the heavenly palace of Jehovah, but it is more probable that the invocation, like so many others of a similar kind, is addressed to men and angels, than that the latter only are meant. They who stand in the earthly courts and they who circle the throne that is reared above the visible firmament are parts of a great whole, an antiphonal chorus. It becomes them to praise, for they each dwell in God's sanctuary.

The theme of praise is next touched in ver. 2. "His mighty deeds" might be rendered "His heroic [or, valiant] acts." The reference is to His deliverance of His people as a signal manifestation of prowess or conquering might. The tenderness which moved the power is not here in question, but the power cannot be worthily praised or understood, unless that Divine pity and graciousness of which it is the instrument are apprehended. Mighty acts, unsoftened by loving impulse and gracious purpose, would evoke awe, but not thanks. No praise is adequate to the abundance of His greatness, but yet He accepts such adoration as men can render.

The instruments named in vv. 3-5 were not all used, so far as we know, in the Temple service. There is possibly an intention to go beyond those recognised as sacred, in order to emphasise the universality of praise. The horn was the curved "Shophar," blown by the priests; "harp and psaltery were played by the Levites, timbrels were

struck by women; and dancing, playing on stringed instruments and pipes and cymbals, were not reserved for the Levites. Consequently the summons to praise God is addressed to priests, Levites, and people" (Baethgen). In ver. 4 *b* "strings" means stringed instruments, and "pipe" is probably that used by shepherds, neither of which kinds of instrument elsewhere appears as employed in worship.

Too little is known of Jewish music to enable us to determine whether the epithets applied to cymbals refer to two different kinds. Probably they do; the first being small and high-pitched, the second larger, like the similar instrument used in military music, and of a deep tone.

But the singer would fain hear a volume of sound which should drown all that sweet tumult which he has evoked; and therefore he calls on "everything that has breath" to use it in sending forth a thunder-chorus of praise to Jehovah. The invocation bears the prophecy of its own fulfilment. These last strains of the long series of psalmists are as if that band of singers of Israel turned to the listening world, and gave into its keeping the harps which, under their own hands, had yielded such immortal music.

Few voices have obeyed the summons, and the vision of a world melodious with the praise of Jehovah and of Him alone appears to us, in our despondent moments, almost as far off as it was when the last psalmist ceased to sing. But his call is our confidence; and we know that the end of history shall be that to Him whose work is mightier than all the other mighty acts of Jehovah, "Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

BY THE REV. R. F. HORTON, M. A.

INTRODUCTION.

IN attempting to make the book of Proverbs a subject of Expository Lectures and practical sermons, it has been necessary to treat the book as a uniform composition, following, chapter by chapter, the order which the compiler has adopted, and bringing the scattered sentences together under subjects which are suggested by certain more striking points in the successive chapters. By this method the great bulk of the matter contained in the book is brought under review, either in the way of exposition or in the way of quotation and allusion, though even in this method many smaller sayings slip through the expositor's meshes. But the grave defect of the method which is thus employed is that it completely obliterates those interesting marks, discernible on the very surface of the book, of the origin and the compilation of the separate parts. This defect the reader can best supply by turning to Professor Cheyne's scholarly work "Job and Solomon; or, The Wisdom of the Old Testament;" but for those who have not time or opportunity to refer to any book besides the one which is in their hands, a brief Introduction to the following Lectures may not be unwelcome.

The Jewish tradition ascribed the Proverbs, or Sayings of the Wise, to Solomon, just as it ascribed the Psalms, or inspired lyrics of the poets, to King David, and we may add, just as it ascribed all the gradual accretions and developments of the Law to Moses. But even a very uncritical reader will observe that the book of Proverbs as we have it is not the work of a single hand; and a critical inquiry into the language and style of the several parts, and also into the social and political conditions which are implied by them, has led scholars to the conclusion that, at the most, a certain number of Solomon's wise sayings are included in the collection, but that he did not in any sense compose the book. In fact, the statement in 1 Kings iv. 32, "He spake three thousand proverbs," implies that his utterances were recorded by others, and not written down by himself, and the heading to chap. xxv. of our book suggests that the "men of Hezekiah" collected the reputed sayings of Solomon from several sources, one of those sources being the collection contained in the previous chapters.*

The opening words, then, of the book—"The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel"—are not to be taken as an assertion that all which follows flowed from Solomon's pen, but rather as a general description and keynote of the subject of the treatise. It is as if the compiler wished to say, "This is a compendium of those wise sayings current among us, the model and type of which may be found in the proverbs attributed to the wisest of men, King Solomon." That this is the way in which we must understand the title becomes plain when

*Cf. xxv. 24 (xxi. 9), xxvi. 22 (xviii. 8), xxvii. 12 (xxii. 3), xxvii. 13 (xx. 16), xxvi. 15 (xxii. 13), xxvi. 15 (xix. 24), xxviii. 6 (xix. 1), xxviii. 10 (xii. 11), xxix. 13 (xxii. 2); to which add xxvii. 15 (xix. 13), xxvii. 21 (xvii. 3), xxix. 22 (xv. 18).

we find contained in the book a passage described as "the sayings of the wise" (xxiv. 23-34), a chapter distinctly entitled "The Words of Agur," and another paragraph headed "The Words of King Lemuel."

Leaving aside the traditional view of the authorship, which the book itself shows to be misleading, the contents may be briefly delineated and characterised.

The main body of Proverbs is the collection which begins at chap. x., "The Proverbs of Solomon," and ends at xxii. 16. This collection has certain distinct features which mark it off from all that precedes and from all that follows. It is, strictly speaking, a collection of proverbs, that is of brief, pointed sayings,—sometimes containing a similitude, but more generally consisting of a single antithetical moral sentiment,—such as spring into existence and pass current in every society of men. All these proverbs are identical in form: each is expressed in a distich; the apparent exception in xix. 7 is to be explained by the obvious fact that the third clause is the mutilated fragment of another proverb, which in the LXX. appears complete: *ὁ πολλὰ κακοποιῶν τελεσιουργεῖ κακίαν, ὃς δὲ ἐρεθίζει λόγους οὐ σωθήσεται*. As the form is the same in all, so the general drift of their teaching is quite uniform; the morality inculcated is of no very lofty type; the motives for right conduct are mainly prudential; there is no sense of mystery or wonder, no tendency to speculation or doubt; "Be good, and you will prosper; be wicked, and you will suffer," is the sum of the whole. A few scattered precepts occur which seem to touch a higher level and to breathe a more spiritual air; and it is possible, as has been suggested, that these were added by the author of chaps. i.-ix., when he revised and published the compilation. Such a sentiment as xiv. 34 well accords with the utterance of Wisdom in viii. 15, 16. And the series of proverbs which are grouped on the principle of their all containing the name of Jahveh, xv. 33-xvi. 7 (cf. xvi. 20, 33) seems to be closely linked with the opening chapters of the book. Assuming the proverbs of this collection to spring from the same period, and to reflect the social conditions which then prevailed, we should say that it points to a time of comparative simplicity and purity, when the main industry was that of tilling the soil, when the sayings of wise people were valued by an unsophisticated community, when the family life was pure, the wife honoured (xii. 4; xviii. 22; xix. 14), and parental authority maintained, and when the king was still worthy of respect, the immediate and obedient instrument of the Divine government (xxi. 1). The whole collection seems to date from the earlier and happier times of the monarchy.

To this collection is added an appendix (xxii. 17-xxiv. 22), which opens with an exhortation addressed by the teacher to his pupil. The literary form of this appendix falls far behind the style of the main collection. The terse and compact distich occurs rarely; most of the sayings are more cumbrous and elaborate, and in one

case there is a brief didactic poem carried through several verses (xxiii. 29-35). As the style of composition shows a decline, so the general conditions which form the background of the sayings are less happy. They seem to indicate a time of growing luxury; gluttony and drunkenness are the subjects of strong invective. It appears that the poor are oppressed by the rich (xxii. 22), and justice is not rightly administered, so that the innocent are carried away into confinement (xxiv. 11, 12). There is political unrest, too, and the young have to be cautioned against the revolutionary or anarchical spirit (xxiv. 21). We are evidently brought down to a later period in Israel's melancholy history.

Another brief appendix follows (xxiv. 23-34), in which the distich form almost entirely disappears; it is remarkable as containing a little picture (30-34), which, like the much longer passage in vii. 6-27, is presented as the personal observation of the writer.

We now pass on to an entirely new collection, ch. xxv.-xxix., which was made, we are told, in the literary circle at the court of Hezekiah, two hundred and fifty years or thereabouts after the time of Solomon. In this collection there is no uniformity of structure such as distinguished the proverbs of the first collection. Some distichs occur, but as often as not the proverb is drawn out into three, four, and in one case (xxv. 6, 7) five clauses; xxvii. 23-27 forms a brief connected exhortation, which is a considerable departure from the simple structure of the *masal*, or proverb. The social condition reflected in these chapters is not very attractive; it is clear that the people have had experience of a bad ruler (xxix. 2); we seem to have hints of the many troubled experiences through which the monarchy of Israel passed—the divided rule, the injustice, the incapacity, the oppression (xxviii. 2, 3, 12, 15, 16, 28). There is one proverb which particularly recalls the age of Hezekiah, when the doom of the exile was already being proclaimed by the prophets: "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place" (xxvii. 8). And it is perhaps characteristic of that troubled time, when the spiritual life was to be deepened by the experience of material suffering and national disaster, that this collection contains a proverb which might be almost the key-note of the New Testament morality (xxv. 21, 22).

The book closes with three quite distinct passages, which can only be regarded as appendices. According to one interpretation of the very difficult words which stand at the head of chaps. xxx. and xxxi., these paragraphs would come from a foreign source; it has been thought that the word translated "oracle" might be the name of the country mentioned in Gen. xxv. 14, Massa. But whether Jakeh and King Lemuel were natives of this shadowy land or not, it is certain that the whole tone and drift of these two sections are alien to the general spirit of the book. There is something enigmatical in their style and artificial in their form, which would suggest a very late period in Israel's literary history. And the closing passage, which describes the virtuous woman, is distinguished by being an alphabetical acrostic, the verses beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a kind of composition which points to the dawn of Rabbinical methods in

literature. It is impossible to say when or how these curious and interesting additions were made to our book, but scholars have generally recognised them as the product of the exile, if not the post-exile, period.

Now, the two collections which have been described, with their several appendices, were at some favourable point in religious history, possibly in those happy days of Josiah when the Deuteronomic Law was newly promulgated to the joyful nation, brought together, and, as we should say now, edited, with an original introduction by an author who, unknown to us by name, is among the greatest and noblest of Biblical writers. The first nine chapters of the book, which form the introduction to the whole, strike a far higher note, appeal to nobler conceptions, and are couched in a much loftier style than the book itself. The writer bases his moral teaching on Divine authority rather than on the utilitarian basis which prevails in most of the proverbs. Writing in a time when the temptations to a lawless and sensual life were strong, appealing to the wealthier and more cultured youth of the nation, he proceeds in sweet and earnest discourse to woo his readers from the paths of vice into the Temple of Wisdom and Virtue. His method of contrasting the "two ways," and exhorting men to shun the one and choose the other, constantly reminds us of the similar appeals in the Book of Deuteronomy; but the touch is more graphic and more vivid; the gifts of the poet are employed in depicting the seven-pillared House of Wisdom and the deadly ways of Folly; and in the wonderful passage which introduces Wisdom appealing to the sons of men, on the ground of the part which she plays in the Creation and by the throne of God, we recognise the voice of a prophet—a prophet, too, who holds one of the highest places in the line of those who foretold the coming of our Lord.

Impossible as it has been in the Lectures to bring out the history and structure of the book, it will greatly help the reader to bear in mind what has just been said; he will thus be prepared for the striking contrast between the glowing beauty of the introduction and the somewhat frigid precepts which occur so frequently among the Proverbs themselves; he will be able to appreciate more fully the point which is from time to time brought into relief, that much of the teaching contained in the books is crude and imperfect, of value for us only when it has been brought to the standard of our Lord's spirit, corrected by His love and wisdom, or infused with His Divine life. And especially as the reader approaches those strange chapters "The Sayings of Agur" and "The Sayings of King Lemuel" he will be glad to remind himself of the somewhat loose relation in which they stand to the main body of the work.

In few parts of the Scripture is there more need than in this of the ever-present Spirit to interpret and apply the written word, to discriminate and assort, to arrange and to combine, the varied utterances of the ages. Nowhere is it more necessary to distinguish between the inspired speech, which comes to the mind of prophet or poet as a direct oracle of God, and the speech which is the product of human wisdom, human observation, and human common sense, and is only in that secondary sense inspired. In the book of Proverbs there is much which is recorded for

us by the wisdom of God, not because it is the expression of God's wisdom, but distinctly because it is the expression of man's wisdom; and among the lessons of the book is the sense of limitation and incompleteness which human wisdom leaves upon the mind.

But under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the reader may not only learn from the Proverbs much practical counsel for the common duties of life; he may have, from time to time, rare and wonderful glimpses into the heights and depths of God.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."—PROV. i. 7.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."—PROV. ix. 10.

(Cf. Eccles. i. 14, "To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and it was created with the faithful in the womb;" also Ps. cxi. 10).

THE book of Proverbs belongs to a group of works in the Hebrew literature the subject of which is Wisdom. It is probably the earliest of them all, and may be regarded as the stem, of which they are the branches. Without attempting to determine the relative ages of these compositions, the ordinary reader can see the points of contact between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and a little careful study reveals that the book of Job, though fuller, and richer in every respect, belongs to the same order. Outside the canon of Holy Scripture we possess two works which avowedly owe their suggestion and inspiration to our book, viz., "The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach," commonly called Ecclesiasticus, a genuinely Hebrew product, and "The Wisdom of Solomon," commonly called the Book of Wisdom, of much later origin, and exhibiting that fusion of Hebrew religious conceptions with Greek speculation which prevailed in the Jewish schools of Alexandria.

Now, the question at once occurs, What are we to understand by the Wisdom which gives a subject and a title to this extensive field of literature? and in what relation does it stand to the Law and the Prophets, which form the great bulk of the Old Testament Scriptures?

Broadly speaking, the Wisdom of the Hebrews covers the whole domain of what we should call Science and Philosophy. It is the consistent effort of the human mind to know, to understand, and to explain all that exists. It is, to use the modern phrase, the search for truth. The "wise men" were not, like Moses and the Prophets, inspired legislators and heralds of God's immediate messages to mankind; but rather, like the wise men among the earlier Greeks, Thales, Solon, Anaximenes, or like the Sophists among the later Greeks, Socrates and his successors, they brought all their faculties to bear in observing the facts of the world and of life, and in seeking to interpret them, and then in the public streets or in appointed schools endeavoured to communicate their knowledge to the young. Nothing was too high for their inquiry: "*That which is* is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?"* yet they

tried to discover and to explain *that which is*. Nothing was too lowly for their attention; wisdom "reaches from one end to another mightily, and sweetly orders all things."* Their purpose finds expression in the words of Ecclesiastes, "I turned about, and my heart was set to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things."†

But by Wisdom is meant not merely the search, but also the discovery; not merely a desire to know, but also a certain body of conceptions ascertained and sufficiently formulated. To the Hebrew mind it would have seemed meaningless to assert that Agnosticism was wisdom. It was saved from this paradoxical conclusion by its firmly rooted faith in God. Mystery might hang over the details, but one thing was plain: the whole universe was an intelligent plan of God; the mind might be baffled in understanding His ways, but all that existence is of His choosing and His ordering was taken as the axiom with which all thought must start. Thus there is a unity in the Hebrew Wisdom; the unity is found in the thought of the Creator; all the facts of the physical world, all the problems of human life, are referred to His mind; objective Wisdom is God's Being, which includes in its circle everything; and subjective wisdom, wisdom in the human mind, consists in becoming acquainted with His Being and all that is contained in it, and meanwhile in constantly admitting that He *is*, and yielding to Him the rightful place in our thought.

But while Wisdom embraces in her wide survey all things in heaven and in earth, there is one part of the vast field which makes a special demand upon human interest. The proper study of mankind is man. Very naturally the earliest subject to occupy human thought was human life, human conduct, human society. Or, to say the same thing in the language of this book, while Wisdom was occupied with the whole creation, she specially rejoiced in the habitable earth, and her delight was with the sons of men.

Theoretically embracing all subjects of human knowledge and reflection, the Wisdom of the Hebrew literature practically touches but little on what we should now call Science, and even where attention was turned to the facts and laws of the material world, it was mainly in order to borrow similitudes or illustrations for moral and religious purposes. King Solomon "spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."‡ But the Proverbs which have actually come down to us under his name refer almost exclusively to principles of conduct or observation of life, and seldom remind us of the earth, the sea, and the sky, except as the dwelling-place of men, the house covered with paintings for his delight or filled with imagery for his instruction.

But there is a further distinction to be drawn, and in attempting to make it plain we may determine the place of the Proverbs in the general scheme of the inspired writings. Human life is a sufficiently large theme; it includes not only social and political questions, but the searchings and speculations of philosophy, the truths and revelations of religion. From one point of view, therefore, wisdom may be said to embrace the Law and the Prophets, and in a beautiful pas-

* Eccl. vii. 24.

* Wisdom viii. 1.

† Eccl. vii. 25.

‡ 1 Kings iv. 33.

sage of Ecclesiasticus* the whole covenant of Jehovah with Israel is treated as an emanation of wisdom from the mouth of the Most High. Wisdom was the inspiration of those who shaped the law and built the Holy House, of those who ministered in the courts of the Temple, and of those who were moved by the Holy One to chide the faults of the people, to call them to repentance, to denounce the doom of their sin, and proclaim the glad promise of deliverance. Again, from this large point of view Wisdom could be regarded as the Divine Philosophy, the system of thought and the body of beliefs which would furnish the explanation of life, and would root all the decisions of ethics in eternal principles of truth. And this function of Wisdom is presented with singular beauty and power in the eighth chapter of our book, where, as we shall see, the mouth of Wisdom shows that her concern with men is derived from her relation with the Creator and from her comprehension of His great architectural design in the construction of the world.

Now, the wisdom which finds expression in the bulk of the Proverbs must be clearly distinguished from wisdom in this exalted sense. It is not the wisdom of the Law and the Prophets; it moves in a much lower plane. It is not the wisdom of chap. viii., a philosophy which harmonises human life with the laws of nature by constantly connecting both with God.

The wisdom of the Proverbs differs from the wisdom of the Prophets in this, that it is derived not directly, but immediately from God. No special mind is directed to shape these sayings; they grow up in the common mind of the people, and they derive their inspiration from those general qualities which made the whole nation in the midst of which they had their birth an inspired nation, and gave to all the literature of the nation a peculiar and inimitable tone. The wisdom of the Proverbs differs, too, from the wisdom of these introductory chapters in much the same way; it is a difference which might be expressed by a familiar use of words; it is a distinction between Philosophy and Proverbial Philosophy, a distinction, let us say, between Divine Philosophy and Proverbial Philosophy.

The Proverbs are often shrewd, often edifying, sometimes almost evangelical in their sharp ethical insight; but we shall constantly be reminded that they do not come with the overbearing authority of the prophetic "Thus saith the Lord." And still more shall we be reminded how far they lag behind the standard of life and the principles of conduct which are presented to us in Christ Jesus.

* In this passage Wisdom is represented saying—

"I from the mouth of the Highest came forth, and as vapour I veiled the earth;
I in the heights pitched my tent, my throne in a pillar of cloud;
I alone circled the ring of heaven, and walked in the depths of abysses;
In the waves of the sea, and in all the earth, and in every people and race I obtained a possession;
With all these I sought a rest (saying), In whose inheritance shall I settle?
Then came to me the command of the Creator of all; my Creator pitched my tent; and He said,
In Jacob pitch thy tent, in Israel find thine inheritance.
Before the world was, in the beginning He created me, and while the world lasts I shall not fail:
In the holy tent before Him I offered service, and thus in Sion I was planted;
In the beloved city He likewise made me rest, and in Israel is my power;
And I took root in a people that is glorified, in a portion of the Lord His inheritance."—ECCLES. xxiv. 3.

What has just been said seems to be a necessary preliminary to the study of the Proverbs, and it is only by bearing it in mind that we shall be able to appreciate the difference in tone between the nine introductory chapters and the main body of the book; nor should we venture, perhaps, apart from the consideration which has been urged, to exercise our critical sense in the study of particular sayings, and to insist at all points on bringing the teaching of the wise men of old to the standard and test of Him who is Himself made unto us Wisdom.

But now to turn to our text. We must think of wisdom in the largest possible sense, as including not only ethics, but philosophy, and not only philosophy, but religion; yes, and as embracing in her vast survey the whole field of natural science, when it is said that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*; we must think of knowledge in its fullest and most liberal extent when we read that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*.

In this pregnant truth we may distinguish three ideas: *first*, fear, or, as we should probably say, reverence, is the pre-requisite of all scientific, philosophical, or religious truth; *second*, no real knowledge or wisdom can be attained which does not start with the recognition of God; and then, *thirdly*, the expression is not only the fear of God," which might refer only to the Being that is presupposed in any intelligent explanation of phenomena, but the "fear of the Lord," i. e., of Jahveh, the self-existent One, who has revealed Himself in a special way to men as "I AM WHAT I AM;" and it is therefore hinted that no satisfactory philosophy of human life and history can be constructed which does not build upon the fact of revelation.

We may proceed to dwell upon these three thoughts in order.

1. Most religious people are willing to admit that "the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."* But what is not always observed is that the same attitude is necessary in the intellectual sphere. And yet the truth may be illustrated in a quarter which to some of us may be surprising. It is a notable fact that Modern Science had its origin in two deeply religious minds. Bacon and Descartes were both stirred to their investigation of physical facts by their belief in the Divine Being who was behind them. To mention only our great English thinker, Bacon's "Novum Organum" is the most reverent of works, and no one ever realised more keenly than he that, as Coleridge used to say, "there is no chance of truth at the goal where there is not a childlike humility at the starting-point."

It is sometimes said that this note of reverence is wanting in the great scientific investigators of our day. So far as this is true, it is probable that their conclusions will be vitiated, and we are often impressed by the feeling that the unmannerly self-assertion and overweening self-confidence of many scientific writers augur ill for the truth of their assertions. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that the greatest men of science in our own, as in all other ages, are distinguished by a singular simplicity, and by a reverence which communicates itself to their readers. What could be more reverent than Darwin's way of studying the coral-insect or the earth-worm? He bestowed on

* Prov. xiv. 27.

these humble creatures of the ocean and of the earth the most patient and loving observation. And his success in understanding and explaining them was in proportion to the respect which he showed to them. The coral-diver has no reverence for the insect; he is bent only on gain, and he consequently can tell us nothing of the coral reef and its growth. The gardener has no reverence for the worm; he cuts it ruthlessly with his spade, and flings it carelessly aside; accordingly he is not able to tell us of its lowly ministries and of the part it plays in the fertilisation of the soil. It was Darwin's reverence which proved to be the beginning of knowledge in these departments of investigation; and if it was only the reverence of the naturalist, the truth is illustrated all the better, for his knowledge of the unseen and the eternal dwindled away, just as his perception of beauty in literature and art declined, in proportion as he suffered his spirit of reverence towards these things to die.

The gates of Knowledge and Wisdom are closed, and they are opened only to the knock of Reverence. Without reverence, it is true, men may gain what is called worldly knowledge and worldly wisdom; but these are far removed from truth, and experience often shows us how profoundly ignorant and how incurably blind pushing and successful people are, whose knowledge is all turned to delusion, and whose wisdom shifts round into folly, precisely because the great pre-requisite is wanting. The seeker after real knowledge will have little about him which suggests worldly success. He is modest, self-forgetful, possibly shy; he is absorbed in a disinterested pursuit, for he has seen afar the high, white star of Truth; at it he gazes, to it he aspires. Things which only affect him personally make but little impression on him; things which affect the truth move, agitate, excite him. A bright spirit is on ahead, beckoning to him. The colour mounts to his cheek, the nerves thrill, and his soul is filled with rapture, when the form seems to grow clearer and a step is gained in the pursuit. When a discovery is made he almost forgets that he is the discoverer; he will even allow the credit of it to pass over to another, for he would rather rejoice in the truth itself than allow his joy to be tinged with a personal consideration.

Yes, the modest, self-forgetful, reverent mien is the first condition of winning Truth, who must be approached on bended knee, and recognised with a humble and a prostrate heart. There is no gainsaying the fact that this fear, this reverence, is the beginning of wisdom.

2. We pass now to an assertion bolder than the last, that *there can be no true knowledge or wisdom which does not start from the recognition of God*. This is one of those contentions, not uncommon in the Sacred Writings, which appear at first sight to be arbitrary dogmas, but prove on closer inquiry to be the authoritative statements of reasoned truth. We are face to face, in our day, with an avowedly atheistic philosophy. According to the Scriptures, an atheistic philosophy is not a philosophy at all, but only a folly: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." We have thinkers among us who deem it their great mission to get rid of the very idea of God, as one who stands in the way of spiritual, social, and political progress. According to the Scriptures, to

remove the idea of God is to destroy the key of knowledge and to make any consistent scheme of thought impossible. Here certainly is a clear and sharp issue.

Now, if this universe of which we form a part is a thought of the Divine mind, a work of the Divine hand, a scene of Divine operations, in which God is realising, by slow degrees, a vast spiritual purpose, it is self-evident that no attempt to understand the universe can be successful which leaves this, its fundamental idea, out of account; as well might one attempt to understand a picture while refusing to recognise that the artist had any purpose to express in painting it, or indeed that there was any artist at all. So much every one will admit.

But if the universe is not the work of a Divine mind, or the effect of a Divine will; if it is merely the working of a blind, irrational Force, which realises no end, because it has no end to realise; if we, the feeble outcome of a long, unthinking evolution, are the first creatures that ever *thought*, and the only creatures who now *think*, in all the universe of Being; it follows that of a universe so irrational there can be no true knowledge for rational beings, and of a scheme of things so unwise there can be no philosophy or wisdom. No person who reflects can fail to recognise this, and this is the truth which is asserted in the text. It is not necessary to maintain that without admitting God we cannot have knowledge of a certain number of empirical facts; but that does not constitute a philosophy or a wisdom. It is necessary to maintain that without admitting God we cannot have any explanation of our knowledge, or any verification of it; without admitting God our knowledge can never come to any roundness or completeness such as might justify our calling it by the name of Wisdom.

Or to put the matter in a slightly different way: a thinking mind can only conceive the universe as the product of thought; if the universe is not the product of thought it can never be intelligible to a thinking mind, and can therefore never be in a true sense the object of knowledge; to deny that the universe is the product of thought is to deny the possibility of wisdom.

We find, then, that it is not a dogma, but a truth of reason, that knowledge must start with the recognition of God.

3. But now we come to an assertion which is the boldest of all, and for the present we shall have to be content to leave behind many who have readily followed us so far. That we are bound to recognise "the Lord," that is the God of Revelation, and bow down in reverence before Him, as the first condition of true wisdom, is just the truth which multitudes of men who claim to be Theists are now strenuously denying. Must we be content to leave the assertion merely as a dogma enunciated on the authority of Scripture?

Surely they, at any rate, who have made the beginning of wisdom in the fear of the Lord should be able to show that the possession which they have gained is actually wisdom, and does not rest upon an irrational dogma, incapable of proof.

We have already recognised at the outset that the Wisdom of this book is not merely an intellectual account of the reason of things, but also more specifically an explanation of the moral and spiritual life. It may be granted that

so far as the Intellect alone claims satisfaction it is enough to posit the bare idea of God as the condition of all rational existence. But when men come to recognise themselves as Spiritual Beings, with conceptions of right and wrong, with strong affections, with soaring aspirations, with ideas which lay hold of Eternity, they find themselves quite incapable of being satisfied with the bare idea of God; the soul within them pants and thirsts for a *living* God. An intellectual love of God might satisfy purely intellectual creatures; but to meet the needs of man as he is, God must be a God that manifests His own personality, and does not leave Himself without a witness to His rational creature. A wisdom, then, that is to truly appraise and rightly guide the life of man must start with the recognition of a God whose peculiar designation is the self-existent One, and who makes Himself known to man by that name; that is, it must start with the "fear of the Lord."*

How cogent this necessity is appears directly the alternative is stated. If Reason assures us of a God that made us, a First Cause of our existence and of our being what we are; if Reason also compels us to refer to Him our moral nature, our desire of holiness, and our capacity of love, what could be a greater tax on faith, and even a greater strain on the reason, than to declare that, notwithstanding, God has not revealed Himself as the Lord of our life and the God of our salvation, as the authority of righteousness or the object of our love? When the question is stated in this way it appears that apart from a veritable and trustworthy revelation there can be no wisdom which is capable of really dealing with human life, as the life of spiritual and moral creatures; for a God who does not reveal Himself would be devoid of the highest qualities of the human spirit, and the belief in a God who is inferior to man, a Creator who is less than the creature, could furnish no foundation for an intelligible system of thought.

Our text now stands before us, not as the unsupported deliverance of dogma, but as a condensed utterance of the human reason. We see that starting from the conception of Wisdom as the sum of that which is, and the sufficient explanation of all things, as including therefore not only the laws of nature, but also the laws of human life, both spiritual and moral, we can make no step towards the acquisition of wisdom without a sincere and absolute reverence, a recognition of God as the Author of the universe which we seek to understand, and as the Personal Being, the Self-existent One, who reveals Himself under that significant name "I AM," and declares His will to our waiting hearts. "To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed? or who hath known her wise counsels? There is one wise, and greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon His throne."†

In this way is struck the key-note of the Jewish "Wisdom." It is profoundly true; it is stimulating and helpful. But it may not be out of place to remind ourselves even thus early that the idea on which we have been dwelling comes

* It may be well to remind the reader who is too familiar with the name "the Lord" to consider its significance; that "the Lord" is the English translation of that peculiar name, Jahveh, by which God revealed Himself to Moses, and the term Jahveh seems to convey one of two ideas, existence or the cause of existence, according to the vowel-pointing of the consonants יהוה.

† Eccles. i. 6, 8.

short of the higher truth which has been given us in Christ. It hardly entered into the mind of a Hebrew thinker to conceive that "fear of the Lord" might pass into full, whole-hearted, and perfect love. And yet it may be shown that this was the change effected when Christ was of God "made unto us Wisdom;" it is not that the "fear," or reverence, becomes less, but it is that the fear is swallowed up in the larger and more gracious sentiment. For us who have received Christ as our Wisdom, it has become almost a truism that we must love in order to know. We recognise that the causes of things remain hidden from us until our hearts have been kindled into an ardent love towards the First Cause, God Himself: we find that even our processes of reasoning are faulty until they are touched with the Divine tenderness, and rendered sympathetic by the infusion of a loftier passion. And it is quite in accordance with this fuller truth that both science and philosophy have made genuine progress only in Christian lands and under Christian influences. Where the touch of Christ's hand has been most decisively felt, in Germany, in England, in America, and where consequently Wisdom has attained a nobler, a richer, a more tender significance, there, under fostering powers, which are not the less real because they are not always acknowledged, the great discoveries have been made, the great systems of thought have been framed, and the great counsels of conduct have gradually assumed substance and authority. And from a wide observation of facts we are able to say, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge;" yes, but the Wisdom of God has led us on from fear to love, and in the Love of the Lord is found the fulfilment of that which trembled into birth through fear.

CHAPTER II.

WISDOM AS THE GUIDE OF CONDUCT.

"To deliver thee from the way of the evil man. . . .
To deliver thee from the strange woman."—PROV. ii.
12a-16a.

WISDOM is concerned, as we have seen, with the whole universe of fact, with the whole range of thought; she surveys and orders all processes of nature. We might say of her,

"She doth preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens by her are fresh and strong."

But while she is occupied in these high things, she is no less attentive to the affairs of human life, and her delight is to order human conduct, not despising even the smallest detail of that which is done by men under the sun. Side by side with physical laws, indeed often intertwined with them, appear the moral laws which issue from the lively oracles of Wisdom. There is not one authority for natural phenomena, and another for mental and moral phenomena. As we should say now, Truth is one: Science is one: Law is one. The laws of the physical order, the laws of the speculative reason, the laws of practical life, form a single system, come from the sole mind of God, and are the impartial interests of Wisdom.

As the great authority on *Conduct*, Wisdom is pictured standing in the places where men congregate, where the busy hum of human voices

and the rush of hurried feet make it necessary for her to lift up her voice in order to gain attention. With words of winsome wooing—"for wisdom shall enter into thy heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul"*—or with loud threats and stern declarations of truth—"the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them"†—she tries to win us, while we are yet young, to her paths of pleasantness and her ways of peace. Her object is to deliver youth, (1) from the evil man, and (2) from the evil woman, or in the most comprehensive way "to deliver us from evil."

First of all, we may spend a few moments in noting the particular temptations to which men were exposed in the days when these chapters were written.‡ There was a temptation to join a troop of banditti, and to obtain a living by acts of highway robbery which would frequently result in murder; and there was the temptation to the sin which we call specifically Impurity, a temptation which arose not so much from the existence of a special class of fallen women, as from the shocking looseness and voluptuousness of married women in well-to-do circumstances.

Society under the kings never seems to have reached anything approaching to an ordered security. We cannot point to any period when the mountain roads, even in the neighbourhood of the capital, were not haunted by thieves, who lurked in the rocks or the copses, and fell upon passing travellers, to strip and to rob, and if need be to kill them. When such things are done, when such things are even recounted in sensational literature, there are multitudes of young men who are stirred to a debased ambition; a spurious glory encircles the brow of the adventurer who sets the laws of society at defiance; and without any personal entreaty the foolish youth is disposed to leave the quiet ways of industry for the stimulating excitement and the false glamour of the bandit life. The reckless plottings of the robbers are described in chap. i. 11-14. The character of the men themselves is given in chap. iv. 16, 17: "They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence." The proverb in xxiv. 15 is addressed to such an one: "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place."

The rebukes of the prophets—Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah—may have a wider application, but they seem at any rate to include this highwayman's life. "Your hands are full of blood" is the charge of Isaiah;§ and again, "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity."|| "They build up Zion with blood," says Micah indignantly.¶ Jeremiah cries with still more vehemence to his generation, "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor;"** and again, "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed

innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it."*

We are to conceive, then, the young and active men of the day constantly tempted to take these unhallowed paths which seemed to promise wealth; the sinners were always ready to whisper in the ears of those whose life was tedious and unattractive,† "Cast in thy lot among us; we will all have one purse." The moral sense of the community was not sufficiently developed to heartily condemn this life of iniquity; as in the eighteenth century among ourselves, so in Israel when this book was written, there existed in the minds of the people at large a lurking admiration for the bold and dashing "gentlemen of the way."

The other special temptation of that day is described in our book with remarkable realism, and there is no false shame in exposing the paths of death into which it leads. In v. 3-20 the subject is treated in the plainest way: "Her latter end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on Sheol." It is taken up again in vi. 24-35: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? or can one walk upon hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" The guilty man who has been betrayed by the glitter and beauty, by the honeyed words and the soft entreaties, "shall get wounds and dishonour, and his reproach shall not be wiped away."

In chapter vii. 5-27 a most vivid picture is drawn of the foolish youth seduced into evil; there he is seen going as an ox to the slaughter, as one in fetters, "till an arrow strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." And the Introduction closes with a delineation of Folly, which is obviously meant as a counterpart to the delineation of Wisdom in chap. i. 20, etc.‡ The miserable woman sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city; with seductive words she wins the foolish passers-by to enter her doors: "The dead are there; her guests are in the depths of Sheol."

It is a temptation which in many varying forms has always beset human life. No small part of the danger is that this evil, above all others, grows in silence, and yet seems to be aggravated by publicity. The preacher cannot speak plainly about it, and even writers shrink from touching the subject. We can, however, be thankful that the book, which is God's book rather than man's, knows nothing of our false modesty and conventional delicacy: it speaks out not only boldly, but minutely; it is so explicit that no man who with a prayerful heart will meditate upon its teachings need fall into the pitfall—that pitfall which seems to grow even more subtle and more seductive as civilisation advances, and as the great cities absorb a larger proportion of the population; or if he fall he can only admit with shame and remorse, "I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. I was well-nigh in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly."§

In the second place, we must try to look at these temptations in the light of our own day,

* Prov. ii. 10.

† Prov. i. 32.

‡ We may remind ourselves that, according to the most probable conjecture, this introduction to Solomon's Proverbs (chaps. i.-ix.) dates from the reign of Josiah (640-609 B. C.).

§ Isa. i. 15.

|| Isa. lix. 7.

¶ Micah iii. 10.

** Jer. ii. 34.

* Jer. xxii. 17.

† Prov. i. 14. Compare the proverb, xvi. 29, "A man of violence enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him in a way that is not good."

‡ Prov. ix. 13-18.

§ Prov. v. 12-14.

in order that we may listen to the voice of wisdom, not in the antiquarian, but rather in the practical spirit. The second temptation exists amongst us almost unchanged, except that the vast accumulation and concentration of vice in great cities has provided that mournful band of women whom a great moralist has designated the Vestal Virgins of Humanity, consecrated to shame and ruin in order to preserve unsullied the sacred flame of the domestic altar. The result of this terrible development in evil is that the deadly sin has become safer for the sinner, and in certain circles of society has become recognised as at any rate a venial fault, if not an innocent necessity. It is well to read these chapters again with our eye on the modern evil, and to let the voice of Wisdom instruct us that the life is not the less blighted because the body remains unpunished, and vice is not the less vicious because, instead of ruining others for its gratification, it feeds only on those who are already ruined. If the Wisdom of the Old Testament is obscure on this point, the Wisdom of the New Testament gives no uncertain sound. Interpreting the doctrine of our book, as Christians are bound to do, by the light of Christ, we can be left in no doubt, that to all forms of impurity applies the one principle which is here applied to a specific form: "He doeth it that would destroy his own soul." "His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin."*

But with regard to the first of the two temptations, it may be urged that in our settled and ordered society it is no longer felt. We are not tempted to become highwaymen, nor even to embark on the career of a professional thief. We are disposed to skim lightly over the warning, under the impression that it does not in any way apply to us. But stop a moment! Wisdom spoke in the first instance direct to the vice of her day, but she gave to her precepts a more general colouring, which makes it applicable to all time, when she said, "So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; it taketh away the life of the owners thereof."† The specific form of greediness described in this first chapter may have become obsolete among decent and respectable people; but that greed of gain which showed itself then in a particular form is alive to-day. Dressed in a different garb, it presents temptations of a slightly different order; but the spirit is the same, the issue, the fatal issue, is the same. It is a melancholy fact that in the most progressive and civilised communities the greed of gain, instead of dying out, becomes aggravated, acquires a dominant influence, and sways men as the master passion. The United States, a country so bountiful to her children that a settled peace might be supposed to pervade the life of men who can never be in fear of losing the necessities, or even the comforts, of life, are inflamed with a fierce and fiery passion. Society is one perpetual turmoil; life is lived at the highest conceivable pressure, because each individual is seeking to gain more and ever more. In our own country, though society is less fluid, and ancient custom checks the action of disturbing forces, the passion for gain becomes every year a more exacting tyranny over the lives of the people. We are engaged in a pitiless warfare, which we dignify by the name of competition; the race is to the swift, and the battle to

the strong. It becomes almost a recognised principle that man is at liberty to prey upon his fellow man. The Eternal Law of Wisdom declares that we should treat others as we treat ourselves, and count the interests of others dear as our own; it teaches us that we should show a tender consideration for the weak, and be always ready, at whatever cost, to succour the helpless. But competition says, "No; you must try rather to beat the weak out of the field; you must leave no device untried to reduce the strength of the strong, and to divert into your own hands the grist which was going to your neighbour's mill." This conflict between man and man is untempered by pity, because it is supposed to be unavoidable as death itself. In a community so constituted, where business has fallen into such ways, while the strong may hold their own with a clean hand, the weaker are tempted to make up by cunning what they lack in strength, and the weakest are ground as the nether millstone. The pitilessness of the whole system is appalling, the more so because it is accepted as necessary.

The Bandit life has here emerged in a new form. "Come, let us lay wait for blood," says the Sweater or the Fogger, "let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them up alive as Sheol, and whole as those that go down into the pit."* The Bandit is an outcast from society, and his hand is turned against the rich. The Sweater is an outcast from society, and his hand is turned against the poor. By "laying wait" he is able to demand, from weak men, women, and children, the long hours of the day for unceasing toil, and the bitter hours of the night for hunger and cold, until the gaunt creatures, worn with weariness and despair, find a solace in debauchery or an unhallowed rest in death.

Now, though the temptation to become a sweater may not affect many or any of us, I should like to ask, Are there not certain trades or occupations, into which some of us are tempted to enter, perfectly honeycombed with questionable practices? Under the pretext that it is all "business," are not things done which can only be described as preying upon the innocence or the stupidity of our neighbours? Sometimes the promise is, "We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil."† Sometimes the simple object is to escape starvation. But there is the miserable temptation to sacrifice probity and honour, to stifle compassion and thought, in order to bring into our own coffers the coveted wealth. And is there not, I ask, a similar temptation lurking in a thousand haunts more or less respectable—a temptation which may be described as the spirit of *gambling*? The essence of all gambling, whether it be called speculative business or gaming, in stock and share markets or in betting clubs and turf rings, is simply the attempt to trade on the supposed ignorance or misfortune of others, and to use superior knowledge or fortune for the purpose, not of helping, but of robbing them. It may be said that we do it in self-defense, and that others would do the same by us; yes, just as the bandit says to the young man, "We do not want to injure the traveller yonder; we want

* A dog-chain sold in London at one shilling and three-pence was found to have cost, for materials twopence, for labour three farthings. (Evidence before Lord Dunraven's Commission on the Sweating System.)

† See Prov. i. 13.

* Prov. vi. 32 and v. 22.

† Prov. i. 19.

his purse. He will try to shoot you; you only shoot him in self-defense." It is the subtlety of all gambling that constitutes its great danger. It seems to turn on the principle that we may do what we like with our own; it forgets that its object is to get hold of what belongs to others, not by honest work or service rendered, but simply by cunning and deception.

It is, then, only too easy to recognise, in many varied shapes of so-called business and of so-called pleasure, "the ways of those who are greedy of gain." Wisdom has need to cry aloud in our streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the city, in exchanges and marts. Her warning to the young man must be explicit and solemn: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." The bandit life still has its attractions, though its methods are changed; it plays upon the idle imagination: it promises freedom from laborious and distasteful toil; but it says nothing of the ways of death into which it leads.

Now, in the third place, we come to the protest of Divine Wisdom against these evil ways in which men are tempted to walk. They are, she says, folly of the most egregious kind. There may be an apparent success or a momentary gratification; "precious substance may be amassed, and houses may be filled with spoil;" but the people who are betrayed into these wicked courses "shall be cut off from the land." * They "lay wait for their own blood;" greed "taketh away the life of the owner thereof;" † and as for the strange woman, that flattereth with her words, "none that go unto her return again." ‡

It needs but a clear vision or a little wise reflection to see the destructive tendency of Evil. It is the commonest fact of experience that where "vice goes before, vengeance follows after." Why do men not perceive it? There is a kind of fatuity which blinds the eyes. The empty-headed bird sees the net spread out before its eyes; § many of its fellows have already been caught; the warning seems obvious enough, but it is all "in vain;" eager to get the bait—the dainty morsel lying there, easy obtainable—the foolish creature approaches, looks, argues that it is swifter and stronger than its predecessors, who were but weaklings! it will wheel down, take the food, and be gone long before the flaps of the net can spring together. In the same way the empty-headed youth, warned by the experience of elders and the tender entreaties of father and mother, assured that these ways of unjust gain are ways of ruin, is yet rash enough to enter the snare in order to secure the coveted morsel. And what is the issue? Setting at nought all the counsel of Wisdom, he would none of her reproof. ¶ A momentary success led to wilder infatuation, and convinced him that he was right, and Wisdom was wrong; but his prosperity destroyed him. Soon in the shame of exposure and the misery of remorse he discovers his mistake. Or, worse still, no exposure comes; success continues to his dying day, and he leaves his substance to his heirs; "he eats of the fruits of his own way, and is filled with his own devices," *¶ but none the less he walks in the ways of darkness—in paths that are crooked and perverse—and he is consumed with inward misery. The soul within is hard, and dry, and

dead; it is insensible to all feelings except feelings of torture. It is a life so dark and wretched, that when a sudden light is thrown upon its hidden secrets men are filled with astonishment and dismay, that such things could exist underneath that quiet surface.

Finally, note these two characteristics of the Divine Wisdom: (1) she is found in her fulness only by diligent seekers; and (2) rejected, she turns into the most scornful and implacable foe.

She is to be sought as silver or hidden treasure is sought. The search must be inspired by that eagerness of desire and passion of resolve with which avarice seeks for money. No faculty must be left unemployed: the *ear* is to be inclined to catch the first low sounds of wisdom; the *heart* is to be applied to understand what is heard; the very *voice* is to be lifted up in earnest inquiry. It is a well-known fact that the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God are not fruits which grow on every wayside bush, to be plucked by every idle passer-by, to be dropped carelessly and trodden under foot. Without seriousness and devotion, without protracted and unflagging toil, the things of God are not to be attained. You must be up betimes; you must be on your knees early; you must lay open the book of Wisdom, pore over its pages, and diligently turn its leaves, meditating on its sayings day and night. The kingdom of God and His righteousness must be *sought*, yes, and sought first, sought exclusively, as the one important object of desire. That easy indifference, that lazy optimism—"it will all come right in the end"—that habit of delay in deciding, that inclination to postpone the eternal realities to vanishing shadows, will be your ruin. The time may come when you will call, and there will be no answer, when you will seek diligently, but shall not find. Then in the day of your calamity, when your fear cometh, what a smile of scorn will seem to be on Wisdom's placid brow, and around her eloquent lips! what derision will seem to ring in the well-remembered counsels which you rejected.* O tide in the affairs of men! O tide in the affairs of God! We are called to stand by death-beds, to look into anguished eyes which know that it is too late. The bandit of commercial life passes into that penal servitude which only death will end; what agony breaks out and hisses in his remorse! The wretched victim of lust passes from the house of his sin down the path which inclines unto death; how terrible is that visage which just retains smirched traces that purity once was there! The voice rings down the doleful road, "If I had only been wise, if I had given ear, wisdom might have entered even into my heart, knowledge might have been pleasant even to my soul!"

And wisdom still cries to us, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

CHAPTER III.

THE EARTHLY REWARDS OF WISDOM.

PROVERBS iii. 1-10.

THE general teaching of these nine introductory chapters is that the "ways of Wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." We

* Prov. ii. 22.

† Prov. i. 19.

‡ Prov. ii. 19.

§ Prov. i. 17.

¶ Prov. i. 25.

* Prov. i. 31, 32.

* Prov. i. 24-31.

are taught to look for the fruit of righteousness in long life and prosperity, for the penalty of sin in premature destruction. "The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and they that deal treacherously shall be rooted out of it."* The foolish "shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto Wisdom shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil."† "By Wisdom thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shall hear it." The ways of Folly have this legend written over the entrance-gate: "The dead are there; her guests are in the depths of Sheol."‡

This teaching is summarised in the passage before us. "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and years of life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth," those primary requirements of wisdom, "forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thy heart;" *i. e.*, let them be an ornament which strikes the eye of the beholder, but also an inward law which regulates the secret thought. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man;" that is to say, the charm of thy character will conciliate the love of thy fellow creatures and of thy God, while they recognise, and He approves, the spiritual state from which these graces grow. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding; § in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil: it shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine."||

The rewards of wisdom, then, are health and long life, the good-will of God and man, prosperity, and abundant earthly possessions. As our Lord would put it, they who leave house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, shall receive manifold more in this time, even of the things which they surrender, in addition to the everlasting life in the time to come.¶

This is a side of truth which we frequently allow to drop out of sight, in order to emphasise another side which is considered more important. We are accustomed to dwell on the promised joys of the future world as if godliness had no promise of the life which now is, and in so doing we take all life and colour from those expected blessings. The true view seems to be, The way of wisdom, the path of the upright, is so full of joy, so crowned with peace; the life of the children of the kingdom is so wisely and bountifully provided for; the inevitable pains and troubles which fall to their share are so transformed; that from this present good we can infer a future better, gathering hints and prom-

ises of what we shall be from the realised felicity of what we are.

If we try to estimate the temporal blessings of wisdom we do not thereby deny the larger and more lasting blessings which are to come; while if we ignore these present joyful results we deprive ourselves of the surest evidence for the things which, though hoped for, are not yet seen.

We may, then, with much advantage try to estimate some of the immediate and apprehensible benefits of the life which is lived according to the dictates of heavenly wisdom.

(1) First of all, the right life is a wholesome life—yes, physically healthy. Obedience to the eternal moral laws brings "health to the navel," and that peculiar brightness which is like the freshness of dew.* The body is a sacred trust, a temple of the Holy Ghost; to use it ill is to violate the trust and to defile the temple. The temperance of habit and orderliness of life which Wisdom requires of her children are the first conditions of vitality. They who seek health as the first consideration become valetudinarians and find neither health nor happiness; but they who diligently follow the law of God and the impulse of His Spirit find that health has come to them, as it were, by a side wind. The peace of mind, the cheerfulness of temper, the transfer of all anxiety from the human spirit to the strong Spirit of God, are very favourable to longevity. Insurance societies have made this discovery, and actuaries will tell you that in a very literal way the children of God possess the earth, while the wicked are cut off.

Yet no one thinks of measuring life only by days and years. To live long with the constant feeling that life is not worth living, or to live long with the constant apprehension of death, must be counted as a small and empty life. Now, it is the chief blessedness in the lot of the children of light that each day is a full, rich day, unmarred by recollections, unshadowed by apprehensions. Each day is distinctly worth living; it has its own exquisite lessons of cloud or sunshine, its own beautiful revelations of love, and pity, and hope. Time does not hang heavily on the hands, nor yet is its hurried flight a cause of vain regret; for it has accomplished that for which it was sent, and by staying longer could not accomplish more. And if, after all, God has appointed but a few years for His child's earthly life, that is not to be regretted; the only ground for sorrow would be to live longer than His wise love had decreed. "If God thy death desires," as St. Genest says to Adrien in Rotrou's tragedy, "life has been long enow."†

The life in God is undoubtedly a healthy life, nor is it the less healthy because the outward man has to decay, and mortality has to be swallowed up of life. From the standpoint of the Proverbs this wider application of the truth was not as yet visible. The problem which emerges in the book of Job was not yet solved. But already, as I think we shall see, it was understood that the actual and tangible rewards of righteousness were of incomparable price, and made the prosperity of the wicked look poor and de-

* Prov. ii. 21, 22. † Prov. i. 31-33. ‡ Prov. ix. 12, 18.
§ Cf. xxviii. 26, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."
|| Prov. iii. 1-10. ¶ Luke xviii. 29, 30.

* The Hebrew word שָׁקֵי in iii. 8b is the same as that which is translated "my drink" in Hosea ii. 6. The LXX. render it "marrow," but it means the moisture which in a natural and healthy state keeps the bones supple, as opposed to the dryness which is produced by senility or disease.

† Si ton Dieu veut ta mort, c'est déjà trop vécu.

lusive. (2) But there is a second result of the right life which ordinary observation and common sense may estimate. Wisdom is very uncompromising in her requirement of fair dealing between man and man. She cannot away with those commercial practices which can only be described as devising "evil against thy neighbour," who "dwelleth securely by thee."* Her main economic principle is this, that all legitimate trade is the mutual advantage of buyer and seller; where the seller is seeking to dupe the buyer, and the buyer is seeking to rob the seller, trade ceases, and the transaction is the mere in-working of the devil. Wisdom is quite aware that by these ways of the devil wealth may be accumulated; she is not blind to the fact that the overreaching spirit of greed has its rich and splendid reward; but she maintains none the less that "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but He blesseth the habitation of the righteous."†

It is a very impressive experience to enter the house of a great magnate whose wealth has been obtained by questionable means. The rooms are beautiful; works by the great masters shed their radiance of eternal truth from the walls; the library gleams with the well-bound books of moralists and religious teachers. The sons and daughters of the house are fair and elegant; the smile of prosperity is in every curtained and carpeted room, and seems to beam out of every illuminated window; and yet the sensitive spirit cannot be rid of the idea that "the curse of the Lord is in the house."

On the other hand, the honourable man whose paths have been directed by the Lord, no matter whether he be wealthy or merely in receipt, as the result of a life's labour, of his "daily bread," has a blessing in his house. Men trust him and honour him.‡ His wealth flows as a fertilising stream, or if it run dry, his friends, who love him for himself, make him feel that it was a good thing to lose it in order to find them. In proportion as the fierce struggle of competition has made the path of fair dealing more difficult, they who walk in it are the more honoured and loved. Nowhere does Wisdom smile more graciously or open her hand to bless more abundantly, than in the later years of a life which has in its earlier days been exposed, and has offered a successful resistance, to the strong temptations of unrighteous gain.

(3) Further, Wisdom commands not only justice, but generosity. She requires her children to yield the first-fruits of all their possessions to the Lord, and to look tenderly upon His poor. "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."§ And the teaching of experience is that those who act upon this precept purchase to themselves a good possession. The main value of the Mammon of unrighteousness is, as our Lord says, to make to ourselves friends with it, friends who shall receive us into the everlasting habitations. The money we spend upon our own pleasures, and to promote our own interests, is spent and gone; but the money

given with an open hand to those poor children of God, to whom it is strictly due, is not spent at all, but laid up in the most secure of banks. There is no source of joy in this present world to be compared with the loving gratitude of the poor whom you have lovingly helped. Strangely enough, men will spend much to obtain a title which carries no honour with it, forgetting that the same money given to the needy and the suffering purchases the true honour, which gives the noblest title. For we are none of us so stupid as to think that the empty admiration of the crowd is so rich in blessing as the heartfelt love of the few.

But in enumerating these external results of right living we have only touched incidentally upon the deeper truths which lie at the root of it. It is time to look at these.

God is necessarily so much to men, men are necessarily so completely bereft without Him, that clear vision and strong action are utterly impossible apart from a humble dependence upon Him. The beginning of all wisdom is, as we have seen, in the recognition of God, in personal submission to Him, in diligent obedience to all His directions. This appears, before we reflect, to be a mere truism; when we have reflected, it proves to be a great revelation. We do not at first see what is meant by trusting in the Lord with all our heart; we confuse it with that tepid, conventional relation to God which too frequently passes current for faith. We do not readily apprehend what is implied in acknowledging God in all our ways; we suppose that it only means a general professing and calling ourselves Christians. Consequently, many of us who believe that we trust in the Lord, yet lean habitually and confidently upon our own understanding, and are even proud of doing so; we are wise in our own eyes long after our folly has become apparent to every one else; we resent with a vehemence of righteous indignation any imputation upon the soundness of our judgment. The very tone of mock humility in which we say, "I may be wrong, but—" shows that we are putting a case which seems to us practically impossible. Consequently, while we think that we are acknowledging God in all our ways, He does not direct our paths; indeed, we never gave Him an opportunity. From first to last we directed them ourselves. Let us frankly acknowledge that we do not really believe in God's detailed concern with the affairs of the individual life; that we do not, therefore, commit our way with an absolute surrender into His hand; that we do not think of submitting to His disposal the choice of our profession, the choice of our partner in life, the choice of our place of residence, the choice of our style of living, the choice of our field of public service, the choice of our scale of giving. Let us confess that we settled all these things in implicit and unquestioning reliance upon our own understanding.

I speak only in wide and fully admitted generalities. If Christians as a whole had really submitted their lives in every detail to God, do you suppose that there would be something like fifty thousand Christian ministers and ten times that number of Christian workers at home, while scarcely a twentieth of that number have gone out from us to labour abroad? If Christians had really submitted their lives to God, would there have been these innumerable wretched marriages—man and wife

* Prov. iii. 29.

† Prov. iii. 33.

‡ Cf. xii. 8, "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised."

§ Prov. iii. 27, 28.

joined together by no spiritual tie, but by the caprice of fancy or the exigencies of social caste? If Christians had really asked God to guide them, meaning what they said, would all the rich be found in districts together, while all the poor are left to perish in other districts apart? If Christians had really accepted God's direction, would they be living in princely luxury while the heathen world is crying for the bread of life? would they be spending their strength on personal aims while the guidance of social and political affairs is left in the hands of the self-interested? would they be giving such a fragment of their wealth to the direct service of the Kingdom of God?

We may answer very confidently that the life actually being lived by the majority of Christian people is not the result of God directing their paths, but simply comes from leaning on their own understanding. And what a sorrowful result!

But in the face of this apostasy of life and practice, we can still joyfully point to the fact that they who do entirely renounce their own judgment, who are small in their own eyes, and who, with their whole heart trusting Him, acknowledge Him in all their ways, find their lives running over with blessing, and become the means of incalculable good to the world and to themselves. It would not be easy to make plain or even credible, to those who have never trusted in God, how this guidance and direction are given. Not by miraculous signs or visible interpositions, not by voices speaking from heaven, nor even by messages from human lips, but by ways no less distinct and infinitely more authoritative, God guides men with His eye upon them, tells them, "This is the way; walk ye in it," and whispers to them quite intelligibly when they turn to the right hand or the left. With a noble universality of language, this text says nothing of Urim or Thummim, of oracle or seer, of prophet or book: "He shall direct thy paths."* That is enough; the method is left open to the wisdom and love of Him who directs. There is something even misleading in saying much about the methods; to set limits to God's revelations, as Gideon did, is unworthy of the faith which has become aware of God as the actual and living Reality, compared with whom all other realities are but shadows. Our Lord did not follow the guidance of His Father by a mechanical method of signs, but by a more intimate and immediate perception of His will. When Jesus promised us the Spirit as an indwelling and abiding presence He clearly intimated that the Christian life should be maintained by the direct action of God upon the several faculties of the mind, stimulating the memory, quickening the perception of truth, as well as working on the conscience and opening the channels of prayer. When we wait for signs we show a defect of faith. True trust in our Heavenly Father rests in the absolute assurance that He will make the path plain, and leave us in no uncertainty about His will. To doubt that He speaks inwardly and controls us, even when we are unconscious of His control, is to doubt Him altogether.

When a few years have been passed in humble dependence on God, it is then possible to look back and see with astonishing clearness how real and decisive the leadings of the Spirit have been.

* Prov. iii. 6.

There were moments when two alternatives were present, and we were tempted to decide on the strength of our own understanding; but thanks be to his name, we committed it to Him. We stepped forward then in the darkness; we deserted the way which seemed most attractive, and entered the narrow path which was shrouded in mist. We knew He was leading us, but we could not see. Now we see, and we cannot speak our praise. Our life, we find, is all a plan of God, and He conceals it from us, as if on purpose to evoke our trust, and to secure that close and personal communion which the uncertainty renders necessary.

Are you suspicious of the Inward Light, as it is called? Does it seem to open up endless possibilities of self-delusion? Are you disgusted with those who follow their own wilful way, and seek a sanction for it by calling it the leading of God? You will find that the error has arisen from not trusting the Lord "with the whole heart," or from not acknowledging Him "in all ways." The eye has not been single, and the darkness therefore has been, as our Lord declares that it would be, dense.* The remedy is not to be found in leaning more on our own understanding, but rather in leaning less. Wisdom calls for a certain absoluteness in all our relations to God, a fearless, unreserved, and constantly renewed submission of heart to Him. Wisdom teaches that in His will is our peace, and that His will is learnt by practical surrender to His ways and commandments.

Now, is it not obvious that while the external results of wisdom are great and marked, this inward result, which is the spring of them all, is more blessed than any? The laws which govern the universe are the laws of God. The Stoic philosophy demanded a life according to Nature. That is not enough, for by Nature is meant God's will for the inanimate or non-moral creation. Where there is freedom of the will, existence must not be "according to Nature," but according to God; that is to say, life must be lived in obedience to God's laws for human life. The inorganic world moves in ordered response to God's will. We, as men, have to choose; we have to discover; we have to interpret. Woe to us if we choose amiss, for then we are undone. Woe to us if we do not understand, but in a brutish way follow the ordinances of death instead of the way of life.

Now, the supreme bliss of the heavenly wisdom is that it leads us into this detailed obedience to the law which is our life; it sets us under the immediate and unbroken control of God. Well may it be said, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies."† And yet rubies are very precious. I learn that the valley in Burmah where the most perfect rubies in the world are found is situated four thousand five hundred feet above the sea level, in a range of mountainous spurs about eighty miles due north of Mandalay; but owing to the difficult nature of the intervening ground, the valley can only be reached by a circuitous journey of some two hundred miles, which winds through malarious jungles and over arduous mountain passes. An eminent jewellers' firm is about to explore the Valley of Rubies, though it

* Matt. vi. 22.

† Prov. iii. 13-15.

is quite uncertain whether the stones may not be exhausted. Wisdom is "more precious than rubies, and none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her."

To know the secret of the Lord, to walk in this world not guideless, but led by the Lord of life, to approach death itself not fearful, but in the hands of that Infinite Love for whom death does not exist, surely this is worth more than the gold and precious stones which belong only to the earth and are earthy. This wisdom is laden with riches which cannot be computed in earthly treasures; "she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her."* The creation itself, in its vast and infinite perfections, with all its æonian changes, and all the mysterious ministries which order its details and maintain its activities, comes from that same wisdom which controls the right human life. The man, therefore, who is led in the ways of wisdom, trusting wholly to God, is in harmony with that great universe of which he forms an intelligent part: he may lie down without being afraid; he may walk securely without stumbling; no sudden fear can assail him; all the creatures of God are his sisters and his brothers; even Sister Death, as St. Francis used to say, is a familiar and a friend to him.

We have been dwelling upon the outward results of Heavenly Wisdom—the health, the prosperity, the friends, the favour with God and man which come to those who possess her. We have been led to seek out the secret of her peace in the humble surrender of the will to its rightful Lord. But there is a caution needed, a truth which has already occurred to the author of this chapter. It is evident that while Wisdom brings in her hand riches and honour,† health to the navel, and marrow to the bones,‡ it will not be enough to judge only by appearances. As we have pondered upon the law of Wisdom, we have become aware that there may be an apparent health and prosperity, a bevy of friends, and a loud-sounding fame which are the gift not of Wisdom, but of some other power. It will not do, therefore, to set these outward things before our eyes as the object of desire; it will not do to envy the possessors of them.§ "The secret of the Lord is with the upright," and it may often be that they to whom His secret has become open will choose the frowns of adversity rather than the smile of prosperity, will choose poverty rather than wealth, will welcome solitude and contumely down in the Valley of Humiliation. For it is an open secret, in the sweet light of wisdom it becomes a self-evident truth, that "whom the Lord loveth He reproveth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."||

There is, then, a certain paradox in the life of wisdom which no ingenuity can avoid. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, but we may not seek them because they are pleasant, for other ways are pleasant too, or seem to be so for a while. All her paths are peace, but we do not enter them to gain peace, for the peace comes often under the stress of a great conflict or in the endurance of a heavy chastening. A thousand temporal blessings accompany the entrance into the narrow way, but so far from seeking them, it is well-nigh impossible to start on the way unless we lose sight and care of them altogether. The Divine Wisdom gives us these blessings

when we no longer set our hearts on them, because while we set our hearts on them they are dangerous to us. Putting the truth in the clearest light which has been given to us, the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called upon to give up everything in order to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and when we are absorbed in that as our true object of search everything is given back to us a hundredfold; we are called upon to take up our cross and follow Him, and when we do so He bears the cross for us; we are called upon to take His yoke upon us and to learn of Him, and immediately we take it—not before—we find that it is easy. The wise, loving only wisdom, find that they have inherited glory; the fools, seeking only promotion, find that they have achieved nothing but shame.*

CHAPTER IV.

EDUCATION: THE CHILD'S THOUGHT OF THE PARENT.†

"Wisdom doth live with children round her knees."
—WORDSWORTH.

"He taught me, and said unto me," etc.—PROV. iv. 4.

THIS chapter begins with a charming little piece of autobiography. Unhappily the writer is unknown. That it was not Solomon is plain from the fact that an only son is speaking, and we know from 1 Chron. iii. 5 that Solomon was not an only son of his mother.‡ But the naïveté and beauty of the confession are the same, whoever was the speaker. The grateful memories of a father's teaching and of a mother's tenderness give point and force to the exhortations. "Do I urge upon you, young people, the claims of Wisdom?" the author seems to say. "Well, I speak from experience. My parents taught me her wholesome and pleasant ways. Though I was an only son, they did not by a selfish indulgence allow me to be spoiled. They made me bear the yoke in my youth, and now I live to thank them for it."

There is a great temptation to spoil an only child, a temptation which few are able to resist. Parents can deny themselves everything for their idol, except the pleasure of making the child a despot; they can endure any pain for their despot, except the pain of resisting him and instructing him. And accordingly they have sometimes to experience the shame and anguish of their children's curses, like that Carthaginian mother, of whom it is related that her son, a convicted criminal, passing to execution, requested that he might whisper something to her, and, coming near, bit off her ear, saying that it was his revenge because she had brought him up so badly. Very different are the feelings of our author; he owes much to his parents, and is eager to acknowledge what he owes. God has no kinder gift to give us than a hallowed home, the memory of lessons from the lips of father and mother, the early impressions of virtue and wisdom, the sacred streams which rise from that fountainhead, and that alone, and run freshen-

* Prov. iii. 35.

† This subject, which occupies so large a part of the book, is further treated in Lect. XXIII.

‡ It is noteworthy that the LXX. in ver. 2 seek to maintain the Solomonic authorship by deliberately altering the words.

* Prov. iii. 18.

† Prov. iii. 16.

‡ Prov. iii. 8.

§ Prov. iii. 31.

|| Prov. iii. 12.

ing and singing and broadening all through our lives.*

With this happy example of good home influence before our eyes, we will come to consider briefly two points which are suggested by it: *first*, the importance of these early impressions; *second*, the main features of the discipline presented in the chapter.

I. Not without reason has a great cardinal of the Roman Church said that if he may have the children up to the age of five, he will not mind in whose hand they may be afterwards; for it is almost impossible to exaggerate the permanent effects of those first tendencies impressed on the soul before the intellect is developed, and while the soft, plastic nature of the child is not yet determined in any particular direction. Things which we learn we can more or less unlearn, but things which are blended with the elements of our composition, made parts of us before we are conscious of our own personality, defy the hand of time and the power of conscious effort to eradicate them.

John Paton, that noble missionary to the New Hebrides, has given us a vivid picture of his early home. It was a plain lowland cottage, with its "but and ben," and between the two a small chamber with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. To this room the children saw the father retire oftentimes a day, and shut to the door; they would occasionally hear the pathetic pleadings of the voice that prayed, and they learnt to slip past the door on tiptoe. They got to understand whence came that happy light upon their father's face; they recognised it as a reflection from the Divine presence, in the consciousness of which he lived.

Let a child draw his first breath in a house which possesses a sanctuary like that; let him come to know by his quick childish perceptions that there is in his home a ladder set up from earth to heaven, and that the angels of God go up and down on it; let him feel the Divine atmosphere in his face, the air all suffused with heavenly light, the sweetness and the calm which prevail in a place where a constant communion is maintained,—and in after years he will be aware of voices which call and hands which reach out to him from his childhood, connecting him with heaven, and even the most convincing negations of unbelief will be powerless to shake the faith which is deep as the springs of his life.

We learn to love, not because we are taught to love, but by some contagious influence of example or by some indescribable attraction of beauty. Our first love to Wisdom, or, to use our modern phrase, Religion, is won from us by living with those that love her. She stole in upon us and captured us without any overpowering arguments; she was beautiful and we felt that those whom we loved were constantly taken and held by her beauty. Just reflect upon this subtle and wonderful truth. If my infancy is spent among those whose main thought is "to get" riches. I acquire imperceptibly the love of money. I cannot rationally explain my love; but it seems to me in after life a truism, that money is the principal thing; I look with blank incredulity upon one who questions this ingrained truth. But if in infancy I live with

those whose love is wholly centred upon Religion, who cherish her with unaffected ardour and respond to her claims with kindling emotion, I may in after life be seduced from her holy ways for awhile, but I am always haunted by the feeling that I have left my first love, I am restless and uneasy until I can win back that "old bride-look of earlier days."

Yes, that old bride-look—for religion may be so presented to the child's heart as to appear for ever the bride elect of the soul, from whose queenly love promotion may be expected, whose sweet embraces bring a dower of honour, whose beautiful fingers twine a chaplet of grace for the head and set a crown of glory on the brow.*

The affections are elicited, and often permanently fixed, before the understanding has come into play. If the child's heart is surrendered to God, and moulded by heavenly wisdom, the man will walk securely; a certain trend will be given to all his thoughts; a certain instinctive desire for righteousness will be engrafted in his nature; and an instinctive aversion will lead him to decline the way of the wicked.†

The first thing, then, is to give our children an atmosphere to grow up in; to cultivate their affections, and set their hearts on the things eternal; to make them associate the ideas of wealth and honour, of beauty and glory, not with material possessions, but with the treasures and rewards of Wisdom.

II. But now comes the question, What is to be the definite teaching of the child? for it is an unfailing mark of the parents who themselves are holy that they are impelled to give clear and memorable instruction to their children. And this is where the great and constant difficulty emerges. If the hallowed example would suffice we might count the task comparatively easy. But some day the understanding will begin to assert itself; the desire to question, to criticise, to prove, will awake. And then, unless the truths of the heart have been applied to the conscience in such a way as to satisfy the reason, there may come the desolate time in which, while the habits of practical life remain pure, and the unconscious influence of early training continues to be effective, the mind is shaken by doubt, and the hope of the soul is shrouded in a murky cloud.

Now the answer to this question may, for the Christian, be briefly given. Bring your children to Christ, teach them to recognise in Him their Saviour, and to accept Him as their present Lord and gracious Friend. But this all-inclusive answer will not suffer by a little expansion on the lines which are laid down in the chapter before us. When Christ is made unto us Wisdom, the contents of Wisdom are not altered, they are only brought within our reach and made effectual in us. Bringing our children to Christ will not merely consist in teaching them the doctrine of salvation, but it will include showing them in detail what salvation is, and the method of its realisation.

The first object in the home life is to enable children to realise what salvation is. It is easy to dilate on an external heaven and hell, but it is not so easy to demonstrate that salvation is an inward state, resulting from a spiritual change.

It is very strange that Judaism should ever have sunk into a formal religion of outward observance, when its own Wisdom was so explicit

* Cf. the beautiful family picture of the linked and mutually blessed generations in the proverb, "Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers" (xvii. 6).

* Prov. iv. 8, 9.

† Prov. iv. 14.

on this point: "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them *in the midst of thine heart*. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. *Keep thy heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." * The Greek version, which was very generally used in our Lord's time, had a beautiful variation of this last clause: "In order that thy fountains may not fail thee, guard them in the heart." It was after all but a new emphasis on the old teaching of the book of Proverbs when Jesus taught the necessity of heart purity, and when He showed that out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, and all the things which defile a man.† Yet this lesson of inwardness has always been the most difficult of all to learn. Christianity itself has always been declining from it and falling into the easier but futile ways of externalism; and even Christian homes have usually failed in their influence on the young chiefly because their religious observances have fallen into formalism, and while the outward conduct has been regulated, the inner springs of action have not been touched.

All conduct is the outcome of hidden fountains. All words are the expression of thoughts. The first thing and the main thing is that the hidden fountains of thought and feeling be pure. The source of all our trouble is the bitterness of heart, the envious feeling, the sudden outbreak of corrupt desire. A merely outward salvation would be of no avail; a change of place, a magic formula, a conventional pardon, could not touch the root of the mischief. "I wish you would change my heart," said the chief Sekomi to Livingstone. "Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always." He would not hear of the New Testament way of changing the heart; he wanted an outward, mechanical way—and that way was not to be found. The child at first thinks in the same way. Heaven is a place to go to, not a state to be in. Hell is an outward punishment to fly from, not an inward condition of the soul. The child has to learn that searching truth which Milton tried to teach, when he described Satan in Paradise,—

" . . . within him hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from hell
One step, no more than from himself, can fly
By change of place.

"Which way I fly is hell,"

cries the miserable being,

"myself am hell;
And in the lowest deep, a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven."‡

We are tempted in dealing with children to train them only in outward habits, and to forget the inward sources which are always gathering and forming; hence we often teach them to avoid the lie on the tongue, to put away from them the froward mouth and perverse lips,§ and

* Prov. iv. 20-23.

† Matt. xv. 19.

‡ "Paradise Lost," iv. 20, etc., and 75. Cf. also ix.

120:—

"And the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me, as from hateful siege
Of contraries. All good to me becomes
Bane, and in heaven much worse would be my state."

§ Prov. iv. 24.

yet leave them with the lies in the soul, the deep inward untruths which are their ruin. We often succeed in bringing them up as respectable and decorous members of society, and yet leave them a prey to secret sins; they are tormented by covetousness which is idolatry, by impurity, and by all kinds of envious and malignant passions.

There is something even ghastly in the very virtues which are sometimes displayed in a highly civilised society like ours. We perceive what appear to be virtues, but we are haunted by an uncomfortable misgiving that they are virtues only in appearance; they seem to have no connection with the heart; they never seem to bubble up from irrepressible fountains; they do not overflow. There is charity, but it is the charity only of the subscription list; there is pity, but it is the pity only of conventional humanitarianism; there is the cold correctness of conduct, or the formal accuracy of speech, but the purity seems to be prudery because it is only a concession to the conventional sentiments of the hour, and the truthfulness seems to be a lie because its very exactness seems to come, not from springs of truth, but only from an artificial habit.

We are frequently bound to notice a religion of a similar kind. It is purely mimetic. It is explained on the same principle as the assimilation of the colours of animals to the colours of their environment. It is the unconscious and hypocritical instinct of self-preservation in a presumably religious society, where not to seem religious would involve a loss of caste. It may be regarded then as the first essential lesson which is to be impressed on the mind of a child,—the lesson coming next after the unconscious influences of example, and before all dogmatic religious teaching,—that righteousness is the condition of salvation, righteousness of the heart; that the outward seeming goes for nothing at all, but that God with a clear and quiet eye gazes down into the hidden depths, and considers whether the fountains there are pure and perennial.

The second thing to be explained and enforced is *singleness of heart*, directness and consistency of aim; by which alone the inward life can be shaped to virtuous ends: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left." * As our Lord puts it, If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. This precept has frequently been given in the interests of worldly wisdom. The boy is told that if he means to get on he must concentrate his thoughts and refuse to let any of the seductions around him divert his attention. Singleness of eye may be the most ruinous of evils—if a man has only a single eye to his own advantage, and pursues nothing but his own pleasure. The precept is given here however in the interests of heavenly wisdom, and there is much to be said for the view that only the truly religious mind can be quite single-eyed. Selfishness, though it seems to be an undivided aim, is really a manifold of tumultuous and conflicting passions. He only, strictly speaking, has one desire, whose one desire is God. The way of wisdom is, after all, the only way which has no bifurcations. The man

* Prov. iv. 25-27.

who has a single eye to his own interest may find before long that he has missed the way: he pushes eagerly on, but he flounders ever deeper in the mire; for though he did not turn to the right hand nor to the left, he never all the time removed his foot from evil.*

The right life then is a steady progress undiverted by the alluring sights and sounds which appeal to the senses.† “Look not round about thee,” says Ecclesiasticus,‡ “in the streets of the city, neither wander thou in the solitary places thereof.” We are to learn that the way goes through Vanity Fair, but admits of no divergences into its tempting booths or down its alluring alleys; the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the vainglory of life, are not to distract the mind which has but one purpose in view. The path is to be kept level;§ as we should say, an even tenor is to be preserved; we are to follow the plain unexciting path of duty, the beaten track of sober rightness. For while it is the mark of all unhallowed ways that they plunge up and down from despondency to wild elation, from giddy raptures to heartstricken depression, it is the sure sign of God’s hand in our life when the paths are made level.|| Ah those tempting ways, on which shine the false lights of imagined duty, of refined selfishness, or of gilded sensuality. Surely it is the result of Wisdom, the gift of God’s grace, to keep the eyes “looking right on.”

But it is time to sum up. Here is a great contrast between those whose early training has been vicious or neglected, and those who have been “taught in the way of wisdom, led in paths of uprightness.” It is a contrast which should constantly be present to the eyes of parents with a warning and an encouragement. The unfortunate child whose infancy was passed in the midst of baleful example, whose heart received no instruction from parents’ lips, grows up like one stumbling in the dark, and the darkness deepens as he advances; observers cannot tell—he himself cannot tell—what it is at which he stumbles.¶ There is the old ingrained vice which comes out again and again after every attempted reformation; there is the old shuffling habit; there is the old unhallowed set of the thoughts and the tastes; there is the old incurable pharisaism, with its tendency to shift all blame on to other people’s shoulders. It is all like the damp in the walls of an ill-built house. In dry weather there are only the stains, but those stains are the prophecy of what will be again when the wet weather returns. The corrupt ways have become a second nature; they are as sleep and food to the wretched creature; to abstain from iniquity creates the restlessness of insomnia; if he has not been spreading an influence of evil and leading others astray, he feels as if he had been deprived of his daily food, and he is consumed with a fiery thirst.** Even when such an one is genuinely born again, the old hideous habits will appear like seams in the character; and temptations will send the flush along the tell-tale scars.

On the other hand, the life which starts from the sweet examples of a hallowed home, and all

its timely chastisements and discipline, presents a most entrancing history. At first there is much which is difficult to bear, much against which the flesh revolts. The influences of purity are cold like the early dawn, and the young child’s spirit shrinks and shivers; but with every step along the levelled road the light broadens and the air becomes warmer,—the dawn shines more and more unto the perfect day.* As the character forms, as the habits become fixed, as the power of resistance increases, a settled strength and a lasting peace gladden the life. The rays of heavenly wisdom not only shine on the face, but suffuse the very texture of the being, so that the whole body is full of light. Eventually it begins to appear that truth and purity, pity and charity, have become instinctive. Like a well-disciplined army, they spring at once into the ranks, and are ready for service even on a surprise. The graces of holy living come welling up from those untainted inner springs, and, be the surroundings ever so dry, the fountains fail not. The habit of single-eyed devotion to right avails even where there is no time for reflection; more and more the seductions of the senses lose their point of attack in this disciplined spirit. There is a freedom in the gait, for holiness has ceased to be a toilsome calculation,—the steps of the spiritual man are not straitened. There is a swiftness in all action,—the feet are shod with a joyous and confident preparation, for the fear of stumbling is gone.†

With daily growing gratitude and veneration does such an one look back upon the early home of piety and tenderness.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAYS AND ISSUES OF SIN.

“His own iniquities shall take the wicked,
And he shall be holden with the cords of his sin.
He shall die for lack of instruction;
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.”
—PROV. V. 22, 23.

It is the task of Wisdom, or, as we should say, of the Christian teacher,—and a most distasteful task it is,—to lay bare with an unsparing hand (1) the fascinations of sin, and (2) the deadly entanglements in which the sinner involves himself,—“there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”‡ It would be pleasanter, no doubt, to avoid the subject, or at least to be content with a general caution and a general denunciation; one is tempted to take refuge in the opinion that to mention evils of a certain kind with any particularity is likely to suggest rather than to suppress, to aggravate rather than to lessen, them. But Wisdom is not afraid of plain speaking; she sees that shame is the first result of the Fall, and behind the modest veil of shame the devil works bravely. There is a frankness and a fulness in the delineations of this chapter and of chapter seven which modern taste would condemn; but the motive cannot be mistaken. Holiness describes the ways of sin in detail to create a horror and a hatred of them; she describes exactly what is within the tempting doors,—all the glamour, all the softness, all the

* Prov. iv. 27.

† Cf. xvii. 24, “Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.”

‡ Eccles. ix. 7.

§ Prov. iv. 26.

|| Prov. v. 21.

¶ Prov. iv. 19.

** Prov. iv. 16, 17.

* Prov. iv. 18, margin.

† Prov. iv. 12.

‡ Prov. xiv. 12.

luxury, all the unhallowed raptures,—and shows distinctly how these chambers are on the incline of death, in order that curiosity, the mother of prurience, may be stifled, and the unwary may be content to remove his way far from the temptress, and to come not nigh the door of her house.*

But this, it may be said, is the plea urged by a certain school of modern Realism in Art. Let us depict—such is the argument—in all its hideous literalness the sinful life, and leave it to work its own impressions, and to act as a warning to those who are entering on the seductive but dangerous ways. From this principle—so it may be said—has sprung the school of writers at whose head is M. Zola. Yes, but to counteract vice by depicting it is so hazardous a venture that none can do it successfully who is not fortified in virtue himself, and constantly led, directed, and restrained by the Holy Spirit of God. Just in this point lies the great difference between the realism of the Bible and the realism of the French novel. In the first the didactic purpose is at once declared, and the writer moves with swift precision through the fascinating scene, to lift the curtain and show death beyond; in the last the motive is left doubtful, and the writer moves slowly, observantly, even gloatingly, through the abomination and the filth, without any clear conception of the Divine Eye which watches, or the Divine Voice which condemns.†

There is a corresponding difference in the effects of the two. Few men could study these chapters in the book of Proverbs without experiencing a healthy revolt against the iniquity which is unveiled; while few men can read the works of modern realism without contracting a certain contamination, without a dimming of the moral sense and a weakening of the purer impulses.

We need not then complain that the powers of imaginative description are summoned to heighten the picture of the temptation, because the same powers are used with constraining effect to paint the results of yielding to it. We need not regret that the Temptress, Mistress Folly, as she is called, is allowed to utter all her blandishments in full, to weave her spells before our eyes, because the voice of Wisdom is in this way made more impressive and convincing. Pulpit invectives against sin often lose half their terrible cogency because we are too prudish to describe the sins which we denounce.

I. *The glammers of sin and the safeguard against them.*—There is no sin which affords so vivid an example of seductive attraction at the beginning, and of hopeless misery at the end, as that of

* Prov. v. 8.

† The Laureate has touched with stern satire on this debased modern Realism:

"Author, atheist, essayist, novelist, realist, rhymester,
play your part,
Paint the mortal shame of Nature with the living hues
of Art.
Rip your brothers' vices open, strip your own foul passions bare,
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—
naked—let them stare!
Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of
your sewer,
Send the drain into the fountain lest the stream should
issue pure.
Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of
Zolaism,
Forward, forward,—aye and backward, downward too
into the abyss!"

—The new "Locksley Hall."

unlawful love. The illustration which we generally prefer, that drawn from the abuse of alcoholic drinks, occurs later on in the book, at xxiii. 31, 32; but it is not so effectual for the purpose, and we may be thankful that the Divine Wisdom is not checked in its choice of matter by our present-day notions of propriety.

There are two elements in the temptation: there is the smooth and flattering speech, the outpouring of compliment and pretended affection expressed in vii. 15, the subtle and inflaming suggestion that "stolen waters are sweet;"* and there is the beauty of form enhanced by artful painting of the eyelids,† and by all those gratifications of the senses which melt the manhood and undermine the resisting power of the victim.‡ In our own time we should have to add still further elements of temptation,—sophistical arguments and oracular utterances of a false science, which encourages men to do for health what appetite bids them do for pleasure.

After all, this is but a type of all temptations to sin. There are weak points in every character; there are places in every life where the descent is singularly easy. A siren voice waylays us with soft words and insinuating arguments; gentle arms are thrown around us, and dazzling visions occupy our eyes; our conscience seems to fade away in a mist of excited feeling; there is a sort of twilight in which shapes are uncertain, and the imagination works mightily with the obscure presentations of the senses. We are taken unawares; the weak point happens to be unguarded; the fatal byepath with its smooth descent is, as it were, sprung upon us.

Now the safeguard against the specific sin before us is presented in a true and whole-hearted marriage.§ And the safeguard against all sin is equally to be found in the complete and constant preoccupation of the soul with the Divine Love. The author is very far from indulging in allegory,—his thoughts are occupied with a very definite and concrete evil, and a very definite and concrete remedy; but instinctively the Christian ear detects a wider application, and the Christian heart turns to that strange and exigent demand made by its Lord, to hate father and mother, and even all human ties, in order to concentrate on Him an exclusive love and devotion. It is our method to state a general truth and illustrate it with particular instances; it is the method of a more primitive wisdom to dwell upon a particular instance in such a way as to suggest a general truth. Catching, therefore, involuntarily the deeper meanings of such a thought, we notice that escape from the allurements of the strange woman is secured by the inward concentration of a pure wedded love. In the permitted paths of connubial intimacy and tenderness are to be found raptures more sweet and abiding than those which are vainly promised by the ways of sin.

"Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights
His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile
Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendeared."||

Forbidding to marry is a device of Satan; anything which tends to degrade or to desecrate marriage bears on its face the mark of the Tempter. It is at our peril that we invade the holy mystery, or brush away from its precincts

* Prov. ix. 17.

† Prov. vi. 25.

‡ Prov. vii. 16, 17.

§ Prov. v. 15-19.

|| "Paradise Lost."

the radiant dews which reflect the light of God. Nay, even the jest and the playful teasing which the subject sometimes occasions are painfully inappropriate and even offensive. We do ill to smile at the mutual absorption and tender endearments of the young married people; we should do better to pray that their love might grow daily more absorbing and more tender. I would say to brides and bridegrooms: Magnify the meaning of this sacred union of yours; try to understand its Divine symbolism. Labour diligently to keep its mystical passion pure and ardent and strong. Remember that love needs earnest, humble, self-suppressing cultivation, and its bloom is at first easily worn off by negligence or laziness. Husbands, labour hard to make your assiduous and loving care more manifest to your wives as years go by. Wives, desire more to shine in the eyes of your husbands, and to retain their passionate and chivalrous admiration, than you did in the days of courtship.

Where marriage is held honourable,—a sacrament of heavenly significance,—where it begins in a disinterested love, grows in educational discipline, and matures in a complete harmony, an absolute fusion of the wedded souls, you have at once the best security against many of the worst evils which desolate society, and the most exquisite type of the brightest and loveliest spiritual state which is promised to us in the world to come.

Our sacred writings glorify marriage, finding in it more than any other wisdom or religion has found. The Bible, depicting the seductions and fascinations of sin, sets off against them the infinitely sweeter joys and the infinitely more binding fascinations of this condition which was created and appointed in the time of man's innocence, and is still the readiest way of bringing back the Paradise which is lost.

II. *The binding results of sin.*—It is interesting to compare with the teaching of this chapter the doctrine of Karma in that religion of Buddha which was already winning its victorious way in the far East at the time when these introductory chapters were written. The Buddha said in effect to his disciple, "You are in slavery to a tyrant set up by yourself. Your own deeds, words, and thoughts, in the former and present states of being, are your own avengers through a countless series of lives. If you have been a murderer, a thief, a liar, impure, a drunkard, you must pay the penalty in your next birth, either in one of the hells, or as an unclean animal, or as an evil spirit, or as a demon. You cannot escape, and I am powerless to set you free. Not in the heavens," so says the Dhammapada, "not in the midst of the sea, not if thou hidest thyself in the clefts of the mountains, wilt thou find a place where thou canst escape the force of thy own evil actions."

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin." This terrible truth is illustrated with mournful emphasis in the sin of the flesh which has been occupying our attention, a sin which can only be described as "taking fire into the bosom or walking upon hot coals," with the inevitable result that the clothes are burnt and the feet are scorched.* There are four miseries comparable to four strong cords which bind the unhappy transgressor. First of all, there is the shame. His honour is given to others,† and his reproach

shall not be wiped away.* The jealous rage of the offended husband will accept no ransom, no expiation;† with relentless cruelty the avenger will expose to ruin and death the hapless fool who has transgressed against him. Secondly, there is the loss of wealth. The ways of debauchery lead to absolute want, for the debauchee, impelled by his tormenting passions, will part with all his possessions in order to gratify his appetites,‡ until, unnerved and "feckless," incapable of any honest work, he is at his wits' end to obtain even the necessities of life.§ For the third binding cord of the transgression is the loss of health; the natural powers decay, the flesh and the body are consumed with loathsome disease.|| Yet this is not the worst. Worse than all the rest is the bitter remorse, the groaning and the despair at the end of the shortened life. "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"¶ "Going down to the chambers of death," wise too late, the victim of his own sins remembers with unspeakable agony the voice of his teachers, the efforts of those who wished to instruct him.

There is an inevitableness about it all, for life is not lived at a hazard; every path is clearly laid bare from its first step to its last before the eyes of the Lord; the ups and downs which obscure the way for us are all level to Him.** Not by chance, therefore, but by the clearest interworking of cause and effect, these fetters of sin grow upon the feet of the sinner, while the ruined soul mourns in the latter days.†† The reason why Wisdom cries aloud, so urgently, so continually, is that she is uttering eternal truths, laws which hold in the spiritual world as surely as gravitation holds in the natural world; it is that she sees unhappy human beings going astray in the greatness of their folly, dying because they are without the instruction which she offers.‡‡

But now, to turn to the large truth which is illustrated here by a particular instance, that our evil actions, forming evil habits, working ill results on us and on others, are themselves the means of our punishment.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us."§§

We do not rightly conceive God or Judgment or Hell until we recognise that in spiritual and moral things there is a binding law, which is no arbitrary decree of God, but the essential constitution of His universe. *He* does not punish, but sin punishes; *He* does not make hell, but sinners make it. As our Lord puts it, the terrible thing about all sinning is that one may become involved in an eternal sin.|||| It is by an inherent necessity that this results from a sin against the Holy Spirit within us.

We cannot too frequently, or too solemnly, dwell upon this startling fact. It is a fact established, not by a doubtful text or two, nor by a mere *ipse dixit* of authority, but by the widest possible observation of life, by a concurrent witness of all teachers and all true religions. No planetary movement, no recurrence of the sea-

* Prov. vi. 33.

† Prov. vi. 34, 35.

‡ Prov. v. 10.

§ Prov. v. 21.

¶ It is, if we may say so, a maxim of modern science that "A sin without punishment is as impossible, as complete a contradiction in terms, as a cause without an effect" (W. R. Gregg).

†† Prov. v. 23.

§ Prov. vi. 26.

|| Prov. v. 11.

¶ Prov. v. 12-14.

§§ "King Lear."

|||| Mark iii. 26.

* Prov. vi. 27, 28.

† Prov. v. 9

sons, no chemical transformation, no physiological growth, no axiom of mathematics, is established on surer or more irrefutable grounds. Sin itself may even be defined, from an induction of facts, as "the act of a human will which, being contrary to the Divine Will, reacts with inevitable evil upon the agent." Sin is a presumptuous attempt on the part of a human will to disturb the irresistible order of the Divine Will, and can only draw down upon itself those lightnings of the Divine power, which otherwise would have flashed through the heavens beautiful and beneficent.

Let us, then, try to impress upon our minds that, not in the one sin of which we have been speaking only, but in all sins alike, certain bands are being woven, certain cords twisted, certain chains forged, which must one day take and hold the sinner with galling stringency.

Every sin is preparing for us a band of shame to be wound about our brows and tightened to the torture-point. There are many gross and generally condemned actions which when they are exposed bring their immediate penalty. To be discovered in dishonourable dealing, to have our hidden enormities brought into the light of day, to forfeit by feeble vices a fair and dignified position, will load a conscience which is not quite callous with a burden of shame that makes life quite intolerable. But there are many sins which do not entail this scornful censure of our fellows, sins with which *they* have a secret sympathy, for which *they* cherish an ill-disguised admiration,—the more heroic sins of daring ambition, victorious selfishness, or proud defiance of God. None the less these tolerated iniquities are weaving the inevitable band of shame for the brow: we shall not always be called on only to face our fellows, for we are by our creation the sons of God, in whose image we are made, and eventually we must confront the children of Light, must look straight up into the face of God, with these sins—venial as they were thought—set in the light of His countenance. Then will the guilty spirit burn with an indescribable and unbearable shame,—“To hide my head! To bury my eyes that they may not see the rays of the Eternal Light,” will be its cry. May we not say with truth that the shame which comes from the judgment of our fellows is the most tolerable of the bands of shame?

Again, every sin is preparing for us a loss of wealth, of the only wealth which is really durable, the treasure in the heavens; every sin is capable of “bringing a man to a piece of bread,” * filching from him all the food on which the spirit lives. It is too common a sight to see a young spendthrift who has run through his patrimony in a few years, who much pass through the bankruptcy court, and who has burdened his estate and his name with charges and reproaches from which he can never again shake himself free. But that is only a superficial illustration of a spiritual reality. Every sin is the precursor of spiritual bankruptcy; it is setting one’s hand to a bill which, when it comes in, must break the wealthiest signatory.

That little sin of yours, trivial as it seems,—the mere inadvertence, the light-hearted carelessness, the petty spleen, the innocent romancing, the gradual hardening of the heart,—is, if you would see it, like scratching with a pen through and through a writing on a parchment. What is

this writing? What is this parchment? It is a title-deed to an inheritance, the inheritance of the saints in light. You are quietly erasing your name from it and blotching its fair characters. When you come to the day of account, you will show your claim, and it will be illegible. “What,” you will say, “am I to lose this great possession for this trifling scratch of the pen?” “Even so,” says the Inexorable; “it is precisely in this way that the inheritance is lost; not, as a rule, by deliberate and reckless destruction of the mighty treasure, but by the thoughtless triviality, the indolent easiness. See you, it is the work of your own hand. *His own iniquities shall take the wicked.*”

Again, every sin is the gradual undermining of the health, not so much the body’s, as the soul’s health. Those are, as it were, the slightest sins by which “the flesh and the body are consumed.” “Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes?” Who is stricken and hurt and beaten, bitten as if by an adder, stung as if by a serpent? * It is the victim of drink, and every feature shows how he is holden by the cords of his sin. But there is one who is drunk with the blood of his fellow-men, and has thriven at the expense of the poor, who yet is temperate, healthy, and strong. The disease of his soul does not come to the light of day. None the less it is there. The sanity of soul which alone can preserve the life in the Eternal World and in the presence of God is fatally disturbed by every sin. A virus enters the spirit; germs obtain a lodgment there. The days pass, the years pass. The respected citizen, portly, rich, and courted, goes at last in a good old age from the scene of his prosperity here, —surely to a fairer home above?

Alas, the soul if it were to come into those fadeless mansions would be found smitten with a leprosy. This is no superficial malady; through and through the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. Strange that men never noticed it down there in the busy world. But the fact is, *it is the air of heaven which brings out these suppressed disorders.* And the diseased soul whispers, “Take me out of this air, I beseech you, at all costs. I must have change of climate. This atmosphere is intolerable to me. I can only be well out of heaven.” “Poor spirit,” murmur the angels, “he says the truth; certainly he could not live here.”

Finally the worst chain forged in the furnace of sin is Remorse: for no one can guarantee to the sinner an eternal insensibility; rather it seems quite unavoidable that some day he must awake, and standing shamed before the eyes of his Maker, stripped of all his possessions and hopelessly diseased in soul, must recognise clearly what might have been and now cannot be. Memory will be busy. “Ah! that cursed memory!” he cries. It brings back all the gentle pleadings of his mother in that pure home long ago; it brings back all his father’s counsels; it brings back the words which were spoken from the pulpit, and all the conversations with godly friends. He remembers how he wavered—“Shall it be the strait and hallowed road, or shall it be the broad road to destruction?” He remembers all the pleas and counterpleas, and how with open eyes he chose the way which, as he saw, went down to death. And now? Now it is irrevocable. He said he would take his luck,

* Prov. vi. 26.

* Prov. xxiii. 29, 32.

and he has taken it. He said God would not punish a poor creature like him. God does not punish him. No, there is God making level all his paths now as of old. This punishment is not God's; it is his own. *His own iniquities have taken the wicked; he is held with the cords of his sin.*

Here then is the plain, stern truth,—a law, not of Nature only, but of the Universe. As you look into a fact so solemn, so awful; as the cadence of the chapter closes, do you not seem to perceive with a new clearness how men needed One who could take away the sins of the world, One who could break those cruel bonds which men have made for themselves?

CHAPTER VI.

CERTAIN EXAMPLES OF THE BINDING CHARACTER OF OUR OWN ACTIONS.

"The surety . . . the sluggard . . . and the worthless person."—PROV. vi. 1, 6, 12.

FROM the solemn principle announced at the close of the last chapter the teacher passes, almost unconscious of the thought which determines his selection of subjects, to illustrate the truth by three examples,—that of the Surety, that of the Sluggard, that of the Worthless Man. And then, because the horrors of impurity are the most striking and terrible instance of all, this subject, coming up again at v. 20, like the dark ground tone of the picture, finally runs into the long and detailed description of chap. vii.

These three examples are full of interest, partly because of the light they throw on the habits and moral sentiments of the time in which this Introduction was written, but chiefly because of the permanent teaching which is luminous in them all, and especially in the third.

We may spend a few minutes upon the first. The young man, finding his neighbour in monetary difficulties, consents in an easy-going way to become his surety; he enters into a solemn pledge with the creditor, probably a Phœnician money-lender, that he will himself be responsible if the debtor is not prepared to pay at the appointed time. He now stands committed; he is like a roe that is caught by the hunter, or a bird that is held by the fowler, in the hand of his neighbour. His peace of mind, and his welfare, depend no longer upon himself, but upon the character, the weakness, the caprice of another. This is a good illustration of the way in which a thoughtless action may weave cruel bands to bind the unwary. Looking at the matter from this point of view, our book strongly and frequently denounces the practice of suretiship. To become surety for another shows that you are void of understanding. So foolish is the action that it is compared to the surrender of one's own garments, and even to the loss of personal freedom. A proverb declares: "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it, but he that hateth suretiship is sure."*

If then the young man has immeshed himself in obligations of this kind, he is recommended to spare no pains, not to stand upon a false pride, but to go with all urgency, with frank abasement, to the man for whom he has pledged his credit, and at all costs to get released from

the obligation. "Be thou not," says Wisdom, "one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts: if thou hast not wherewith to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?"*

We feel at once that there is another side to the question. There may be cases in which a true brotherliness will require us to be surety for our friend. "An honest man is surety for his neighbour, but he that is impudent will forsake him," says Ecclesiasticus. And from another point of view an injunction has to be given to one who has persuaded his friend to stand as his surety,—“Forget not the friendship of thy surety, for he hath given his life for thee. A sinner will overthrow the good estate of his surety, and he that is of an unthankful mind will leave him in danger that delivered him.” But confining ourselves to the standpoint of the text, we may well raise a note of warning against the whole practice. As Ecclesiasticus himself says, "Suretiship hath undone many of good estate, and shaken them as a wave of the sea: mighty men hath it driven from their houses, so that they wandered among strange nations. A wicked man transgressing the commandments of the Lord shall fall into suretiship."†

We may say perhaps that the truly moral course in these relations with our fellows lies here: if we can afford to be a surety for our neighbour, we can clearly afford to lend him the money ourselves. If we cannot afford to lend it to him, then it is weak and foolish, and may easily become wicked and criminal, to make our peace of mind dependent on the action of a third person, while in all probability it is hurtful to our friend himself, because by consenting to divide the risks with the actual creditor we tend to lessen in the debtor's mind the full realisation of his indebtedness, and thus encourage him in shifty courses and unnerve his manly sense of responsibility. The cases in which it is wise as well as kind to become bail for another are so rare that they may practically be ignored in this connection; and when these rare occasions occur they may safely be left to the arbitrament of other principles of conduct which in the present instance are out of view. Here it is enough to emphasise what a miserable chain thoughtlessness in the matter of suretiship may forge for the thoughtless.

We may now pass to our second illustration, the poverty and ruin which must eventually overtake *the Sluggard*. "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns. The face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I beheld, and considered well: I saw, and received instruction."‡ And there is the lazy owner of this neglected farm murmuring, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." There seem to be in every community a certain number of people who can only be described as constitutionally incapable: as children they are heavy and phlegmatic; at school they are always playing truant, and exerting themselves, if at all, to escape the irksome necessity of learning anything; when they enter into life for themselves they have no notion of honest effort and steady per-

* See Prov. xvii. 18, xx. 16, repeated in xxvii. 13, and especially xi. 15.

* Prov. xxii. 26, 27.

† Eccles. xxix. 14, 16, 17, 18, 19.

‡ Prov. xxiv. 30-34; see for a fuller treatment of the subject Lecture XX.

sistency, but directly their employment becomes distasteful they quit it; and at length, when they end their days in the workhouse, or in those shameful haunts of sin and vice to which sloth so easily leads, they have the melancholy reflection to take with them to the grave that they have proved themselves an encumbrance of the earth, and can be welcomed in no conceivable world. Now the question must force itself upon our attention, Might not these incapables be rescued if they were taken young enough, and taught by wholesome discipline and a wise education what will be the inevitable issue of their lethargic tendencies? Might not the farm of the sluggard be impressed on their very eyeballs as a perpetual and effective warning?

Leaving this important question to social reformers, we may note how beautifully this book employs the examples of insect life to teach and stimulate human beings. "The ants are a people not strong. Yet they provide their meat in summer. . . . The locusts have no king. Yet go they forth all of them by bands."* "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no chief, overseer,† or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."‡ By this little touch the book of Proverbs has turned the magnificent fields of modern scientific observation, and all the astonishing revelations of the microscope, into a school of moral and spiritual discipline for human life. Thus the ants swarm in the woods and the fields as if to rebuke the laziness and thriftlessness of man. They work night and day; they store their galleries with food; they capture and nourish aphides, which they use as a kind of domestic cattle. The vast and symmetrical mounds, which they rear as habitations and barns, are, relatively to the size of the builders, three or four times larger than the pyramids. By what mysterious instinct those long lines of labourers march and work in unison; by what half-human impulses they form in serried hosts and engage in deadly battles prolonged through several days; by what ludicrous freaks they are led to imitate men, spending their lives in pampered luxury, dependent upon slaves, until at last in their helplessness they are mastered by their bondservants in revolt; by what heavenly motive they are stirred to feed and nourish and nurse one another in sickness and trouble,—we need not here enquire, for we are only told to go to the ant in order to learn her ways of ceaseless activity. But in this brief precept we seem to receive a hint of the boundless instruction and warning to be derived from the humbler inhabitants of this earth which man claims as his own.

Let us pass to the *third* illustration of the theme. The surety is the victim of easygoing thoughtlessness, the sluggard is the victim of laziness and incapacity; but now there appears on the scene the thoroughly worthless character, the man of Belial, and after his portrait is drawn in a few touches, his sudden and hopeless ruin is announced in a way which is all the more striking because the connection between the sin and its punishment is left to be guessed rather than explained.§ The description of this person

is wonderfully graphic and instructive, and we must dwell for a moment on the details. We see him, not in repose, but busy going from place to place, and talking a great deal. His lips are shaped continually to lie,—“he walketh with a froward mouth.” There is no straightforwardness about him; he is full of hint, suggestion, innuendo; he gives you always the idea that he has an accomplice in the background; he turns to you and winks in a knowing way; he has a habit of shuffling with his feet, as if some evil spirit forbade him to stand still; you constantly catch his gesticulating; he points with his thumb over his shoulder, and nods significantly; he is never better pleased than when he can give the impression of knowing a great deal more than he cares to say. He delights to wrap himself in mystery—to smile blandly and then relapse into a look of inscrutability—to frown severely and then assume an air of gentle innocence. He is in the habit of beckoning one into a corner, and making a whispered communication as if he were your particular friend, as if he had taken a fancy to you directly. He saw you, and was therefore eager to give you some information which nothing would induce him to divulge to anyone else; if you are foolish enough to share his confidences, he gives you very soon, when others are standing by, a cunning leer, as if to intimate that you and he are old acquaintances, and are in the secret, which the rest do not know.*

The fact is that his heart is as deceitful as his lips; he cannot be true on any terms. If some simple and open course occurred to his mind he would shun it instinctively, because it is in devising evil that he lives and moves and has his being. His friendliest approaches fill an honest man with misgiving, his words of affection or admiration send a cold shudder through one's frame. His face is a mask; when it looks fair you suspect villainy; when it looks villainous, and then only, you recognise that it is true. Wherever he goes he makes mischief, he causes divisions; he is the Iago of every play in which he takes a part, the Judas of every society of which he is a member. He manages to sow suspicion in the mind of the least suspicious, and to cast a slur on the character of the most innocent. When he has created discord between friends he is delighted. If he sees them disposed to a reconciliation, he comes forward as a mediator and takes care to exasperate the differences, and to make the breach irreparable. Like Edmund in “King Lear,” he has a genius for setting men at variance, and for so arranging his plots that each party thinks he hears with his own ears and sees with his own eyes the proof of the other's perfidy. But, unlike Edmund, he does the mischief, not for any special good to himself, but for the mere delight of being an agent of evil.

It is this kind of man that is the pest of commerce. He introduces dishonest practices into every business that he touches. He makes it a principle that in selling you are to impose on the customer, avail yourself of his ignorance or prejudice or weakness, and hide everything which might incline him to draw back; while in buying you are to use any fraud or panic or misrepresentation which might induce the seller to lower

* Prov. xxx. 25-27.

† It is the word used in Exod. v. 6 of those who directed the tasks of the Israelites in Egypt.

‡ Prov. vi. 6-8.

§ Prov. vi. 12-15.

* Cf. the proverb xvi. 30—“He that shutteth his eyes, it is to devise froward things: he that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass.”

the price.* When he has been in a business for a little while the whole concern becomes tainted, there is a slime over everything; the very atmosphere is fetid.

It is this kind of man that is the bane of every social circle. In his presence, all simplicity and innocence, all charity and forbearance and compassion, seem to wither away. If you are true and straightforward he manages to make you ridiculous; under his evil spell you seem a simpleton. All genial laughter he turns into sardonic smiles and sneers; all kindly expressions he transforms into empty compliments which are not devoid of a hidden venom. He is often very witty, but his wit clings like an eating acid to everything that is good and pure; his tongue will lodge a germ of putrescence in everything which it touches.

It is this kind of man that is the leaven of hypocrisy and malice in the Christian Church; he intrigues and cabals. He sets the people against the minister and stirs up the minister to suspect his people. He undertakes religious work, because it is in that capacity he can do most mischief. He is never better pleased than when he can pose as the champion of orthodoxy, because then he seems to be sheltered and approved by the banner which he is defending.

"Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly."† It is because the character is so incurably base, so saturated with lies and insinuations, that there can be no gradations or temperings in his punishment. One who is less evil may be proved and tested with slight troubles, if possibly he may be stirred to amendment. But this utterly worthless person is quite unaffected by the smaller trials, the tentative disciplines of life. He cannot be chastised as a son; he can only be broken as a vessel in which there is an intrinsic flaw; or as a building, which has got the plague in its very mortar and plaster.

We are told that in Sierra Leone the white ants will sometimes occupy a house, and eat their way into all the woodwork, until every article in the house is hollow, so that it will collapse into dust directly it is touched. It is so with this deceitful character, so honeycombed, and eaten through, that though for years it may maintain its plausible appearance in the world, few people even suspecting the extent of the inward decay, on a sudden the end will come; there will be one touch of the finger of God, and the whole ill-compacted, worm-devoured thing will crumble into matchwood: "He shall be broken, and that without remedy."

But while we are thus watching this worthless soul overtaken with an inevitable calamity, we are reminded that not only are our eyes upon him, but the Lord also sees him. And to that calm and holy watcher of the poor sinful creature there are six things which appear specially hateful—seven which are an abomination of His soul.‡ Is there not a kind of comfort in the thought that the Lord watches and knows the whole story of that miserable life, not leaving it to us to condemn, but taking upon Himself the whole responsibility? He knows whether there is a reason in nature for these bad hearts;

He knows too what power outside of nature can change and redeem them. But at present we want only to mark and consider these seven things which are abominable to God—the seven prominent traits of the character which has just been depicted. We seem to need some spiritual quickening, that we may observe these hateful things not only with our own natural repugnance, but with something of the holy hatred and the inward loathing which they produce in the Divine mind.

1. *Haughty eyes.* "There is a generation, Oh how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up."* And to that generation how many of us belong, and what secret admiration do we cherish for it, even when we can honestly disclaim any blood relationship! That haughty air of the great noble; that sense of intrinsic superiority; that graciousness of manner which comes from a feeling that no comparison can possibly be instituted between the great man and his inferiors; that way of surveying the whole earth as if it were one's private estate; or that supreme satisfaction with one's private estate as if it were the whole earth! This lofty pride, when its teeth are drawn so that it cannot materially hurt the rest of mankind, is a subject of mirth to us; but to the Lord it is not, it is hateful and abominable; it ranks with the gross vices and the worst sins; it is the chief crime of Satan.

2. *A lying tongue,* though it "is but for a moment."† It is the sure sign of God's intense hatred against lies that they recoil on the head of the liar, and are the harbingers of certain destruction. We dislike lies because of their social inconvenience, and where some social convenience is served by them we connive at them and approve. But God hates the lying tongue, whatever apparent advantage comes from it. If we lie for personal gain He hates it. If we lie from mere weakness, He hates it. If we lie in the name of religion, and in the fashion of the Jesuit, for the welfare of men and the salvation of souls, He hates it none the less. The abomination does not consist in the motive of the lie, but in the lie itself.

3. *Hands that shed innocent blood.* So hateful are they to Him that He could not let David His chosen servant build Him a house because this charge could be laid against the great king. The soldier in the battle-field hewing down the man who is innocent, and the man who in carelessness or greed is wearing the poor, who are dependent on him, down to death, and the man who in a passion rises up and murders his fellow,—these are very hateful to the Lord. There at the beginning of the world's history, in the blood of righteous Abel crying to the Lord, and in the mark set on the guilty brow of Cain, the heart of God was clearly and finally shown. He has not changed. He does not shed innocent blood Himself; He cannot away with them that shed it.

4. Hateful too to Him is *the devising heart*, even where courage or opportunity fails of realising the device. There are so many more murders in the world than we see, so many cruel and wicked deeds restrained by the police or by a dominant public sentiment, which yet lie deep in the wicked imagination of our hearts, and are abominable to God, that we may be thankful

* Cf. Prov. xx. 14: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth."

† It is probably assumed that warnings and corrections have been given him in vain—cf. Prov. xxix. 1: "He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be broken, and that without remedy."

‡ Prov. vi. 16-19.

* Prov. xxx. 13. See Lecture XIII. for the teaching of the Proverbs on Pride.

† Prov. xii. 10.

if we do not see as He sees, and may wonder at the forbearance of His compassion.

5. *Feet that be swift in running to mischief.* Feet listless in the ways of brotherly service or holy worship, but swift, twinkling with eager haste, when any mischief is toward, are marked by God—and hated.

6. And a *false witness* is abominable to Him, the poisoner of all social life, the destroyer of all justice between man and man. Again and again in this book is censure passed upon this unpardonable crime.*

7. Finally, as the blessing of Heaven descends on the peacemaker, so the hatred of God assails the man *who sows discord among brethren.*

Such is the character which God abominates, the character which binds itself with cords of penalty and falls into irretrievable ruin. And then, after this disquisition on some of the vices which destroy the individual life and disturb society, our author turns again to that snaring vice which is so much the more destructive because it comes under the guise, not of hate, but of love. Those other vices after all bear their evil on their faces, but this is veiled and enchanted with a thousand possible sophistries; it pleads the instincts of nature, the fascinations of beauty, the faults of the present social state, and even advances the august precepts of science. Surely in a way where such a danger lurks we need a commandment which will shine as a lamp, a law which will be itself a light (ver. 23).

CHAPTER VII.

REALISM IN MORAL TEACHING.

"I looked forth through my lattice; and I beheld."—PROV. vii. 6.

THE three chapters which close the introduction of our book (vii.-ix.) present a lively and picturesque contrast between Folly and Wisdom—Folly more especially in the form of vice; Wisdom more generally in her highest and most universal intention. Folly is throughout concrete, an actual woman portrayed with such correctness of detail that she is felt as a personal force. Wisdom, on the other hand, is only personified; she is an abstract conception; she speaks with human lips in order to carry out the parallel, but she is not a human being, known to the writer. As we shall see in the next Lecture, this high Wisdom never took a human shape until the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; Folly, unhappily, had become incarnate in myriads of instances; scarcely any city or place where men congregate was, or is, without its melancholy example. It follows from this difference between the two that the picture of Folly is a piece of vigorous realism, while the account of Wisdom is a piece of delicate idealism. Folly is historical. Wisdom is prophetic. In this chapter we are concerned with facts which the author witnessed from the window of his house, looking forth through the lattice.† In the next chapter we shall touch on ideas which

he had not seen, and could not have seen unless it were in lofty vision, looking out through the lattice of the soul. In the present chapter we have an opportunity of noticing the immense value and power of pictorial delineation and concrete images in moral teaching; in the next we shall experience the peculiar fascination and inspiration of beautiful abstract conceptions, of disembodied ideals which, so far as we know at the time, are not capable of actual realisation.

It is important to remember this difference in order to understand why Wisdom, the shadowy contrast to that Mistress Folly who was only too concrete and familiar, shaped itself to the writer's mind as a fair and stately woman, a queenly hostess inviting simple ones to her feast; though, as Christians, we have learnt, the historical embodiment of Wisdom was a man, the Word of God, who of God was made unto us wisdom.

Now before we take our stand at the window and look through the lattice into the street, we must notice the exhortations to the young man to make wisdom and understanding his intimate friends, with which the chapter begins. The law is to be kept as the apple of the eye, which is so sensitive, so tender, and at the same time so surpassingly important, that the lid has to shield it by a quick instinctive movement out-running thought, and the hand has to be ready at all times to come to its succour. The commandments are to be written on the fingers, like engraved rings, which would serve as instant reminders in unwary moments; the very instruments through which the evil would be done are to be claimed and sealed and inscribed by the righteousness which can preserve it from evil, while in the secret tablets of the heart the holy truths are to be written; so that if, in the business of life, the writing on the fingers may get blurred or effaced, the principles of righteousness may yet be kept like priceless archives stored in the inviolable chambers of the inner man. Wisdom is to be treated as a sister,* not as if there were a natural kinship, but on the ground of the beautiful influence which a true sister, a pure woman soul, exercises over a young man's life. It is given to a sister again and again, by unfailing sympathy and by sweet comprehending ways, not teasing nor lecturing, but always believing and hoping and loving, to weave a magical spell of goodness and truth around a brother who is exposed to dangerous temptations; she will "maintain for him a saving intercourse with his true self;" when the fires of more ardent affections are burning low, or extinguished in doubt or disgust she will be with him like a calm impersonal presence, unobtrusive, unforgotten, the more potent because she makes no show of power. Such a lovely fraternal relation is to be maintained with Wisdom, constant as a tie of blood, firm as a companionship from earliest infancy, yet exalted and enthusiastic in its way, and promising a lifelong attraction and authority.

This blessed kinship with Understanding should save the young man from such a fate as we are now to contemplate.

It is twilight, not yet absolutely dark, but the shuddering horror of the scene seems to quench the doubtful glimmer of evening and to plunge the observer suddenly into midnight.† There is a young man coming round the corner of the

* See Prov. xii. 17; xiv. 5, 25; xix. 5, 9. A crime, it may be remembered, which would be much more common and much more fatal in a primitive state of society, where on the one hand legal procedure was less cautious and less searching, and on the other hand the inward sanctions of truth which Christianity has brought home to the modern conscience were but feebly perceived.

† Prov. vii. 6.

* Prov. vii. 4.

† Prov. vii. 9.

street. His is no manly walk, but an idle, effeminate saunter—a detail which is not brought out in the English Version.* He is a dandy and sadly empty-headed. Now all young men, good and bad alike, pass through a period of dandyism, and it has its uses; but the better the stuff of which the man is made, the more quickly he gets over the crisis, and returns to his senses. This young man is "void of understanding;" his dandyism will be chronic. His is a feeble will and a prurient mind; but his special weakness consists in this, that he thinks he can always resist temptation, and therefore never hesitates to thrust himself in his way. It is as if one were to pride himself on being able to hang on with his fingers to the rim of a well; he is always hanging there, and a touch will send him in. One who is in his opinion weaker would give the dangerous place a wide berth, and nothing but sheer force would bring him to the edge.

This young dandy has nothing to say for himself. A tempter need not be at the trouble to bring any sound arguments, or to make the worse appear the better reason; to this poor weakling the worse the reason is the better it will appear. As you see him lolling down the path with his leering look and his infinite self-satisfaction—good-natured, but without any other goodness, not with bad intentions, but with everything else bad—you can foresee that he will be blown over as easily as a pleasure skiff on a stormy ocean; if you have a compassionate heart you mourn over him at once, for you see the inevitable.

The woman has come out to meet him—like a bird-catcher who has been watching for the unwary bird. Now he should escape at once, for her very attitude warns him of her intentions. But this is just his weakness: he delights to place himself in such a position; he would say that it is the proof of his manliness that he can resist. She approaches him with a smirk and a smile, with an open countenance but a closed heart. She utters a sound, moving and pathetic like the murmur of harp-strings;† it comes from that inward tumult of passion in the woman's nature which always flutters the heart of a weak youth. She is a wild, undisciplined creature; she always hankers after the forbidden; the quiet home ways are insufferable to her; out in the streets, with their excitement, their variety, their suggestions, their possibilities, she forgets, if she does not quiet, her restlessness. The poor woman-nature which, rightly taught and trained, might make the beauty and sweetness of a home, capable of sanctified affections and of self-sacrificing devotion, is here entirely perverted. The passion is poisoned and now poisonous. The energy is diseased. The charms are all spurious. She goes abroad in the blackness of night because in even a faint light her hideousness would appear; under the paint and the finery she is a hag, her eyes are lustreless but for the tempo-

rary fire of her corruptions; behind that voice which croons and ripples there is a subdued moan of despair—the jarring of harp-strings which snap and quiver and shudder and are silent forever. The wise man looks at her with compassionate loathing, God with pity which yearns to save; but this foolish youth is moved by her as only a fool could be moved. His weak understanding is immediately overcome by her flatteries; his polluted heart does not perceive the poison of her heartless endearments.

She throws her arms around him and kisses him, and he makes no question that it is a tribute to the personal attractions which he has himself often admired in his mirror. She would have him believe that it was he whom she had come out specially to seek, though it would have been just the same whoever had caught her eye; and he, deceived by his own vanity, at once believes her. She has a great deal to say; she does not rely on one inducement, for she does not know with whom she has to do; she pours out therefore all her allurements in succession without stopping to take breath.

First, she holds out the prospect of a good meal. She has abundant meat in the house, which comes from the sacrifice she has just been offering, and it must be eaten by the next day, according to the commandment of the Law.* Or if he is not one to be attracted merely by food, she has appeals to his æsthetic side; her furniture is rich and artistic, and her chamber is perfumed with sweet spices. She perceives perhaps by now what a weak, faint-hearted creature, enervated by vice, unmanly and nervous, she has to do with, and she hastens to assure him that his precious skin will be safe. Her Goodman is not at home, and his absence will be prolonged; he took money with him for a long journey, and she knows the date of his return. The foolish youth need not fear, therefore, "that jealousy which is the rage of a man;" he will not have to offer gifts and ransom to the implacable husband, because his deed will never be known. How hollow it all sounds, and how suspicious; surely one who had a grain of understanding would answer with manly scorn and with kindling indignation. But our poor young fool, who was so confident of himself, yields without a struggle; with her mere talk, playing upon his vanity, she bends him as if he were a water-weed in a stream—her appeals to his self-admiration drive him forth as easily as the goads urge an ox to the slaughter-house.

And now you may watch him going after her to destruction!

Is there not a pathos in the sight of an ox going to the slaughter? The poor dumb creature is lured by the offer of food or driven by the lash of the driver. It enters the slaughter-house as if it were a stall for rest and refreshment; it has no idea that "it is for its life." The butcher knows; the bystanders understand the signs; but it is perfectly insensible, taking a transitory pleasure in the unwonted attentions which are really the portents of death. It is not endeared to us by any special interest or affection; the dull, stupid life has never come into any close connection with ours. It has never been to us like a favorite dog, or a pet bird that has cheered our solitary hours. It gave us no response when we spoke to it or stroked its sleek hide. It was merely an animal. But

* Prov. viii. 3. The term *ἄνθρωπος* describes a special kind of motion, *v. g.* the slow pacing of the oxen that hure the ark (Jer. x. 4); it is therefore not strange to render it by the generic word "go." The affected dignity and sauntering indifference of a dandy are immediately suggested by it, and the shade of meaning is fairly well preserved in the English "saunter."

† This is the meaning of the word translated "clamorous."

‡ So says the Greek version of Gen. vii. 1: *ἡ φωνὴ αὐτῶν ὡς φωνὴ βοῶντος*.

* See Lev. vii. 16.

yet it moves our pity at this supreme moment of its life; we do not like to think of the heavy blow which will soon lay the great slow-pacing form prostrate and still in death.

Here is an ox going to the slaughter,—but it is a fellow-man, a young man, not meant for ignominious death, capable of a good and noble life. The poor degraded woman who lures him to his ruin has no such motive of serviceableness as the butcher has. By a malign influence she attracts him, an influence even more fatal to herself than to him. And he appears quite insensible,—occupied entirely with reflections on his glossy skin and goodly form; not suspecting that bystanders have any other sentiment than admiration of his attractions and approval of his manliness, he goes quietly, unresistingly, lured rather than driven, to the slaughter-house.

The effect of comparison with dumb animals is heightened by throwing in a more direct comparison with other human beings. Transposing the words, with Delitzsch, as is evidently necessary in order to preserve the parallelism of the similitude, we find this little touch: "He goeth after her straightway, as a fool to the correction of the fetters,"—as if the Teacher would remind us that the fate of the young man, tragic as it is, is yet quite devoid of the noble aspects of tragedy. This clause is a kind of afterthought, a modification. "Did we say that he is like the ox going to the slaughter?—nay, there is a certain dignity in that image, for the ox is innocent of its own doom, and by its death many will benefit; with our pity for it we cannot but mingle a certain gratitude, and we find no room for censure; but this entrapped weakling is after all only a fool, of no service or interest to any one, without any of the dignity of our good domestic cattle; in his corrupt and witless heart is no innocence which should make us mourn. And the punishment he goes to, though it is ruin, is so mean and degrading that it awakes the jeers and scorn of the beholders. As if he were in the village stocks, he will be exposed to eyes which laugh while they despise him. Those who are impure like himself will leer at him; those who are pure will avert their glance with an ill-disguised contempt." There, then, goes the ox to the slaughter; nay, the mere empty-headed fool to the punishment of the fetters, which will keep him out of further mischief, and chain him down to the dumb lifeless creation to which he seems to belong.

But the scorn changes rapidly to pity. Where a fellow-creature is concerned we may not feel contempt beyond that point at which it serves as a rebuke, and a stimulus to better things. When we are disposed to turn away with a scornful smile, we become aware of the suffering which the victim of his own sins will endure. It will be like an arrow striking through the liver. Only a moment, and he will be seized with the sharp pain which follows on indulgence. Oh the nausea and the loathing, when the morning breaks and he sees in all their naked repulsiveness the things which he allowed to fascinate him yester-eve! What a bitter taste is in his mouth; what a ghastly and livid hue is on the cheek which he imagined fair! He is pierced; to miserable physical sufferings is joined a sense of unspeakable degradation, a wretched depression of spirits, a wish to die which is balanced in horrid equilibrium by a fear of death.

And now he will arise and flee out of this loathly house, which seems to be strewn with dead men's bones and haunted by the moaning spirits of the mighty host which have here gone down into Sheol. But what is this? He cannot flee. He is held like a bird in the snare, which beats its wings and tries to fly in vain; the soft yielding net will rise and fall with its efforts, but will not suffer it to escape. He cannot flee, for if he should escape those fatal doors, before to-morrow's sun sets he will be seized with an over-mastering passion, a craving which is like the gnawing of a vulture at the liver; by an impulse which he cannot resist he will be drawn back to that very corner; there will not be again any raptures, real or imagined, only racking and tormenting desires; there will be no fascination of sight or scent or taste; all will appear as it is—revolting; the perfumes will all be rank and sickly, the meat will all be blighted and fly-blown; but none the less he must back; there, poor, miserable, quivering bird, he must render himself, and must take his fill of—loves? no, of maudlin rapture and burning disgust; solace-himself? no, but excite a desire which grows with every satisfaction, which slowly and surely, like that loathsome monster of the seas, slides its clinging suckers around him, and holds him in an embrace more and more deadly until he finally succumbs.

Then he perceives that the fatal step that he took was "for his life," that is, his life was at stake. When he entered into the trap, the die was cast; hope was abandoned as he entered there. The house which appeared so attractive was a mere covered way to hell. The chambers which promised such imagined delights were on an incline which sloped down to death.

Look at him during that brief passage from his foolish heedlessness to his irretrievable ruin, a Rake's Progress presented in simple and vivid pictures, which are so terrible because they are so absolutely true.

After gazing for a few minutes upon the story, do we not feel its power? Are there not many who are deaf to all exhortations, who will never attend to the words of Wisdom's mouth, who have a consummate art in stopping their ears to all the nobler appeals of life, who yet will be arrested by this clear presentation of a fact, by the teacher's determination not to blink or underrate any of the attractions and seductions, and by his equal determination not to disguise or diminish any of the frightful results?

We may cherish the sweetness and the purity which reticence will often preserve, but when the sweetness and the purity are lost, reticence will not bring them back, and duty seems to require that we should lay aside our fastidiousness and speak out boldly in order to save the soul of our brother.

But after dwelling on such a picture as this there is a thought which naturally occurs to us; in our hearts a yearning awakes which the book of Proverbs is not capable of meeting. Warnings so terrible, early instilled into the minds of our young men, may by God's grace be effectual in saving them from the decline into those evil ways, and from going astray in the paths of sin. Such warnings ought to be given, although they are painful and difficult to give. But when we have gone wrong through lack of instruction, when a guilty silence has prevented our teachers from cautioning us, while the cor-

rupt habits of society have drawn us insensibly into sin, and a thousand glozing excuses have veiled from our eyes the danger until it is too late, is there nothing left for us but to sink deeper and deeper into the slough, and to issue from it only to emerge in the chambers of death?

To this question Jesus gives the answer. He alone can give it. Even that personified Wisdom whose lofty and philosophical utterances we shall hear in the next chapter, is not enough. No advice, no counsel, no purity, no sanctity of example can avail. It is useless to upbraid a man with his sins when he is bound hand and foot with them and cannot escape. It is a mockery to point out, what is only too obvious, that without holiness no man can see God, at a moment when the miserable victim of sin can see nothing clearly except the fact that he is without holiness. "The pure in heart shall see God" is an announcement of exquisite beauty, it has a music which is like the music of the spheres, a music at which the doors of heaven seem to swing open; but it is merely a sentence of doom to those who are not pure in heart. Jesus meets the corrupt and ruined nature with the assurance that He has come "to seek and to save that which was lost." And lest a mere assertion should prove ineffectual to the materialised and fallen spirit, Jesus came and presented in the realism of the Cross a picture of Redemption which could strike hearts that are too gross to feel and too deaf to hear. It might be possible to work out ideally the redemption of man in the unseen and spiritual world. But actually, for men whose very sin makes them unspiritual, there seems to be no way of salvation which does not approach them in a tangible form. The horrible corruption and ruin of our physical nature, which are the work of sin, could be met only by the Incarnation, which should work out a redemption through the flesh.

Accordingly, here is a wonder which none can explain, but which none can gainsay. When the victim of fleshly sin, suffering from the arrow which has pierced his liver, handed over as it seems to despair, is led to gaze upon the Crucified Christ, and to understand the meaning of His bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, he is touched, he is led to repentance, he is created anew, his flesh comes again to him as a little child, he can offer up to God the sacrifice of a contrite heart, and he is cleansed.

This is a fact which has been verified again and again by experience. And they who have marked the power of the Cross can never sufficiently admire the wisdom and the love of God, who works by ways so entirely unlike our ways, and has resources at His command which surpass our conception and baffle our explanation.

If there is a man literally broken down and diseased with sin, enfeebled in will and purpose, tormented by his evil appetite so that he seems like one possessed, the wisest counsels may be without any effect: paint in the most vivid hues the horrible consequences of his sin, but he will remain unmoved; apply the coercion of a prison and all the punishments which are at the disposal of an earthly judge, and he will return to his vicious life with a gusto increased by his recuperated physical strength; present to him the most touching appeals of wife and children and friends, and while he sheds sentimental tears he will continue to run the downward way.—But let him be arrested by the spectacle of Christ

crucified for him, let the moving thought of that priceless love and untold suffering stir in his heart, let his eyes be lifted never so faintly to those eyes of Divine compassion,—and though he seemed to have entered the very precincts of the grave, though the heart within him seemed to have died and the conscience seemed to be seared with a hot iron, you will observe at once the signs of returning animation; a cry will go up from the lips, a sob will convulse the frame, a light of passionate hope will come into the eyes. Christ has touched him. Christ is merciful. Christ is powerful. Christ will save.

Ah, if I speak to one who is bound with the cords of his sin, helplessly fettered and manacled, dead as it were in trespasses, I know there is no other name to mention to you, no other hope to hold out to you. Though I knew all science, I could not effectually help you; though I could command all the springs of human feeling, I could not stir you from your apathy, or satisfy the first cries of your awaking conscience. But it is permitted to me to preach unto you—not abstract Wisdom, but—Jesus, who received that name because He should save His people from their sins.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST-BORN OF THE CREATOR.

"Doth not Wisdom cry?"—PROV. viii. 1.

IN the last chapter a dark and revolting picture of Vice was drawn. This chapter contains a lovely and living picture of Wisdom. In this contrast, as we have already seen, Vice can be presented as a vicious woman, because it is unhappily only too easy to find such an incarnation in actual experience; Wisdom, on the other hand, cannot be presented as an actual person, but only as a personification, because there was, as yet, no Incarnation of Wisdom; far from it, Solomon, the wisest of men, the framer of many wise proverbs, had been in practical conduct an incarnation of folly rather than of wisdom, had himself become a proverb for a wise and understanding heart in combination with a dark and vicious life. Yet how could the teacher fail to feel that some day there must be an Incarnate Wisdom, a contrast to the Incarnate Vice, a conqueror and destroyer of it? In describing Wisdom personified, and in following out her sweet and high-souled utterance, the teacher unconsciously to himself becomes a prophet, and presents, as we shall see, a faint and wavering image of Him who of God was to be made unto men Wisdom, of Him who was actually to live a concrete human life embodying the Divine Wisdom as completely as many poor stained human lives have embodied the undivine folly of vice. The description, then, is an adumbration of something as yet not seen or fully understood; we must be careful not to spoil its meaning by representing it as more, and by attempting to press the details in explanation of the being and the work of Christ. We shall do wisely to look at the whole picture as it formed itself before the eye of the writer, and to abstain from introducing into it colours or shades of our own. Our first task must be to follow the movement of the chapter as carefully as possible.

Wisdom, unlike the vicious woman who lurks

in the twilight at the corner of the street which contains her lair, stands in the open places; she makes herself as manifest as may be by occupying some elevated position, from which her ringing voice may be heard down the streets and up the cross-ways, and may attract the attention of those who are entering the city gates or the doors of the houses. As her voice is strong and clear, so her words are full and rounded; there is no whispering, no muttering, no dark hint, no subtle incitement to secret pleasures; her tone is breezy and stirring as the dawn; there is something about it which makes one involuntarily think of the open air, and the wide sky, and the great works of God.* There is the beauty of goodness in all that she says; there are the charming directness and openness of truth; she abhors tortuous and obscure ways; and if some of her sayings seem paradoxes or enigmas, a little difficult to understand, that is the fault of the hearer; to a tortuous mind straight things appear crooked; to the ignorant and un-instructed mind the eternal laws of God appear foolishness; but all that she says is plain to one who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.† She walks always in a certain and undeviating course—it is the way of righteousness and judgment—and only those who tread the same path can expect to perceive the meaning of what she says, or to appreciate the soundness of all her counsels.‡ And now she proclaims the grounds on which she demands the attention of men, in a noble appeal, which rises to a passionate eloquence and deepens in spiritual significance as it advances. Roughly speaking, this appeal seems to fall into two parts: from ver. 10 to ver. 21 the obvious advantages of obeying her voice are declared, but at ver. 22 the discourse reaches a higher level, and she claims obedience because of her essential nature and her eternal place in the universe of created things.

In the first part Wisdom solemnly states her own value, as compared with the valuables which men usually covet—silver, and gold, and precious stones. That she is of more account than these appears from the fact that they are but parts of her gifts. In her train come riches; but they differ from ordinary riches in being durable; her faithful followers obtain substantial wealth, and their treasures insensibly fill.§ To riches she adds honour, a crown which worldly riches seldom bring, and, what is better still, the honour which she confers is associated with righteousness, while the spurious honour which is commonly rendered to riches, being conferred without any moral implication, is devoid of any moral appreciation.|| But after all, she herself is her own best reward; the prosperity which accompanies her seems trivial compared with the desirableness of her own person. Her queenly dwelling is prudence, and at her touch all the charmed regions of knowledge and discovery fly open; they who dwell with her and are admitted to share her secrets find the fruit and the increase of the intellectual life incomparably better than fine gold or choice silver. And what gives to her endowments their peculiar completeness is that she requires a moral culture to go hand in hand with mental development; and leading her disciples to hate evil, and to avoid the arrogance and the pride of the intel-

lect, she rescues knowledge from becoming a mere barren accumulation of facts, and keeps it always in contact with the humanities and with life. Indeed, she finds it one great part of her mighty task to instruct the rulers of men, and to fit them for the fulfilment of their high functions. Her queenly prerogative she shares with all her faithful followers. Since Wisdom is the actual arbiter of human life, the wise man is, as the Stoics would have said, a king; nor can any king be recognised or tolerated who is not wise.*

And all these advantages of wealth and honour, of knowledge, and power, and righteousness, are put within the reach of every one. Wisdom is no churl in loving; she loves all who love her. She does not seek to withdraw herself from men; rather she chooses the places and the ways in which she can best attract them. Queenly as she is, she condescends to woo them. Her invitations are general, even universal. And therefore if any do not find her, it is because they do not seek her; if any do not share in her rich gifts and graces, it is because they will not take the trouble to claim them.†

But now we pass on to the *second* ground of appeal. Wisdom unveils herself, discloses her origin, shows her heart, stands for a moment on her high celestial throne, that she may make her claims upon the sons of men more irresistible. She was the first creation of God.‡ Before the earth issued out of nothingness she was there. In joyous activity, daily full of delight, she was beside God, an architect, in the forming of the world. She saw the great earth shaped and clothed for the first time in the mantle of its floods, and made musical with the sound of its fountains. She saw the mountains and the hills built up from their foundations. She saw the formation of the dry land, and of the atoms of dust which go to make the ground.§ She saw the sky spread out as a firm vault to cover the earth; and she saw God when

“ . . . in His hand
He took the golden compasses, prepared
In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
This universe and all created things.” ||

She saw the mighty tides of the ocean restricted to their appointed cisterns, and the firm outlines of the land fixed as their impassable barriers.¶

* Prov. viii. 10-16.

† Prov. viii. 17.

‡ Prov. viii. 22. There is unfortunately an ambiguity in the word קָנָה. It may mean either “to possess” or “to create.” Cf. Gen. xiv. 19, 22, where it is impossible to decide between “Possessor of the earth” and “Maker of the earth.” That the word might be rendered “got” in this passage is evident from iv. 7, where it is employed; on the other hand, the LXX. renders *ἐκτίσσε*, and the author of Ecclesiasticus evidently took it in this sense; cf. i. 4, “Wisdom hath been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting.” In Gen. iv. it is rendered “gotten,” but it is quite possible that the joyful mother called her son יִשְׁשַׁכּר with the feeling that she had created him with the help of the Lord.

§ Prov. viii. 26.

|| Milton, “Paradise Lost,” vii. 225.

¶ Prov. viii. 29. It is hardly necessary to point out that the language betrays a complete ignorance of those facts with which astronomy and geology have made us familiar. The author puts into the lips of Wisdom the scientific conceptions of his own time, when the earth was regarded as a flat surface, covered by a solid circular vault, in which the sun, and moon, and stars were fixed. The “circle upon the flood” is probably the apparent circle which is suggested to the observer by the horizon. No one had as yet dreamed that the mountains were thrown up by, not settled in, the surface of the earth, nor

* Prov. viii. 1-6. † Prov. viii. 7-9. ‡ Prov. viii. 20.
§ Prov. viii. 8, 9. || Prov. viii. 18.

And this very Wisdom, who thus presided over the formation of land, and sea, and sky, is she who still sports with God's fruitful earth—yes, *sports*, for the great characteristic of Wisdom is her exultant cheerfulness, and it must by no means be supposed that the foolish and the wicked have all the gaiety and mirth as their own.* This Wisdom is she who too finds her peculiar delight with the sons of men.†

Is it not obvious, then, that men, who are her sons, ought to give ear to her counsels? What could establish a stronger claim for attention than this ancient origin, this honourable part in laying the very foundations of the earth, and this special interest in human life from the beginning? Raised to this high level, where we command so wide a prospect, are we not forced to see that it is our duty, our interest, our joy, to come as humble suitors to the gates of Wisdom and there to watch, and wait, and seek until we may obtain admission? Must we not search after her, when in finding her we find life and obtain favour of the Lord? Can we not perceive that to miss her is to miss life, to wrong our own souls—to hate her is to love death? Evidently her eagerness to win us is entirely disinterested; though she delights in us, she could easily dispense with us; on the other hand, though we do not delight in her, though we constantly turn a deaf ear to her, and refuse to walk in her ways, she is indispensable to us.

Such a passage as this gives rise to many reflections, and the longer we meditate upon it the more rich and suggestive it appears. Let us try to follow out some of the thoughts which readily present themselves, and especially such as are suggested by the verses which may be described as a poem of creation.

First of all, here is the noble idea which overturns at a touch all mythological speculations about the origin of things—an idea which is in deep harmony with all the best knowledge of our own time—that there is nothing fortuitous in the creation of the world; the Creator is not a blind Force, but an Intelligent Being whose first creation is wisdom. He is the origin of a Law by which He means to bind Himself; arbitrariness finds no place in His counsels; accident has no part in His works; in Wisdom hath He formed them all. In all heathen conceptions of creation caprice is supreme, law has no place, blind force works in this way or that, either by the compulsion of a Necessity which is stronger than the gods, or by freaks and whims of the gods which would be contemptible even in men. But here is the clear recognition of the principle that God's Law is a law also to Himself, and that His law is wisdom. He creates the world as an outcome of His own wise and

holy design, so that "nothing walks with aimless feet." It is on this theological conception that the possibility of science depends. Until the universe is recognised as an ordered and intelligible system the ordered and intelligent study of it cannot begin. As long as the arbitrary and fortuitous are supposed to hold sway inquiry is paralysed at its starting-point.

It may, however, be suggested that the doctrine of Evolution, which scientific men are almost unanimous in accepting, is inconsistent with this idea of Creation. By this doctrine our attention is directed to the apparently disordered collision of forces, and the struggle for existence out of which the order and progress of life are educed, and it is hastily assumed that a Wise Intelligence would not work in this way, but would exhibit more economy of resources, more simplicity and directness of method, and more inevitableness of result. But may we not say that the apparent fortuitousness with which the results are achieved is the clearest evidence of the wise purpose which orders and directs the process? for about the results there can be no question; order, beauty, fitness everywhere prevail; life emerges from the inorganic, thought from life, morality and religion from thought. The more our attention is called to the apparently accidental steps by which these results are reached, the more persuaded must we become that a great and a wise law was at work, that by the side of the Creator, as a master workman, was Wisdom from the beginning. Such a passage as this, then, prepares the way for all science, and furnishes the true conceptions without which science would be sterile. It takes us at a step out of a pagan into a truly religious mode of thinking; it leads us out of the misty regions of superstition to the luminous threshold of the House of Knowledge. It may be said with truth that many scientific facts which are known to us were not known to the writer; and this may raise a prejudice against our book in those minds which can tolerate no thought except that of the present generation, and appreciate no knowledge which is not, as it were, brought up to date; but the fruitful conception is here, here is the right way of regarding the universe, here the preparation of all science.

And now to advance to another idea which is implied in the passage, the idea that in the very conception of the universe human life was contemplated, and regarded with a peculiar delight by the Wisdom of God. The place which Man occupies in creation has been variously estimated in different religious systems and by different religious thinkers. Sometimes he has been regarded as the centre of all things, the creature for whom all things exist. Then a reaction has set in, and he has been treated as a very insignificant and possibly transient phenomenon in the order of things. It is characteristic of the Bible that it presents a balanced view of this question, avoiding extremes in both directions. On the one hand, it very clearly recognises that man is a part of the creation, that he belongs to it because he springs out of it, and rules over it only in so far as he conforms to it; on the other hand, it clearly insists on that relation between man and his Creator which is hinted at here. Man is always implicitly connected with God by some half-divine mediator. The Wisdom of God watches with an unmoved heart the growth of the physical world, but into her

was it dreamed that the bounds of the sea are far from being settled, but subject to gradual variations, and even to cataclysmal changes. It may be observed, however, that the voyage of the *Challenger* seems to have established beyond question that the great outlines of land and ocean have remained approximately the same from the beginning. Ocean islands are of volcanic origin or the work of the coral-insect; but the great continents and all contained within the fringe of a thousand-fathom depth from their shores have remained practically unaltered despite the numerous partial upheavals or submergences.

A passage so full of spiritual and moral significance, and yet so entirely untouched by what are to us the elementary conclusions of science, should furnish a valuable criterion in estimating what we are to understand by the Inspiration of such a book as this.

* Cf. x. 23.

† Prov. viii. 22-31.

contemplation of mankind there enters a peculiar delight. There is that in man which can listen to her appeals, can listen and respond. He is capable of rising to the point of view from which she looks out upon the world, and can even see himself in the light in which she sees him. In a word, man, with all his insignificance, has a sublime possibility in him, the possibility of becoming like God; in this he stands quite alone among created things; it is this which gives him his pre-eminence. Thus our passage, while it does not for a moment imply that the material universe was made for the sake of man, or that man in himself can claim a superiority over the other creatures of the earth—and so far takes a view which is very popular with scientific men—yet parts company with the philosophy of materialism in claiming for man a place altogether unique, because he has within him the possibility of being linked to God by means of the Wisdom of God.

And now we may notice another implication of the passage. While Wisdom celebrates her high prerogative as the first-born of the Creator and the instrument of the creation, and urges upon men as parts of the creation the observance of the Moral Law, she is implicitly teaching the great truth which men have been so slow to grasp, that the law of practical righteousness is of a piece with the very laws of creation. To put it in another form, the rules of right conduct are really the rules of the universe applied to human life. Laws of nature, as they are called, and laws of morality have their origin in one and the same Being, and are interpreted to us by one and the same Wisdom. It would be well for us all if we could understand how far-reaching this great truth is, and an intelligent study of this passage certainly helps us to understand it. None of us, in our wildest moments, think of pitting ourselves against the laws of nature. We do not murmur against the law of gravitation; we scrupulously conform to it so far as we can, knowing that if we do not it will be the worse for us. When heavy seas are breaking, and the spirit of the winds is let loose, we do not venture on the waves in a small, open boat, or if we do, we accept the consequences without complaint. But when we come to deal with the moral law we entertain some idea that it is elastic and uncertain, that its requirements may be complied with or not at pleasure, and that we may violate its eternal principles without any serious loss or injury. But the truth is, the Law is one. The only difference arises from the fact that while the natural laws, applying to inanimate objects or to creatures which enjoy no freedom of moral life, are necessarily obeyed, the moral rules apply to conscious reasoning creatures, who, possessed of freedom, are able to choose whether they will obey the law or not. Yes, the Law is one, and breaches of the Law are punished inevitably both in the natural and in the moral sphere. This same Wisdom, to which "wickedness is an abomination," and which therefore exhorts the sons of men to walk in the ways of righteousness, is the great principle which ordered the physical universe and stamped upon it those laws of uniformity and inevitableness which Science delights to record and to illustrate.]

But when we notice how the Wisdom who is here speaking is at once the mouthpiece of the laws which underlie the whole creation and of

the laws which govern the moral life, it is easy to perceive how this passage becomes a foreshadowing of that wonderful Being who of God is made unto us Wisdom as well as Righteousness. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, we are able to perceive how this passage is a faint and imperfect glimpse into the nature and the work of Him whom in New Testament phraseology we call the Son of God—faint and imperfect, because this Wisdom, although represented as speaking, is still only an abstraction, a personification, and her relation both to God and to man is described in very vague and indefinite language; and yet, though faint and imperfect, very true as far as it goes, for it recognises with wonderful distinctness the three truths which we have just been considering, truths that have become luminous for us in Christ; it recognises, *firstly*, that the world was the creation of Wisdom, of Reason, or, if we may use the New Testament term, of the Word; it recognises, *secondly*, that the thought of Man was contained in the very thought of creation, and that man was related in a direct and unique way with the Creator; *lastly*, it recognises that goodness lies at the very root of creation, and that therefore natural law when applied to human life is a demand for righteousness.

It is interesting to observe that this glimpse, this adumbration of a great truth, which was only to become quite clear in Christ Jesus our Lord, was advanced a little in clearness and completeness by a book which is not generally considered to be inspired, the so-called book of Wisdom, in a passage which must be quoted. "For she [*i. e.*, Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness. And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it."*

In this passage Wisdom is still a mere impersonation, but the language employed is evidently very near to that which the New Testament applies to Christ. When Philo came to treat of the idea, and wished to describe this intermediate being between God and man, he employed another term; changing the feminine into the masculine, he spoke of it as the Logos. And this expression is adopted by the Fourth Gospel in describing the Eternal Son before He became flesh; the Word of the fuller revelation is the Wisdom of the Proverbs.

How far Christ recognised in this impersonation of our book a description or representation of Himself it is impossible to say. It is certain that on one occasion, in defending His action against the charges of the Pharisees, He de-

* Wisdom vii. 25-29. The book of Wisdom, a work of the second century B. C., at one time had a place in the canon, and owes its exclusion, in all probability, to the fact that it was written in Greek; as there was no Hebrew original, it was evident that Solomon was not the author. But the use which the Epistle to the Hebrews makes of the passage quoted in the text may suggest how very unnecessary the exclusion from the canon was.

clared, "Wisdom is justified of her children,"* a defence which can be most simply explained by supposing that Wisdom stands for Himself. It is certain, too, that He spoke of His own pre-existence,† and that the Evangelist assigns to Him in that life before the Incarnation a position not unlike that which is attributed to Wisdom in our passage: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made. . . . No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."‡ But whether our Lord expressly acknowledged the forecast of Himself which is contained in the passage or not, we cannot fail to mark with joy and wonder how strikingly all that is best in the utterance and in the delineation of Wisdom is produced, concrete, tangible, real, in Him.

He, like Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, appears in the busy haunts of man, appeals to them, invites them with large, open-armed generosity. His voice is to the sons of men. He, like Wisdom, can say with absolute truth, "All the words of My mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverse in them." He too could speak of His teaching as "plain and right," and could with simple literalness declare that His words were more precious than gold, while obedience to Him would cause men "to inherit substance." With what force He might claim that even kings rule by Him we shall only know when the kingdoms of the world have become His in their integrity; but we can see at once how appropriate in His lips is the beautiful saying, "I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me."

With equal suitability might He, the First-born of all creation, the beginning of the creation of God, use the sublime language which follows. And He too could say that His delight was with the sons of men. Yes, how much that means to us! If His delight had not been with us, how could ours ever have been with Him? What a new meaning irradiates every human being when we realise that with him, with her, is the delight of the Son of God! What a revelation lies in the fact, a revelation of what man was by his origin, made in the image of God, and of what he may be in the last event, brought to "the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ." We must not speak as if He delights in us because He has redeemed us; no, He redeemed us because He delighted in us. Is not this a ground on which He may appeal to us, "Now, therefore, my sons, hearken unto Me; for blessed are they that keep My ways"? And can we not say to Him with a fervour which the cold abstraction of Wisdom could not possibly excite, "We would watch daily at Thy gates, waiting at the posts of Thy doors. For when we find Thee we find life and obtain favour of the Lord. When we sin against Thee we wrong our own souls; when we hate Thee we love death"?

Yes, in place of this ancient Wisdom, which, stately and lovely as she is, remains always a little intangible and unapproachable, Christ is made unto us Wisdom, and He speaks to us the old words with a deeper meaning, and new words which none but He could ever speak.

* Luke vii. 35; Matt. xi. 19.

† John viii. 58.

‡ John i. 3, 18.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO VOICES IN THE HIGH PLACES OF THE CITY.

PROVERBS ix., vv. 14 WITH 3, AND 16 WITH 4.

AFTER the lengthened contrast between the vicious woman and Wisdom in chaps. vii. and viii., the introduction of the book closes with a little picture which is intended to repeat and sum up all that has gone before. It is a peroration, simple, graphic, and beautiful.

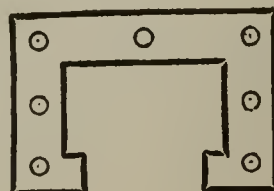
There is a kind of competition between Wisdom and Folly, between Righteousness and Sin, between Virtue and Vice; and the allurements of the two are disposed in an intentional parallelism; the colouring and arrangement are of such a kind that it becomes incredible how any sensible person, or for that matter even the simple himself, could for a moment hesitate between the noble form of Wisdom and the meretricious attractions of Folly. The two voices are heard in the high places of the city; each of them invites the passers-by, especially the simple and unsophisticated—the one into her fair palace, the other into her foul and deadly house. The words of their invitation are very similar: "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him;" but how different is the burden of the two messages! Wisdom offers life, but is silent about enjoyment; Folly offers enjoyment, but says nothing of the death which must surely ensue.*

First of all we will give our attention to the Palace of Wisdom and the voices which issue from it, and then we will note for the last time the features and the arts of Mistress Folly.

The Palace of Wisdom is very attractive; well built and well furnished, it rings with the sounds of hospitality; and, with its open colonnades, it seems of itself to invite all passers-by to enter in as guests. It is reared upon seven well-hewn marble pillars, in a quadrangular form, with the entrance side left wide open.† This is no shifting tent or tottering hut, but an eternal mansion, that lacks nothing of stability, or completeness, or beauty. Through the spacious doorways may be seen the great courtyard, in which appear the preparations for a perpetual feast. The beasts are killed and dressed; the wine stands in tall flagons ready mixed for drinking; the tables are spread and decked. All is open, generous, large, a contrast to that unhallowed private supper to which the unwary youth was invited by his seducer.‡ There are no secret chambers, no twi-

* Cf. for this contrast between the two xxiii. 26-28, where Wisdom speaks, and expressly warns against her rival.

† The arrangement of the house is that of an open courtyard, surrounded with apartments, the general roof supported on the pillars thus.



‡ Prov. vii. 14.

light suggestions and insinuations: the broad light shines over all; there is a promise of social joy; it seems that they will be blessed who sit down together at this board. And now the beautiful owner of the palace has sent forth her maidens into the public ways of the city: theirs is a gracious errand; they are not to chide with sour and censorious remarks, but they are to invite with winning friendliness; they are to offer this rare repast, which is now ready, to all those who are willing to acknowledge their need of it. "Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."*

We were led to inquire in the last chapter how far our Lord identified Himself with the hypostatic Wisdom who was speaking there, and we were left in some doubt whether He ever consciously admitted the identity; but it is hardly a matter of doubt that this passage was before His mind when He spoke His parable of the Wedding Feast.† And the connection is still more apparent when we look at the Greek version of the LXX., and notice that the clause "sent forth her bond-servants" is precisely the same in Prov. ix. 3 and in Matt. xxii. 3. Here, at any rate, Jesus, who describes Himself as "a certain king," quite definitely occupies the place of the ancient Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, and the language which in this passage she employs He, as we shall see, in many slight particulars made His own.

Yes, our Lord, the Wisdom Incarnate, has glorious ideas of hospitality; He keeps open house; His purpose is to call mankind to a great feast; the "bread and the wine" are prepared; the sacrifice which furnishes the meat is slain. His messengers are not commissioned with a mournful or a condemnatory proclamation, but with good tidings which they are to publish in the high places. His word is always, Come. His desire is that men should live, and therefore He calls them into the way of understanding.‡ If a man lacks wisdom, if he recognises his ignorance, his frailty, his folly, if he is at any rate wise enough to know that he is foolish, well enough to know that he is sick, righteous enough to know that he is sinful, let him approach this noble mansion with its lordly feast. Here is bread which is meat indeed; here is wine which is life-giving, the fruit of the Vine which God has planted.

But now we are to note that the invitation of Wisdom is addressed only to the simple, not to the scorner.§ She lets the scorner pass by, because a word to him would recoil only in shame on herself, bringing a blush to her queenly face, and would add to the scorner's wickedness by increasing his hatred of her. Her reproof would not benefit him, but it would bring a blot upon herself, it would exhibit her as ineffectual and helpless. The bitter words of a scorner can make wisdom appear foolish, and cover virtue with a confusion which should belong only to vice. "Speak not in the hearing of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."|| Indeed, there is no character so hopeless as that of the scorner; there proceeds from him, as it were, a fierce blast, which blows away all the approaches which goodness makes to him. Reproof cannot come near him;¶ he cannot find

wisdom, though he seek it;* and as a matter of fact, he never seeks it.† If one attempts to punish him it can only be with the hope that others may benefit by the example; it will have no effect upon him.‡ To be rid of him must be the desire of every wise man, for he is an abomination to all,§ and with his departure contention disappears.|| They that scoff at things holy, and scorn the Divine Power, must be left to themselves until the beginnings of wisdom appear in them—the first sense of fear that there is a God who may not be mocked, the first recognition that there is a sanctity which they would do well at all events to reverence. There must be a little wisdom in the heart before a man can enter the Palace of Wisdom; there must be a humbling, a self-mistrust, a diffident misgiving—before the scorner will give heed to her invitation.

There is an echo of this solemn truth in more than one saying of the Lord's. He too cautioned His disciples against casting their pearls before swine, lest they should trample the pearls under their feet, and turn to rend those who were foolish enough to offer them such treasure.¶ Men must often be taught in the stern school of Experience, before they can matriculate in the reasonable college of Wisdom. It is not good to give that which is holy to dogs, nor to display the sanctities of religion to those who will only put them to an open shame. Where we follow our own way instead of the Lord's, and insist on offering the treasures of the kingdom to the scornors, we are not acting according to the dictates of Wisdom, we get a blot for that goodness which we so rashly offer, and often are needlessly rent by those whom we meant to save. It is evident that this is only one side of a truth, and our Lord presented with equal fulness the other side; it was from Him we learnt how the scorner himself, who cannot be won by reproof, can sometimes be won by love; but our Lord thought it worth while to state this side of the truth, and so far to make this utterance of the ancient Wisdom His own.

Again, how constantly He insisted on the mysterious fact that to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken what he hath, precisely in the spirit of this saying: "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning."** The entrance into the kingdom, as into the house of Wisdom, is by humility. Except a man turn, and become as a little child, he cannot enter. Wisdom is only justified of her children: until the heart is humble it cannot even begin to be wise; although it may seem to possess a great deal, all must be taken away, and a new beginning must be made—that beginning which is found in the fear of the Lord, and in the knowledge of the Holy One.††

The closing words in the invitation of Wisdom are entirely appropriate in the lips of Jesus, and, indeed, only in His lips could they be accepted in their fullest signification. There is a limited sense in which all wisdom is favourable to long

* Prov. ix. 5.

† Matt. xxii. 1 *et seq.*

‡ Prov. ix. 6.

§ Prov. ix. 7.

|| Prov. xxiii. 9.

¶ Prov. xiii. 1.

* Prov. xiv. 6.

† Prov. xv. 12.

‡ Prov. xix. 25.

§ Prov. ix. 9. Cf. xviii. 15.

¶ Prov. ix. 9. Cf. xviii. 15, "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge."

†† Prov. ix. 10.

§ Prov. xxiv. 9.

|| Prov. xxii. 10.

¶ Matt. vii. 6.

life, as we saw in chap. iii., but it is an obvious remark, too, that the wise perish even as the fool; one event happens to them both, and there appears to be no difference. But the Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ, was able to say with a broad literalness, "By Me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased." With Him the outlook widened; He could speak of a new life, of raising men up at the last day; He could for the first time give a solution to that constant enigma which has puzzled men from the beginning, How is it that Wisdom promises life, and yet often requires that her children should die? how is it that the best and wisest have often chosen death, and so to all appearance have robbed the world of their goodness and their wisdom? He could give the answer in the glorious truth of the Resurrection; and so, in calling men to die for Him, as He often does, He can in the very moment of their death say to them with a fulness of meaning, "By Me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased."

And then how entirely is it in harmony with all His teaching to emphasise to the utmost the individual choice and the individual responsibility. "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." There can be no progress, indeed no beginning, in the spiritual life, until this attitude of personal isolation is understood. It is the last result of true religion that we live in others; but it is the first that we live in ourselves; and until we have learnt to live in ourselves we can be of no use by living in others. Until the individual soul is dealt with, until it has understood the demands which are made upon it, and met them, it is in no position to take its rightful place as a lively stone in the temple of God, or as a living member in the body of Christ. Yes, realise this searching assurance of Wisdom, let us say, rather, of Christ: if you are like the wise virgins in the parable, it is for your own everlasting good, you shall enter into the hall with the Bridegroom; but if you are like the foolish virgins, no wisdom of the wise can avail you, no vicarious light will serve for your lamps; for you there must be the personal humiliation and sorrow of the Lord's "I know you not."

If with scornful indifference to your high trust as a servant of the Master you hide your talent, and justify your conduct to yourself by pleading that the Master is a hard man, that scorn must recoil upon your own head; so far from the enlarged wealth of the others coming to meet your deficiencies, the misused trifle which you still retain will be taken from you and given to them. Men have sometimes favoured the notion that it is possible to spend a life of scornful indifference to God and all His holy commandments, a life of arrogant self-seeking and bitter contempt for all His other creatures, and yet to find oneself at the end entirely purged of one's contempt, and on precisely equal terms with all pious and humble hearts; but against this notion Wisdom loudly exclaims; it is the notion of Folly, and so far from redeeming the folly, it is Folly's worst condemnation: for surely Conscience and Reason, the heart and the head, might tell us that it is false; and all that is sanest and wisest in us concurs in the direct and simple assurance, "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."

Such is the invitation, and such the warning,

of Wisdom; such is the invitation, and such the warning, of Christ. Leave off, ye simple ones, and live. After all, most of us are not scorers, but only very foolish, easily dazzled with false lights, easily misled with smooth utterances which happen to chime in with our own ignorant prejudices, easily seduced into by-paths which in quiet moments we readily acknowledge to be sinful and hurtful. The scorers are but a few; the simple ones are many. Here is this gracious voice appealing to the simple ones, and with a winsome liberality inviting them to the feast of Wisdom.

At the close of ver. 12 the LXX. give a very interesting addition, which was probably translated from a Hebrew original. It seems to have been before our Lord's mind when He drew the description of the unclean spirit walking through waterless places, seeking rest and finding none.* The passage is a figurative delineation of the evils which result from making shams and insincerities the support of life, in place of the unfailing sureness and available strength of wisdom; it may be rendered thus: "He who makes falsehood his support shepherds the winds, and will find himself pursuing birds on the wing; for it means leaving the paths of his own vineyard, and wandering over the borders of his own husbandry; it means walking through a waterless wilderness, over land which is the portion of the thirsty; he gathers in his hands fruitlessness." What a contrast to the spacious halls and the bountiful fare of Wisdom! A life based upon everlasting verities may seem for the time cold and desolate, but it is founded upon a rock, and not a barren rock either, for it sends forth in due course corn, and wine, and oil. The children in that house have bread enough and to spare. But when a man prefers make-believe to reality, and follows the apparently pleasant, instead of the actually good, what a clutching of winds it is! what a chase after swift-vanishing birds of joy! The wholesome ways, fruitful, responsive to toil, are left far behind; and here soon is the actual desert, without a drop of water to cool the lips, or a single fruit of the earth which a man can eat. The deluded soul consumes his substance with harlots, and he gathers the wind. The ways of vice are terrible; they produce a thirst which they cannot quench; and they fill the imagination with torturing images of well-being which are farther removed from reality by every step we take. Wisdom bids us to make truth our stay, for after all the Truth is the Way and the Life, and there is no other way, no other life.

And now comes the brief closing picture of Folly, to which again the LXX. give a short addition. Folly is loud, empty-headed as her victims, whom she invites to herself, not as Wisdom invites them, to leave off their simplicity, but rather as like to like, that their ignorance may be confirmed into vice, and their simplicity into brutishness. She has had the effrontery to build her house in the most prominent and lofty place of the city, where by good rights only Wisdom should dwell. Her allurements are specially directed to those who seem to be going right on in their wholesome ways, as if she found her chief delight, not in gratifying the vicious, but in making vicious the innocent. Her charms are poor and tawdry enough; seen in the broad sunlight, and with the wholesome air all round her,

* Matt. xii. 43.

she would be revolting to every uncorrupted nature; her clamorous voice would sound strident, and her shameless brow would create a blush of shame in others; she naturally therefore seeks to throw a veil over herself and a glamour over her proposals; she suggests that secrecy and illicitness will lend a charm to what in itself is a sorry delight. It is clandestine, therefore it is to be sweet; it is forbidden, therefore it is to be pleasant. Could anything be more sophistical? That which owes its attraction to the shadows of the night must obviously be intrinsically unattractive. It is an argument fit only for the shades of the lost, and not for those who breathe the sweet air and behold the sun. Her house is indeed haunted with ghosts, and when a man enters her portal he already has his foot in hell. Well may the LXX. add the vehement warning, "Spring away from her clutches; do not linger in the place; let her not have thy name, for thou wilt traverse another's waters; from another's waters hold aloof, from another's fountains do not drink, in order that thou mayest live long, and add to thy years of life."

And now, before leaving this subject, we must briefly remark the great change and advance which Christ has brought into our thought of the relation between the two sexes. This Book of Wisdom is a fair illustration of the contempt in which woman was held by the wise men of Israel. One would suppose that she is the temptress, and man is the victim. The teacher never dreams of going a step backward, and asking whose fault it was that the temptress fell into her vicious ways. He takes no note of the fact that women are first led astray before they lead others. Nor does he care to inquire how the men of his day ruined their women by refusing to them all mental training, all wholesome interest and occupation, shutting them up in the corrupting atmosphere of the seraglio, and teaching them to regard the domestic sphere, and that only in its narrowest sense, as the proper limit of their thought and affection. It was reserved for the Great Teacher, the Incarnate Wisdom Himself, to redress this age-long injustice to woman, by sternly holding up to men the mirror of truth in which they might see their own guilty hearts.* It was reserved for him to touch the conscience of a city woman who was a sinner, and to bring her from her clamorous and seductive ways to the sweetness of penitential tears, and the rapturous love which forgiveness kindles. It is He, and not the ancient Wisdom, who has turned the current of men's thoughts into juster and kindlier ways on this great question. And thus it is that the great Christian poet represents the archangel correcting the faulty judgment of man.† Adam, speaking with the usual virtuous indignation of the stronger sex in contemplation of the soft vision of frail women presented to his eyes, says:—

"O pity and shame, that they, who to live well
Entered so fair, should turn aside to tread
Paths indirect, or in the midway faint!
But still I see the tenour of man's woe
Holds on the same, from woman to begin."

The correction is the correction of Christ, though Michael is the speaker:—

"From man's effeminate slackness it begins,"
Said the angel, "who should better hold his place,
By wisdom and superior gifts received."

* See John viii. 1 *et seq.*

† Milton, "Paradise Lost," xi. 650, etc.

Our Lord draws no such pictures as these in the book of Proverbs; they have their value; it is necessary to warn young men against the seductions which the vices of other men have created in woman's form; but He prefers always to go to the root of the matter; He speaks to men themselves; He bids them restrain the wandering eye, and keep pure the fountains of the heart. To that censorious Wisdom which judges without any perception t'at woman is more sinned against than sinning He would oppose His severe command to be rid of the beam in one's own eye, before making an attempt to remove the mote from another's. It is in this way that He in so many varied fields of thought and action has turned a half truth into a whole truth by going a little deeper, and unveiling the secrets of the heart; and in this way He has enabled us to use the half truth, setting it in its right relation to the whole.*

CHAPTER X

WEALTH.

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing;
But righteousness delivereth from death."—PROV. x. 2.

"O'erweening statesmen have full long relied
On fleets and armies and external wealth;
But from *within* proceeds a Nation's health."

—WORDSWORTH.

No moral system is complete which does not treat with clearness and force the subject of wealth. The material possessions of an individual or of a nation are in a certain sense the prerequisites of all moral life; for until the human being has food to eat he cannot be virtuous, he cannot even live; until he has clothing he cannot be civilised; and unless he has a moderate assurance of necessities, and a certain margin of leisure secured from the toil of life, he cannot live well, and there can be no moral development in the full sense of that term. And so with a nation: it must have a sufficient command of the means of subsistence to maintain a considerable number of people who are not engaged in productive labour, before it can make much advance in the noblest qualities of national life, progress in the arts, extension of knowledge, and spiritual cultivation. The production of wealth, therefore, if not strictly speaking a moral question itself, presses closely upon all other moral questions. Wisdom must have something to say about it, because, without it, Wisdom, in a material world like ours, could not exist.

Wisdom will be called upon to direct the energies which produce wealth, and to determine the feelings with which we are to regard the wealth which is produced.

Moral problems weightier still begin to emerge when the question of Distribution presents itself. Moral considerations lie at the root of this question; and Political Economy, so far as it attempts to deal with it apart from moral considerations, must always be merely a speculative, and not a practical or a fruitful science.

If Production is in a sense the presupposition of all moral and spiritual life, no less certainly correct moral conceptions—may we not even say true spiritual conditions?—are the indispensable means of determining Distribution. For a so-

* The fuller teaching of the book on the subject of Woman will be found in Lect. XXXI.

ciety in which every individual is striving with all his strength or cunning to procure for himself the largest possible share of the common stock, in which therefore the material possessions gravitate into the hands of the strong and the unscrupulous, while the weak and the honourable are left destitute—such a society, if it ever came into existence, would be a demoralised society. Such a demoralisation is always probable when the means of production have been rapidly and greatly improved, and when the fever of getting has overpowered the sense of righteousness and all the kindlier human feelings. Such a demoralisation is to be averted by securing attention to the abiding moral principles which must govern men's action in the matter of wealth, and by enforcing these principles with such vividness of illustration and such cogency of sanction that they shall be generally accepted and practised.

In our own day this question of the distribution of wealth stands in the front rank of practical questions. Religious teachers must face it, or else they must forfeit their claim to be the guides and instructors of their generation.

Socialists are grappling with this question not altogether in a religious spirit: they have stepped into a gap which Christians have left empty; they have recognised a great spiritual issue when Christians have seen nothing but a material problem of pounds, shillings, and pence, of supply and demand, of labour and capital. Where Socialism adopts the programme of Revolution, Wisdom cannot give in her adhesion; she knows too well that suffering, impatience, and despair are unsafe, although very pathetic, counsellors; she knows too well that social upheaval does not produce social reconstruction, but a weary entail of fresh upheavals; she has learnt, too, that society is organic, and cannot, like Pelops in the myth, win rejuvenescence by being cut up and cast into the cauldron, but can advance only by a quiet and continuous growth, in which each stage comes naturally and harmoniously out of the stage which preceded. But all Socialism is not revolutionary. And Wisdom cannot withhold her sympathy and her aid where Socialism takes the form of stating, and expounding, and enforcing truer conceptions concerning the distribution of wealth. It is by vigorous and earnest grappling with the moral problem that the way of advance is prepared; every sound lesson therefore in the right way of regarding wealth, and in the use of wealth, is a step in the direction of that social renovation which all earnest men at present desire.

The book of Proverbs presents some very clear and decisive teaching on this question, and it is our task now to view this teaching, scattered and disconnected though it be, as a whole.

I. The first thing to be noted in the book is its *frank and full recognition that Wealth has its advantages, and Poverty has its disadvantages*. There is no quixotic attempt to overlook, as many moral and spiritual systems do, the perfectly obvious facts of life. The extravagance and exaggeration which led St. Francis to choose Poverty as his bride find no more sanction in this Ancient Wisdom than in the sound teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. The rich man's wealth is his strong city,* we are told, and as an high wall in his own imagination, while the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The rich man can ransom himself from death if by chance

he has fallen into difficulties, though this benefit is to some extent counterbalanced by the reflection that the poor escape the threats of such dangers, as no bandit would care to attack a man with an empty purse and a threadbare cloak.* The rich man gains many advantages through his power of making gifts; it brings him before great men,† it procures him universal friendship, such as it is,‡ it enables him to pacify the anger of an adversary,§ for indeed a gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it, whithersoever it turneth it prospereth.|| Not only does wealth make many friends,¶ it also secures positions of influence and authority, over those who are poorer, enabling a man to sit in Parliament or to gain the governorship of a colony.** It gives even the somewhat questionable advantage of being able to treat others with brusqueness and hauteur.††

On the other hand, the poor man has to use entreaties.†† His poverty separates him from his neighbours, and even incurs his neighbours' hatred.‡‡ Nay, worse than this, his friends go far from him, his very brethren hate him, if he calls after them they quickly get out of his reach; §§ while the necessity of borrowing from wealthier men keeps him in a position of continual bondage.|||| Indeed, nothing can compensate for being without the necessities of life: "Better is he that is lightly esteemed, and is his own servant, than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread."¶¶

Since then Poverty is a legitimate subject of dread, there are urgent exhortations to diligence and thrift, quite in accordance with the excellent apostolic maxim that if a man will not work he shall not eat; while there are forcible statements of the things which tend to poverty, and of the courses which result in comfort and wealth. Thus it is pointed out how slack and listless labour leads to poverty, while industry leads to wealth.*** We are reminded that the obstinate refusal to be corrected is a fruitful source of poverty,††† while the humble and pious mind is rewarded with riches as well as with honour and life.‡‡‡ In the house of the wise man are found treasures as well as all needful supplies.§§§ Drunkenness and gluttony lead to poverty, and drowsiness clothes a man with rags.||||| And there is a beautiful injunction to engage in an agricul-

* Prov. xiii. 8.

† Prov. xix. 6; xiv. 20.

‡ Prov. xviii. 16.

§ Prov. xxi. 14.

|| Prov. xvii. 8. More literally: "A precious stone is the gift in the eyes of him who gets possession of it, whithersoever he turneth he deals wisely." That is to say, the man who receives the gift, whether a judge or a witness or an opponent, is as it were retained for the giver, and induced to use his best faculties in behalf of his retainer.

¶ Prov. xix. 4: "Wealth addeth many friends, but the poor—his companion separates from him."

** Prov. xxii. 17.

†† Prov. xviii. 23.

‡‡ Prov. xiv. 20; xix. 4.

§§ Prov. xix. 7. The sense of the Authorised Version is here retained, but it will be seen in Lecture XII. that there is good reason for treating the third clause of the verse as a mutilated fragment of another proverb: see p. 389.

|||| Prov. xxii. 7.

¶¶ Prov. xii. 9. This reading is obtained by following the LXX., whose translation δ δουλεύων ϵ αυτῷ shows that they pointed לוועבד. Cf. Eccles. x. 27: "Better is he that laboureth and aboundeth in all things than he that boasteth himself and lacketh bread."

*** Prov. x. 4.

††† Prov. xiii. 18.

‡‡‡ Prov. xxii. 4.

§§§ Prov. xxi. 20.

||||| Prov. xxiii. 21.

* Prov. x. 15; xviii. 11.

tural life, which is the only perennial source of wealth, the only secure foundation of a people's prosperity. As if we were back in patriarchal times, we are thus admonished in the later proverbs of Solomon* :—

"Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,
And look well to thy herds;
For riches are not forever;
And doth the crown endure unto all generations?
The hay is carried; and the tender grass showeth itself,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.
The lambs are for thy clothing,
And the goats are the price of the field;
And there will be goat's milk enough for thy food, for
the food of thy household;
And maintenance for thy maidens."

II. But now, making all allowance for the advantages of wealth, we have to notice *some of its serious drawbacks*. To begin with, it is always insecure. If a man places any dependence upon it, it will fail him; only in his imagination is it a sure defence.† "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? it is gone. For riches certainly make themselves wings, like an eagle that flieth toward heaven."‡

But, further, if the wealth has been obtained in any other way than by honest labour it is useless, at any rate for the owner, and indeed worse than useless for him.§

As the text says, treasures of wickedness profit nothing. In the revenues of the wicked is trouble.|| Got in light and fallacious ways, the money dwindles; only when gathered by labour does it really increase.¶ When it is obtained by falsehood—by the tricks and misrepresentations of trade, for example—it may be likened to a vapour driven to and fro—nay, rather to a mephitic vapour, a deadly exhalation, the snares of death.** Worst of all is it to obtain wealth by oppression of the poor; one who does so shall as surely come to want as he who gives money to those who do not need it.†† In fact, our book contains the striking thought that ill-earned wealth is never gathered for the benefit of the possessor, but only for the benefit of the righteous, and must be useless until it gets into hands which will use it benevolently.‡‡

And while there are these serious drawbacks to material possessions, we are further called upon to notice that there is wealth of another kind, wealth consisting in moral or spiritual qualities, compared with which wealth, as it is usually understood, is quite paltry and unsatisfying. When the intrinsic defects of silver and gold have been frankly stated, this earthly treasure is set, as a whole, in comparison with another kind of treasure, and is observed to become pale and dim. Thus "riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death."§§ Indeed it is only the blessing of

the Lord which brings riches without drawbacks.* In the house of the righteous is much treasure.† Better is a little with righteousness than great treasure without right.‡ In the light of these moral considerations the relative positions of the rich and the poor are reversed; it is better to be an honest poor man than a perverse rich man; the little grain of integrity in the heart and life outweighs all the balance at the bank.§

A little wisdom, a little sound understanding, or a little wholesome knowledge is more precious than wealth. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold. Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver.|| There may be gold and abundance of rubies, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.¶

Nay, there are some things apparently very trifling which will so depreciate material wealth that if a choice is to be made it is well to let the wealth go and to purchase immunity from these trivial troubles. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.** Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith than an house full of feasting with strife.†† Yes, the good will and affectionate regard of our fellow-men are on the whole far more valuable than a large revenue. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.‡‡ Indeed, when the relations of the rich and the poor are brought up into God's presence our whole conception of the matter is liable to change; we observe the rich and the poor meet together, and the Lord the maker of them all; §§ we observe that any slur cast on the poor or any oppression of them is practically a reproach against the Maker,||| whilst any act of pity or tenderness to the needy is in effect a service rendered to God; and more and more we get to feel that notwithstanding the rich man's good opinion of himself he presents rather a sorry spectacle in the presence of the wise, even though the wise may be exceedingly poor.¶¶

Taking into account therefore the intrinsic insecurity of wealth, and the terrible flaws in the title which may result from questionable ways of obtaining it, and estimating at a right value the other things which are not usually reckoned as wealth,—goodness, piety, wisdom, knowledge, and love,—we can quite understand that enlightened men might be too busy in life to

* Prov. x. 22.

† Prov. xv. 6.

‡ Prov. xvi. 8.

§ Prov. xix. 1. The parallelism in this verse is not so complete as in xxviii. 6. The Peshitto reads, "than he who is perverse in his lips and is rich," but it is better to retain the text and understand: There is a poor man walking in his integrity, and everyone thinks that he is to be commiserated; but he is much better off than the fool with perverse lips, though no one thinks of commiserating this last.

|| Prov. xvi. 16.

¶ Prov. xx. 15.

** Prov. xv. 16, 17.

†† Prov. xvii. 1.

‡‡ Prov. xxii. 1. This proverb is inscribed in the cupola which lights the Manchester Exchange. It is a good skylight, but apparently too high up for the busy merchants on the floor of the Exchange to see without more effort than is to be expected of them.

§§ Prov. xiv. 2.

|| Prov. xii. 31; xvii. 5.

||| Prov. xxviii. 11. Cf. an interesting addition to xvii. 6 in the LXX.—τοῦ πιστοῦ ὅλος ὁ κόσμος τῶν χρημάτων, τοῦ δὲ ἀπίστον οὐδὲ ὀβολός. The faithful man owns the whole world of possessions, the unfaithful owns not a farthing.

* Prov. xxvii. 23-27.

† Prov. xi. 28.

‡ Prov. xxiii. 5 (marg.).

§ Cf. the Turkish proverb: "Of riches lawfully gained the devil takes half, of riches unlawfully gained he takes the whole and the owner too."

|| Prov. xv. 6, cf. xiv. 24, "A crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools, (though they may be rich, remains nothing but) folly."

¶ Prov. xiii. 11.

** Prov. xxi. 6. It is evident from their translation ἐπὶ παγίδας θανάτου that the LXX. read מוקשי־מוֹת as in Psalm xviii. 6, and this gives a very graphic and striking sense, while the received text of the Hebrew, מִבְּקִשֵּׁי מוֹת, is hardly intelligible.

†† Prov. xxii. 16.

‡‡ Prov. xiii. 22; xxviii. 8.

§§ Prov. xi. 4.

make money, too occupied with grave purposes and engrossed with noble objects of pursuit to admit the perturbations of mammon into their souls.* Making all allowance for the unquestionable advantages of being rich, and the serious inconveniences of being poor, we may yet see reasons for not greatly desiring wealth, nor greatly dreading poverty.

III. But now we come to the positive counsels which our Teacher would give on the strength of these considerations about money and its acquisition. And first of all we are solemnly cautioned against the fever of money-getting, the passion to get rich, a passion which has the most demoralising effect on its victims, and is indeed an indication of a more or less perverted character. The good man cannot be possessed by it, and if he could he would soon become bad.†

These grave warnings of Wisdom are specially needed at the present time in England and America, when the undisguised and the unrestrained pursuit of riches has become more and more recognised as the legitimate end of life, so that few people feel any shame in admitting that this is their aim; and the clear unimpassioned statements of the result, which always follows on the unhallowed passion, receive daily confirmation from the occasional revelations of our domestic, our commercial, and our criminal life. He that is greedy of gain, we are told, troubleth his own house.‡ An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.§ A faithful man shall abound with blessings, but he that maketh haste to be rich (and consequently cannot by any possibility be faithful) shall not be unpunished.|| He that hath an evil eye hasteth after riches, and knoweth not that want shall come upon him.¶ “Weary not thyself,” therefore, it is said, “to be rich;” which, though it may be the dictate of thine own wisdom,** is really un-mixed folly, burdened with a load of calamity for the unfortunate seeker, for his house, and for all those who are in any way dependent upon him.

Again, while we are cautioned not to aim constantly at the increase of our possessions, we are counselled to exercise a generous liberality in the disposal of such things as are ours. Curiously enough, niggardliness in giving is associated with slothfulness in labour, while it is implied that the wish to help others is a constant motive for due diligence in the business of life. “There is that coveteth greedily all the day long, but the righteous giveth and withholdeth not.”†† The law of nature,—the law of life,—is to give out and not merely to receive, and in fulfilling that law we receive unexpected blessings: “There is that scattereth and increaseth yet more, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth only to want. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.”‡‡ “He that giveth to the poor shall not lack; but he

that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.”* “He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will He pay him again.”† “He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.”‡

Such a wholesome shunning of the thirst for wealth, and such a generous spirit in aiding others, naturally suggest to the wise man a daily prayer, a request that he may avoid the dangerous extremes, and walk in the happy mean of worldly possessions: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and use profanely the name of my God.”§ It is a request not easy to make with perfect sincerity; there are not many who, like Emerson’s grandfather, venture to pray that neither they nor their descendants may ever be rich; while there have been not a few who in a “show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and severity to the body” have sought for an unnecessary and an unwholesome poverty. But it is a wise request; it finds an echo in the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples, and constantly appears inwoven in the apostolic teaching. And if the individual is to desire such things for himself, he must naturally desire that such may be the lot of his fellow-creatures, and he must make it the aim of his efforts after social reform to indefinitely increase the number of those who occupy this happy middle position, and have neither riches nor poverty.

And now we have followed the lines of teaching contained in this book on the subject of wealth, and it is impossible to miss the wisdom, the moderation, the inspiration of such counsels. We cannot fail to see that if these principles were recognised universally, and very generally practised; if they were ingrained in the constitution of our children, so as to become the instinctive motives and guides of action; the serious social troubles which arise from the unsatisfactory distribution of wealth would rapidly disappear. Happy would that society be in which all men were aiming, not at riches, but merely at a modest competency, dreading the one extreme as much as the other; in which the production of wealth was constantly moderated and controlled by the conviction that wealth gotten by vanity is as the snares of death; in which all who had become the owners of wealth were ready to give and glad to distribute, counting a wise benevolence, which in giving to the needy really lends to the Lord, the best investment in the world.

If these neglected principles are hitherto very faintly recognised, we must recollect that they have never been seriously preached. Although they were theoretically taught, and practically lived out, in the words and the life of Jesus Christ, they have never been fully incorporated into Christianity. The mediæval Church fell into the perilous doctrines of the Ebionites, and glorified poverty in theory while in practice it became an engine of unparalleled rapacity. Protestantism has generally been too much occupied with the great principle of Justification by Faith to pay much attention to such a writing as the Epistle of St. James, which Luther described

* It is said of Agassiz that he excused himself from engaging in a profitable lecturing tour on the ground that he had not time to make money.

† Cf. the saying of Sirach: “Winnow not with every wind and go not into every way, for so doth the sinner that hath a double tongue” (Eccles. v. 9).

‡ Prov. xv. 27.

§ Prov. xx. 21.

|| Prov. xxviii. 20.

¶ Prov. xxviii. 22.

** Prov. xxiii. 4.

†† Prov. xxi. 26.

‡‡ Prov. xi. 24, 25.

* Prov. xxviii. 27.

† Prov. xix. 17.

‡ Prov. xxii. 9.

§ Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

as "a letter of straw"; and thus, while we all believe that we are saved by faith in Christ Jesus, it seldom occurs to us that such a faith must include the most exact and literal obedience to His teachings. Christian men unblushingly serve Mammon, and yet hope that they are serving God too, because they believe on Him whom God sent—though He whom God sent expressly declared that the two services could not be combined. Christian men make it the effort of a lifetime to become rich, although Christ declared that it was easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; and when they hear that Christ required an intending follower to sell all that he had and give to the poor, they explain it away, and maintain that He does not require such a sacrifice from them, but simply asks them to believe in the Atonement.

In this way Christians have made their religion incredible, and even ridiculous, to many of the most earnest spirits of our time. When Christ is made unto them Wisdom as well as Redemption, they will see that the principles of Wisdom which concern wealth are obligatory upon them, just because they profess to believe in Christ.

CHAPTER XI.

GOODNESS.

"The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them."
—PROV. xi. 6.

"An unjust man is the abomination of the righteous, and he who goes right in his way is the abomination of the wicked."
—PROV. xxix. 27.

THE book of Proverbs abounds with sayings which have the sound of truisms, sayings which repeat, with innumerable variations and shades of colouring, that wickedness is an evil, hateful to God and to men, and that righteousness is a blessing not only to the righteous themselves, but to all with whom they are connected. We are disposed to say, Surely no reasonable person can question such an obvious truth; but on reflection we remember that the truth was not perceived by the great religions of antiquity, is not recognised now by the vast majority of the human race, and even where it is theoretically admitted without question is too frequently forgotten in the hurry and the pressure of practical life. There is good reason therefore why the truism, as we are inclined to call it, should be thrown into the form of maxims which will find a hold in the memory, and readily occur to the mind on occasions of trial. And as we pass in review what Proverbial Religion has to say upon the subject, we shall perhaps be surprised to find how imperfectly we have apprehended the supreme importance of goodness, and how insidiously teachings, which were originally meant to enforce it, have usurped its place and treated it with contumely. It will begin to dawn upon us that the truth is a truism, not because it is carried out in practice, but only because no one has the hardihood to question it; and perhaps we shall receive some impulse towards transforming the conviction which we cannot dispute into a mode of conduct which we cannot decline.

To begin with, our book is most unflinching in its assertions that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, *wickedness is a mis-*

take, a source of perpetual weakness and insecurity, always in the long run producing ruin and death; while *righteousness is in itself a perpetual blessing*, and is weighted with beautiful and unexpected fruits. The very reiteration becomes most impressive.

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.* The righteous shall never be removed, but the wicked shall not dwell in the land.† The house of the wicked shall be overthrown, but the tent of the upright shall flourish.‡ The wicked earneth deceitful wages, but he that soweth righteousness hath a sure reward.§ A man shall not be established by wickedness, while the root of the righteous shall never be moved.|| The wicked really falls by his own wickedness, and is swept away by his own violence.¶ He sows iniquity and reaps calamity.** His crooked way, his malignant thoughts, the hatred against his neighbour, the guile in his heart, and the flood of evil things which comes out of his lips, have one issue—destruction.†† When he comes to die, his expectation perishes, all the hope of iniquity ends in disappointment.‡‡ His lamp goes out not to be relit.§§ Meanwhile, the light of the righteous man rejoices, because he attains unto life as surely as the wicked works towards death.||||

It is true that the appearance of things is different. Hand joins in hand to promote evil.¶¶ Men follow out what seems right in their own hearts, evil as they are.*** Success seems to attend them, and one is tempted to envy the sinners, and to fret at their ways.††† But the envy is misplaced; the evil man does not go unpunished; the wicked are overthrown and are not.‡‡‡ The way which seemed right in a man's eyes proves to be the way of death.§§§ A righteous man falleth seven times and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity,|||| and the righteous are obliged to look upon their fall.¶¶¶

On the other hand, goodness is its own continual reward. While treacherous men are destroyed by their perverseness, the upright are guided by their own integrity.**** While the sinner is overthrown by his wickedness, righteousness guardeth him that is upright in the way.†††† If the righteous gets into trouble he is delivered, while the wicked falls into his place.‡‡‡‡ there is a kind of substitution; a ransom is paid to enable the righteous to escape, and the ransom is

* Prov. x. 28.

† Prov. x. 30.

‡ Prov. xiv. 11. Cf. Prov. xii. 7: "Overthrow the wicked; and they are not (*i. e.*, there is no rising again for them), but the house of the righteous shall stand."

§ Prov. xi. 18.

|| Prov. xiii. 3.

¶ Prov. xi. 5, 6; xxi. 7.

** Prov. xxii. 8.

†† Prov. xxi. 7, 8, 10, 15; xxvi. 24, 26; xv. 28.

‡‡ Prov. xi. 7.

§§ Prov. xiii. 9; xxiv. 20.

|| Prov. xi. 19.

¶¶ Prov. xi. 21.

*** Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 5, 25; xxi. 2.

††† Prov. xxiii. 17, 18; xxiv. 1, 19.

‡‡† Prov. xii. 7.

§§§ Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 25.

|||| Prov. xxiv. 15, 16.

¶¶¶ Prov. xxix. 16.

**** Prov. xi. 3.

†††† Prov. xiii. 6. Cf. Prov. xiv. 14: "The backslider in heart shall be sated from his own ways, and the good man from himself." Though probably we ought to read,

with Nowack, מְסֻכֵּי, which would give a completer parallelism: "The backslider shall be sated from his own ways, and the good man from his own doings."

‡‡‡† Prov. xi. 8. Cf. Prov. xxviii. 18.

the person of the wicked.* Not only does the righteous come out of trouble,† but, strictly speaking, no mischief really happens to him; it is only the wicked that is filled with evil.‡ The righteous eats to the satisfying of his own soul, but the belly of the wicked shall want.§ The good man walks on a highway and so preserves his soul.|| Mercy and truth shine upon him because he devises good.¶ He only followed after righteousness and mercy, but he found life, righteousness, and honour.** His heart is flooded with joy, he actually sings as he journeys on.†† He seems like a tree in the green leaf, a tree of life, the fruits of which cannot fail to be attractive; so that he unconsciously wins favour.‡‡ The fruit does not fail, because the root is alive.§§ And if in actual life this blessedness of the good man does not appear, if by reason of the evil in the world the righteous seem to be punished, and the noble to be smitten.|||| that only creates a conviction that the fruit will grow in another life; for when we have closely observed the inseparable connection between goodness and blessedness, we cannot avoid the conviction that "the righteous hath hope in his death."¶¶ Yes, practical goodness is the source of perpetual blessing, and it cannot be altogether hidden. Even a child maketh himself known by his doings, whether his work be pure and right.*** To the good we must assign the supremacy; the evil must bow before them and wait at their gates.††† And it is easy to understand why it appears so incongruous—so abnormal, like a troubled fountain and a corrupted spring, when the righteous give way to the wicked.††††

Nor is the blessing of goodness at all limited to the good man himself. It falls on his children too. A just man that walketh in his integrity, blessed are his children after him. §§§ It reaches even to the third generation. A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.|||| The righteous is a guide to his neighbour also.¶¶¶ He is a joy to his sovereign; he that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.**** His character and his well-being are a matter of public, even of national concern, for there is something winning in him; he acts as a saving influence upon those who are around him.†††† Therefore, when the righteous increase the people rejoice, †††† when they triumph there is great glory. §§§§ When it goeth well with the righteous the city re-

joiceth, just as when the wicked perish there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, just as it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.* Yes, righteousness exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to the whole people.†

It is the grand public interest to see the wicked perish in order that the righteous may increase: † for the way of the wicked causes other people to err.§ His lips are like a scorching fire; || his presence brings a general atmosphere of contempt, ignominy, and shame.¶¶ When the wicked rise men hide themselves,** when they bear rule the people sigh.†† Well may the national feeling be severe on all those who encourage the wicked in any way. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him; but to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.‡‡ It is a sure sign that one is forsaking the law when one ceases to contend with the wicked and begins to praise them.§§

Blessing to himself, blessing to his children, his neighbours, his country, is the beautiful reward of the good man; ruin to himself, a spreading contagion of evil to others, and general execration, is the lot of the wicked. Well may the former be bold as a lion, and well may the latter flee when no man pursues, for conscience makes cowards of us all.||||

But at present we have not touched on the chief blessedness of the good, and the chief curse of the evil, on that which is really the spring and fountain-head of all. It is the great fact that *God is with the righteous and against the wicked*, that He judges men according to their integrity or perverseness, and accepts them or rejects them simply upon that principle. By looking at this lofty truth we get all our conceptions on the subject cleared. The perverse in heart are an abomination to the Lord; such as are perfect in their way are His delight.¶¶ A good man shall obtain favour of the Lord, but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.*** Evil devices are an abomination to the Lord.††† and so is the wicked, but He loveth the righteous.††† To justify the wicked or to condemn the righteous is equally abominable to Him. §§§ He considers the house of the wicked, how the wicked are overthrown to their ruin.|||| He overthrows the words of the treacherous man, while His eyes preserve him that hath knowledge.¶¶¶ He weighs the heart and keeps the soul and renders to every man according to his work.**** Thus his way is a stronghold to the upright, but a destruction to the workers of iniquity.†††† He does not regard prayer so much as righteousness; he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.†††† Sacrifice goes for nothing in His sight if the life is not holy. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. §§§§ The sacrifice of the

* Prov. xxi. 18.

† Prov. xii. 13.

‡ Prov. xii. 21.

** Prov. xxi. 21.

†† Prov. xxi. 15; xxix. 6. Unless, with Delitzsch, we are to read *בְּפִשֵּׁעַ* for *בְּפִשֵּׁעַ*, and *יְרוּעַ* for *יְרוּעַ*, which

would give: "In the steps of a bad man lie snares, but the righteous runs and rejoices."

‡‡ Prov. xi. 27, 30.

§§ Prov. xii. 12.

|| Prov. xvii. 26: "To punish the righteous is not good, nor to smite the noble for their uprightness."

¶¶ Prov. xiv. 32.

*** Prov. xx. 11.

††† Prov. xiv. 10.

§§§ Prov. xxv. 26

|||| Prov. xiv. 26: "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." So Prov. xx. 7: "A just man that walketh in his integrity: blessed are his children after him."

||||| Prov. xiii. 22.

¶¶¶ Prov. xii. 26.

**** Prov. xxii. 11. Cf. Prov. xvi. 13.

†††† Prov. xi. 31.

§§§§ Prov. xxix. 2.

§§§§ Prov. xxviii. 12.

§ Prov. xiii. 25.

|| Prov. xvi. 17; xix. 16.

¶ Prov. xiv. 22.

* Prov. xi. 10, 11.

† Prov. xiv. 34.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 28.

§ Prov. xii. 26.

|| Prov. xvi. 27.

¶ Prov. xviii. 3.

** Prov. xxviii. 28.

†† Prov. xxix. 2.

||| Prov. xxi. 12, where "one that is righteous" seems to mean God Himself; see the margin of R. V.

¶¶¶ Prov. xxii. 12.

**** Prov. xxiv. 12.

†††† Prov. x. 29.

‡‡ Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.

§§ Prov. xxviii. 4.

||| Prov. xxviii. 1.

¶¶ Prov. xi. 20.

*** Prov. xii. 2.

††† Prov. xv. 26.

§§§ Prov. xv. 9.

|||| Prov. xvii. 15, 26; xviii. 5.

||||| Prov. xxviii. 9.

§§§§ Prov. xxi. 3.

wicked is an abomination : how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind ? * Yes, it is an abomination to the Lord, just as the prayer of the upright is His delight. The Lord is far from the wicked, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous.† When the foolish sinner offers a sin-offering instead of relinquishing his sin, the very offering mocks him, for it is only the righteous who find favour with the Lord.‡

It is this solemn truth, the truth of God's own way of regarding goodness and wickedness, which makes earnestness on the subject essential. If goodness were only pleasing to man, if sin were only an offence against creatures like ourselves, ordinary prudence would require us to be good and to avoid evil, but higher sanction would be wanting. When, however, the matter is taken up into the Divine presence, and we begin to understand that the Supreme Ruler of all things loves righteousness and hates iniquity, visits the one with favor and the other with reprobation, quite a new sanction is introduced. The wicked man, who makes light of evil, to whom it is as a sport, appears to be nothing short of an absolute fool.§ In God's presence it is not difficult to perceive that goodness is wisdom, the only wisdom, the perfect wisdom.

But now it may occur to some of us that it is surely nothing very wonderful to lay this stress upon the close connection between goodness and God-pleasing. Is it not, we are inclined to say, the most obvious and unquestioned of facts that God requires goodness at our hands, and is angry with the wicked every day ? It is not very wonderful to us, because Revelation has made it familiar, but none the less it is a truth of Revelation, and if we were to ask in what the Inspiration of this book consists, no simpler and truer answer could be given than that it teaches, as we have just seen, the alliance of God with righteousness and the abhorrence in which He holds wickedness.

Yes, a truism, but it was a discovery which the world was very slow to make, and it is still a principle on which the world is very unwilling to act.

The main characteristic of all heathen religions is that their gods do not demand righteousness, but certain outward and formal observances ; sacrifices must be offered to them, their vindictive temper must be propitiated, their anger averted ; if the dues of the gods are paid, the stipulated quantity of corn and wine and oil, the tithes, the firstfruits, the animals for the altar, the tribute for the temple, then the worshipper who has thus discharged his obligations may feel himself free to follow out his own tastes and inclinations. In the Roman religion, for example, every dealing with the gods was a strictly legal contract ; the Roman general agreed with Jupiter or with Mars that if the battle should be won a temple should be built. It was not necessary that the cause should be right, or that the general should be good ; the sacrifice of the wicked, though offered with an evil intent, was as valid as the sacrifice of the good. In either case the same amount of marble and stone, of silver and gold, would come to the god.

In the Eastern religions not only were good-

ness and righteousness dissociated from the idea of the gods, but evil of the grossest kinds was definitely associated with them. The Phœnician deities, like those of the Hindoos, were actually worshipped with rites of murder and lust. Every vice had its patron god or goddess, and it was forgotten by priest and people that goodness could be the way of pleasing God, or moral evil a cause of offence to Him.

Even in Israel, where the teaching of Revelation was current in the proverbs of the people, the practice generally followed the heathen conceptions. All the burning protests of the inspired prophets could not avail to convince the Israelite that what God required was not sacrifice and offering, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. Again and again we find that the high places were frequented and the ritual supported by men who were sensual, unjust, and cruel. The Sabbath Day was kept, the feasts were duly observed, the priests were handsomely maintained, and there, it was supposed, the legitimate claims of Jehovah ceased. What more could He desire ?

This is surely the most impressive proof that the Truth which is under consideration is far from being obvious. Israel himself, the chosen channel for communicating this truth to the world, was so slow to understand and to grasp it, that his religious observances were constantly degenerating into lifeless ceremonies devoid of all moral significance, and his religious teachers were mainly occupied in denouncing his conduct as wholly inconsistent with the truth.

So far from treating the truth as a truism, our Lord in all His teaching laboured to bring it out in greater clearness, and to set it in the forefront of His message to men. He made it the very keynote of the Gospel that not every one who says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of His Father in heaven. He painted with exquisite simplicity and clearness the right life, the conduct which God requires of us, and then likened every one who practised this life to a man who builds his house on a rock, and every one who does not practise it to a man who builds his house on the sand. He declared, in the spirit of all that we have just read from the book of Proverbs, that teachers were to be judged by their fruits, and that God would estimate our lives not by what we professed to do, but by what we did ; and He took up the very language of the book in declaring that every man should be judged according to his works.* In every word He spoke He made it plain that goodness is what God loves, and that wickedness is what He judges and destroys. In the same way every one of the Apostles insists on this truth with a new earnestness. St. John more especially reiterates it, in words which sound even more like a truism than the sayings of this book : " He that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous ;" and, " If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him."†

The Gospel itself is accompanied by a new and more earnest assertion of this cardinal truth, that God loves goodness, and that He judges men according to their works. And even now, after many centuries of Christian faith, and notwithstanding all the teachings of the Bible and the witness of the Spirit, it is very difficult for

* Prov. xxi. 27.

† Prov. xv. 8, 29.

‡ Prov. xiv. 9. This seems to be the meaning of this difficult verse, which should be translated : The sin-offering mocks fools, but among the righteous is favour.

§ Prov. x. 23.

* Matt. xvi. 27.

† 1 John iii. 7, 10 ; ii. 29.

many of us to understand that religion is goodness, and religion without goodness is impiety of the worst kind. It is supposed by some, in face of all the accumulated truth and wisdom of the ages which have passed since this book was written, that God's last and highest message is a dispensation from practical righteousness—that the Gospel of Grace means God's willingness to accept men because they believe, apart from the actual goodness to which all faith is calculated to lead; as if the Gospel were an announcement that God had entirely changed His nature, and that all the best and noblest teachings of His Spirit in the past were set aside by His final revelation. Behind some figment or other, some perverted notion of imputed righteousness, men try to hide their guilty countenance, and to persuade themselves that now, in virtue of the Cross, they can see God without holiness, without purity of heart. Heaven has been treated as a place where men can enter who work abomination and make a lie; and in order to secure a full acceptance for our dogma we try to depreciate goodness as if it were a thing of little worth, and even come to look with some suspicion upon those who are only good—only moral, I think we call it—and do not hold our own views of speculative truth. Meanwhile religious teachers "tell the wicked they are righteous," and earn the curse of the nation, because they thereby enable men to be hard and cruel and unjust and selfish and proud and contemptuous, and yet to esteem themselves as justified by faith. Others "justify the wicked," accepting a verbal profession in place of a virtuous practice; and that, as we have seen, is abominable to the Lord.

Justification by faith loses all its meaning and all its value unless it is fully admitted that *to be just* is the great end and aim of religion. Salvation becomes a delusion unless it is perceived that it means righteousness. Heaven, and the saints' everlasting rest, become worthless and misleading ideas unless we recognise that it is the abode of goodness, and that saints are not, as we sometimes seem to imply, bad people regarded as holy by a legal fiction, but people who are made good and are actually holy.

Strong as the language of our book is upon the subject, it is not possible to bring out in mere proverbial sayings the eternal necessity of this great truth. Goodness and blessedness are actually identical, the reverse and the obverse sides of the same coin. If a man is made good he is made blessed; but if he is made blessed to all appearance, and not good, the blessedness proves to be an illusion. It could not possibly avail to be justified by faith, unless we were made just by faith; a sore body is not healed by covering it up, a dead man is not quickened by a smiling mask. There have been many people who counted themselves the elect, and made no question that they were saved, though they remained all the time inwardly wicked; they were miserable, sour, discontented, censorious, a burden to themselves, an eyesore to others; they were persuaded that they would be happy in heaven, and they supposed that their constant wretchedness was due to their being pilgrims in a strange land; but the fact was they would be more wretched still in heaven, for nowhere is evil such a curse as in a place where good prevails; their misery arose from their own wicked hearts, and in the next world, their hearts still

being wicked, their misery must continue and increase.

May God grant us a clear vision in this matter, that we may see the due relation of things! Goodness is the principal thing—for by it faith itself and all religion exists. God is goodness—man is evil; what God means by saving us is to make us good like Himself. That we must be saved by faith means that we must be made good by faith, not that we must take faith in place of goodness. That righteousness is imputed to us by the goodness of God means that the goodness of Christ is reckoned as ours for the purpose of making us good, not in order to spare us the necessity of being good. And in this way, and this only, we must estimate one another. What a man believes in his heart we can never fully know; but whether he is good or not is a matter plain as the day. It is easy to bandy words of reproach, to call men unbelievers, sceptics, atheists; but there is only one wise way of speaking and thinking. If we see goodness, let us thank God, for there, be sure, His Spirit is;* if we see the lovely graces which shine in our Lord Jesus Christ gleaming, however fitfully, in our fellow-men, let us recognise Christ there. And where we see wickedness, let no consideration of outward Christian profession or orthodoxy of belief restrain us from fully recognising that it is evil, or from courageously contending against it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TONGUE.

"A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his MOUTH: and the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him."—PROV. xii. 14.

"In the transgression of the LIPS is a snare to an evil man: but the righteous shall come out of trouble."—PROV. xii. 13.

"A fool's vexation is PRESENTLY KNOWN: but a prudent man concealeth shame."—PROV. xii. 16.

"He that uttereth truth SHOWETH FORTH righteousness, but a false witness deceit."—PROV. xii. 17.

"The LIP of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying TONGUE is but for a moment."—PROV. xii. 19.

"Lying LIPS are an abomination unto the Lord: but they that deal truly are His delight."—PROV. xii. 22.

"There is that SPEAKETH rashly like the piercings of a sword: but the TONGUE of the wise is health."—PROV. xii. 18.

"A prudent man CONCEALETH knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness."—PROV. xii. 23.

"The WORDS of the wicked are a lying in wait for blood: but the MOUTH of the upright shall deliver them."—PROV. xii. 6.

"Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good WORD maketh it glad."—PROV. xii. 25.

THERE is nothing which seems more insubstantial than speech, a mere vibration in the atmosphere which touches the nerves of hearing and then dies away. There is no organ which seems smaller and less considerable than the tongue; a little member which is not even seen, and, physically speaking, soft and weak. But the word which issues out of the lips is the greatest power in human life. That "soft tongue breaketh the bone."† Words will change the currents

* "If ye know that He is righteous," says St. John, "ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him" (1 John ii. 29).

† Prov. xxv. 15.

of life : look for instance at a great orator addressing his audience ; how miraculous must it seem to a deaf man watching the speaker that the quiet opening of a mouth should be able to produce such powerful effects upon the faces, the movements, the conduct of the listeners !

We are coming to consider the importance of this diminutive organ, the ill uses and the good uses to which it may be turned, and the consequent necessity of fitly directing and restraining it.

On the use of the tongue depend the issues of a man's own life. It may be regarded as a tree which bears fruits of different kinds, and such fruits as his tongue bears a man must eat. If his words have been good, then he shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth.* "A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth, with the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied."† The fruits which grow on this tongue-tree are death and life—the tongue produces them—and he that loves the tree shall according to his love eat the one fruit or the other ; if he loves death-bearing speech he shall eat death ; if he loves life-bearing speech he shall eat life.‡ So deadly may be the fruit of the tongue that the mouth of the fool is regarded as a present destruction.§ So wholesome may be the fruit of the tongue that the tongue of the wise may be actually denominated health.||

In the case of the fool it is always very obvious how powerfully the tongue affects the condition of the speaker. His lips are always coming into strife, and his mouth is always calling for stripes. It is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.¶ In the transgression of the lips always lies the snare for the evil man : ultimately all men are in effect condemned out of their own mouths.** The tongue proves to be a rod for the back of the proud and foolish owner of it, while the good man's tongue is a constant life-preserver.†† As an old proverb says, a fool's tongue is always long enough to cut his own throat. On the other hand, where the tongue is wisely used it always brings back joy to the speaker in the end.‡‡ Thus whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles,§§ but the man who does not take the pains to hear, but gives his testimony falsely, shall perish.|||| While the use of the tongue thus recoils on the speaker for good or for evil, it has a wide influence also on others. "He that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief," ¶¶ but when speech is good, and such as it ought to be, "the words of a man's mouth are like deep waters, a gushing brook, a well of wisdom."***

Thus it is of vast and obvious importance how we use our tongue. If our speech is gracious we shall win the friendship of the king,††† and it is a pleasant thing if we "keep the words of the wise within us and if they be established together upon our lips."‡‡‡ It is better for us to be poor than perverse or untruthful in our speech.§§§ Our teacher, especially our Divine Lord, will rejoice inwardly and deeply "when our lips speak right things.|||||

We are now cautioned against some of the

evil purposes to which the tongue may be turned, and as all the heads of evil are passed in review we realise why St. James spoke of the tongue as "the world of iniquity" (i. 6) ; and how profound was our Lord's teaching that out of the mouth proceed the things which defile a man (Matt. xv. 18).

First of all, the tongue is a fruitful source of *Quarrelling* and discord. A fool cannot hide his vexation, but must immediately blurt it out with the tongue.* When he is angry he must utter it all at once,† though a wise man would keep it back and still it, so concealing shame. No one is more certain to come to grief than "he who provokes with words."‡ These irritating taunts and threats are like coals to hot embers, and wood to fire ;§ in their absence the contention would quickly die out. It is therefore the wise counsel of Agur to one who has done foolishly in exalting himself, or has even entertained for a moment the arrogant or quarrelsome thought, "Hand on thy mouth!" for speech under such circumstances produces strife as surely as churning produces butter from milk, or a blow on the nose blood.|| Rash, inconsiderate, angry words are like the piercings of a sword.¶ If only our wrathful spirit made us immediately dumb, anger would never go far, it would die out as a conflagration dies when there is no wind to fan the flames.

But again, the tongue is the instrument of *Lying* ; one of its worst disservices to man is that when it is well balanced, so that it easily wags, it often betrays him into untruths which his heart never contemplated nor even approved. It is the tongue which by false witness so often condemns the innocent.** A worthless witness mocketh at judgment ; and the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity.†† And though such a witness shall not in the long run go unpunished, nor shall the liar escape,‡‡ yet as experience shows, he may have brought ruin or calamity on others before vengeance falls upon him. The false witness shall perish,§§ but often not before he has like a mace or a hammer bruised and like a sword or a sharp arrow pierced his unfortunate neighbour.|||| It is the tongue which glozes over the purposes of hate, and lulls the victim into a false security ; the fervent lips and the wicked heart are like a silver lining spread over an earthen vessel to make it look like silver ; the hatred is cunningly concealed, the seven abominations in the heart are hidden ; the pit which is being dug and the stone which is to overwhelm the innocent are kept secret by the facile talk and flatteries of the tongue ; the

* Prov. xii. 16.

† Prov. xxix. 11.

‡ Prov. xix. 7. All the Proverbs in this selection are in the form of a distich. This affords a fair presumption that this verse with its three clauses is mutilated ; and the presumption is confirmed by the fact that the third clause adds nothing of value, even if it be intelligible at all, to the sense. There is good reason, therefore, for believing that this third clause is the half of a distich which has not been preserved in its integrity ; all the more because the LXX. have a complete proverb which runs thus : ὁ πολλὰ κακοποιῶν τελεσιουργεῖ κακίαν, ὅς δὲ ἐρεθίζει λόγους οὐ σωθήσεται. "He that does much evil is a craftsman of iniquity, and he that uses provoking words shall not escape." Perhaps in the Hebrew text which was before the Greek trans-

lators מְנַדֵּף appeared instead of מְרַדֵּף, and לֹא תִהְיֶה instead of לֹא תִהְיֶה.

§ Prov. xxvi. 21.

¶ Prov. xxx. 32, 33.

¶ Prov. xii. 18.

** Prov. xii. 17.

†† Prov. xix. 28.

‡‡ Prov. xix. 5, rep. ver. 9.

§§ Prov. xxi. 28.

|||| Prov. xxv. 18.

* Prov. xiii. 2.

† Prov. xviii. 20.

‡ Prov. xviii. 21.

§ Prov. x. 14.

|| Prov. xii. 18.

¶ Prov. xviii. 6, 7.

** Prov. xii. 13.

†† Prov. xiv. 3.

‡‡ Prov. xv. 23.

§§ Prov. xxi. 23.

|| Prov. xxi. 28.

¶ Prov. xvii. 20.

*** Prov. xviii. 4.

††† Prov. xxii. 11.

‡‡‡ Prov. xxii. 18.

§§§ Prov. xix. 1, 22.

|||| Prov. xxiii. 16.

more the tongue lies in its guileful machinations the more the heart hates the victims of its spite.* A righteous man hates lying, but the wicked, by his lies, brings disgrace and shame.† The lie often appears to prosper for a moment,‡ but happily it is an abomination to the Lord,§ and in His righteous ordering of events he makes the falsehood which was as bread, and sweet to the lips, into gravel which breaks the teeth in the mouth.|| The curse which is causeless is frustrated, and so also is the empty lie; it wanders without rest, without limit, like a sparrow or a swallow.¶

Closely allied to lying is *Flattery*; and to this vile use the tongue is often put. Flattery is always a mistake. It does not attain its end in winning the favour of the flattered; for in the long run "he that rebuketh a man shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."** If it is believed, as often unfortunately it is, it proves to be a net spread in the path, which may trip up, and may even capture and destroy, the unwary walker.††

Another evil use of the tongue is for *Whispering and tale-bearing*. "He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets"—he is not to be trusted, it is better to have nothing to do with him. Disclosing the secret of another is a sure way of incurring reproach and lasting infamy. Such a habit is a fruitful source of rage and indignation, it brings black wrath to the countenance of him whose secret has been published, just as a north wind spreads the rain clouds over the sky.‡‡ The temptation to tattling is great; the business of a gossip brings an immediate reward; for the corrupt heart of man delights in scandal as an epicure in tit-bits: "The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels which go down into the chambers of the belly."§§ But what mischief they do! They separate bosom friends, sowing suspicion and distrust.|||| Where there is already a little misunderstanding, the whisperer supplies wood to the fire and keeps it burning; apart from him it would soon die out.¶¶ But if he thinks there is any prospect of a reconciliation he will be constantly harping on the matter; one who seeks love would try to hide the transgression, but the scandal-monger is a foe to love and the unfailing author of enmity.***

But there is *Mischief*, more deliberate and more malignant still, which the tongue is employed to plot, to plan, and to execute. "With his mouth the godless man destroyeth his neighbour."††† "The words of the wicked are a lying in wait for blood."‡‡‡ "The mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things," §§§ blasphemies, obscenities, curses, imprecations. "A froward man scattereth abroad strife." ||||| He deceives, and in bitter raillery declares that he was only jesting; he is like a madman casting firebrands, arrows, and death.¶¶¶ We know what it is to hear a man pouring out foul, abusive, and impious language, until the very atmosphere seems in-

flamed with firebrands, and arrows fly hither and thither through the horrified air. We know, too, what it is to hear the smooth and well-turned speech of the hypocrite and the impostor, which seems to oppress the heart with a sense of decomposition; righteousness, truth, and joy seem to wither away, and in the choking suffocation of deceit and fraud life itself seems as if it must expire.

It is a relief to turn from those worst uses of the tongue to the more pardonable vices of *Rashness* and *Inopportuneness* of speech. Yet these two are evil enough in their way. To pass a judgment before we are in possession of the facts, and before we have taken the pains to carefully investigate and consider them is a sign of folly and a source of shame.* So impressed is our teacher with the danger of ill-considered speech that he says, "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him."† And even where the utterance of the tongue is in itself good it may be rendered evil by its untimeliness; religious talk itself may be so introduced as to hinder the cause of religion; pearls may be cast before swine: "Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."‡ There must be some preparation of spirit before we can wisely introduce Divine and heavenly things, and circumstances must not be chosen which will tend to make the Divine things seem mean and contemptible. It may be good to rebuke an evildoer, or to admonish a friend; but if the opportunity is not fitting, we may make the evildoer more evil,—we may alienate our friend without improving him.

Considering then what mischief may be done with the tongue, it is not to be wondered at that we are cautioned against *excessive speech*. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression, but he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely."§ "He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life; who opens wide his lips gets destruction, and a fool spreadeth out folly." || "In all labour is profit, the talk of the lips tends only to poverty."¶ "Wisdom rests in the heart of the understanding, but even in the inward part of fools all is blabbed."** "In the fool are no lips of knowledge" because he is always talking."†† "The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out folly."‡‡ "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself." §§ One who is always pouring out talk is sure to be pouring out folly. The wise man, feeling that all his words must be tested and weighed, is not able to talk very much. When your money is all in copper, you may afford to throw it about, but when it is all in gold you have to be cautious. A Christian feels that for every idle word he utters he will have to give account, and as none of his words are to

* Prov. xxvi. 23-28.

† Prov. xiii. 5.

‡ Prov. xii. 19.

§ Prov. xii. 22.

|| Prov. xi. 13 and xx. 19; xxv. 2, 23. Cf. "Whoso discovereth secrets loseth his credit and shall never find a friend to his mind" (Eccles. xxvii. 16).

||| Prov. xviii. 8, rep. xxvi. 22.

|||| Prov. xvi. 28.

||||| Prov. xxvii. 20.

¶ Prov. xvii. 9.

¶¶ Prov. xi. 9.

¶¶¶ Prov. xx. 17.

¶¶¶ Prov. xxvi. 2.

** Prov. xxviii. 23.

†† Prov. xxix. 5.

‡‡ Prov. xii. 6.

§§ Prov. xv. 28.

||| Prov. xvi. 28.

|||| Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

* Prov. xviii. 13.

† Prov. xxix. 20.

‡ Prov. xxiii. 9.

** Prov. xiv. 33.

†† Prov. xiv. 7.

There is a quaint and pertinent passage in Lyly's "Euphues":—"We may see the cunning and curious work of Nature, which hath barred and hedged nothing in so strongly as the tongue, with two rows of teeth, and therewith two lips, besides she hath placed it farre from the heart, that it should not utter that which the heart had conceived; this also should cause us to be silent, seinge those that use much talke, though they speake truly, are never beleevd."

‡‡ Prov. xv. 2.

§§ Prov. xviii. 2.

§ Prov. x. 19.

|| Prov. xiii. 3, 16.

¶ Prov. xiv. 23.

be idle they must be comparatively few; the word that kindles wrath, the lie, the whisper, the slander, can therefore find no place on his lips.

This brings us to the *Good and beautiful uses of the tongue*, those uses which justify us in calling the tongue of the wise Health.* First of all the tongue has the gracious power of soothing and restraining anger. It is the readiest instrument of peace-making. Gentleness of speech allays great offences,† and by preventing quarrels, disarming wrath, and healing the wounds of the spirit, it maintains its claim to be a tree of life.‡ If in the tumult of passion, when fiery charges are made and grievous provocations are uttered, the tongue can be held in firm restraint, and made to give a soft answer, the storm will subside, the angry assailant will retire abashed,§ and the flaming arrows will be quenched in the buckler of meekness which opposes them. Nor is the tongue only defensive in such cases. The pleasant words, spoken out of a kindly and gentle nature, have a purifying effect;|| they cleanse away the defilements out of which the evil passions sprang; they purge the diseased humours which produce the irritations of life; they supply a sweet food to the poor hearts of men, who are often contentious because they are hungry for sympathy and love. Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, health to the bones.¶ They must be true words, or they will not in the end be pleasant, for, as we have seen, the sweet bread of falsehood turns to gravel in the mouth. But what a different world this would become if we all spoke as many pleasant words as we honestly could, and were not so painfully afraid of showing what tenderness and pity and healing actually exist in our hearts! For another beautiful use of the tongue is to comfort the mourners, of whom there are always so many in the world. "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop." There are these stooping, bowed-down hearts everywhere around us. We wish that we could remove the cause of sorrow, that we could effectually change the conditions which seem unfavourable to joy; but being unable to do this, we often stand aloof and remain silent, because we shrink from giving words without deeds, pity without relief. We forget that when the heart is heavy it is just "a good word that maketh it glad."** Yes, a word of genuine sympathy, a word from the heart,—and in trouble no other word can be called good,—will often do more to revive the drooping spirit than the grosser gifts of material wealth. A coin kindly given, a present dictated by a heart-felt love, may come as a spiritual blessing; on the other hand, money given without love is worthless, and seldom earns so much as gratitude, while a word in season, how good it is!†† It is better than silver and gold; the discouraged and despondent heart seems to be touched with the delicate finger of hope, and to rise from the ashes and the dust with a new purpose and a new life. It must, of course, be in season. "As vinegar upon nitre so is he that sings songs to a sad heart."‡‡ But

the seasonable word, spoken just at the right moment and just in the right tone, brief and simple, but comprehending and penetrating, will often make the sad heart sing a song for itself.

Great stress is to be laid on this seasonableness of speech, whether the speech be for comfort or reproof. A word fitly spoken, or to preserve the image implied in the original, a word that runs on its wheels in the just and inevitable groove, is compared to a beautiful ornament consisting of golden apples set in an appropriate framework of silver filigree.* In such an ornament the golden apples torn from their suitable foil would lose half their beauty, and the silver setting without the apples would only suggest a void and a missing. It is in the combination that the artistic value is to be found. In the same way, the wisest utterance spoken foolishly † jars upon the hearers, and misses the mark, while a very simple saying, a platitude in itself, may by its setting become lovely and worthy. The best sermon in a social gathering will seem out of place, but how often can the Christian man by some almost unobserved remark correct unseasonable levity, rebuke unhallowed conversation, and lead the minds of the company to nobler thoughts. The timely word is better than the best sermon in such a case.

The use of the tongue in *Reproof* is frequently referred to in these proverbs. "A wise reprover upon an obedient ear" is compared to "an earring of gold, an ornament of fine gold."‡ And rebuke is, as we have seen, preferred before flattery.§ But how wise we must be before our tongue can fitly discharge this function! How humble must the heart be before it can instruct the tongue to speak at once with firmness and tenderness, without a touch of the Pharisee in its tone, to the erring brother or the offending stranger! A rebuke which springs not from love but from vanity, not from self-forgetfulness but from self-righteousness, will not be like an earring of gold, but rather like an ornament of miserable tinsel chafing the ear, the cause of gangrene, a disfigurement as well as an injury. But if we live in close communion with Christ, and daily receive His stern but tender rebukes into our own souls, it is possible that we may be employed by Him to deliver timely rebukes to our fellow-men.

There are two other noble uses of the tongue to which reference is constantly made in our book; the *Instruction of the ignorant*, and the *Championship of the distressed*. With regard to the first, we are told that "the lips of the wise disperse knowledge," while of course the heart of the foolish not being right cannot possibly impart rightness to others.|| It is only the wise in heart that can claim the title of prudent, but where that wisdom is "the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning."¶ "The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth and addeth learning to his lips."** The lips of knowledge are compared to a precious vessel which is more valuable than gold or rubies.†† To teach well requires earnest preparation, "the heart of the righteous studieth to answer."‡‡ But when the right an-

* Prov. xii. 18.

† Eccl. x. 4.

‡ Prov. xv. 4. מִרְפָּא is best rendered here and in Eccl.

x. 4 by "gentleness." It is just that quality of humility and submission and tranquillity which our Lord blessed as meekness.

§ Prov. xv. 1.

|| Prov. xv. 26.

¶ Prov. xvi. 24.

** Prov. xii. 25.

†† Prov. xv. 23.

‡‡ Prov. xxv. 20.

* Prov. xxv. 11.

† Cf. Eccles. xx. 20: "A wise sentence shall be rejected when it cometh out of a fool's mouth, for he will not speak it in due season."

‡ Prov. xxv. 12.

§ Prov. xxviii. 23.

|| Prov. xv. 7.

¶ Prov. xvi. 21.

** Prov. xvi. 23.

†† Prov. xx. 15.

‡‡ Prov. xv. 28.

swer to the pupil is discovered and given it is beautifully compared to a kiss on the lips.*

But never is the tongue more divinely employed than in using its knowledge or its pleadings to deliver those who are in danger or distress. "Through knowledge the righteous may often be delivered."† The mouth of the upright will deliver those against whom the wicked are plotting.‡ It is a great prerogative of wise lips that they are able to preserve not themselves only but others.§ The true and faithful witness delivers souls.|| It is this which gives to power its one great attraction for the good man. The ruler, the judge, the person of social consideration or of large means is in the enviable position of being able to "open his mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are left desolate, to judge rightly and minister judgment to the poor and needy."¶

The Press—that great fourth estate—which represents for us the more extended use of the tongue in modern times, illustrates in the most vivid way the service which can be rendered where speech is fit, and also the injury that can be done where it is rash, imprudent, dishonest, interested, or unjust.

After thus reviewing some of the good uses of the tongue, and observing how they depend on the state of the heart,** we cannot help again laying stress on the need of a wise self-control in all that we say. He that refraineth his lips doeth wisely. A man of understanding holdeth his peace.†† "He that spareth his words hath knowledge."‡‡ "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise, when he shutteth his lips he is prudent."§§ If only the uninstructed and foolish person has sense enough to perceive that wisdom is too high for him he will not open his mouth in the gate,|||| and so in listening he may learn. "Of thine unspoken word thou art master," says an Indian proverb, "but thy spoken word is master of thee." We are to be swift to hear, but slow to speak: we are to ponder all that we hear, for it is only the simple that believes every word, the prudent man looks well to his going.¶¶ As St. James says, summing up all the teaching that we have reviewed, "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain.***"

And now there is only one other point to be noticed, but it is one of vast importance. As we realise the immense power of the tongue and the great issues which depend on its right or wrong employment; as we sum up all the evil which its tiny unobserved movements can accomplish, and all the rich blessings which it is, under right supervision, capable of producing; and as from personal experience we recognise

how difficult it is to bridle the unruly member, how difficult it is to check the double fountain so that it shall send forth sweet waters only, and no bitter, we may be awed into an almost absolute silence, and be inclined to put away the talent of speech which our Lord has given to us, not daring to use it lest in using we should abuse it. But here is the answer to our misgiving: the plans and preparations of our hearts belong to us, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.* This most uncontrollable organ of the body can be put under our Lord's control. He is able to give us "a mouth and wisdom," and to make our words not our own but the utterance of His Holy Spirit. There may be "an ocean round our words which overflows and drowns them," the encircling influences of God, turning even our faultiest speech to good account, neutralising all our falterings and blunderings, and silencing our follies and perversities.

Shall we not put our lips under our Lord's control, that the answer of our tongue may be from Him? While we seek daily to subject our hearts to Him, shall we not in a peculiar and a direct manner subject our tongues to Him? for while a subjected heart may keep the mouth from speaking evil, if the tongue is to speak well and to be employed for all its noble uses it must be immediately moved by God, our lips must be touched with a coal from the altar, our speech must be chastened and purified, inspired, and impelled, by Him.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRIDE AND HUMILITY.

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction, but a scorner heareth not rebuke."—PROV. xiii. 1.

"Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth correction, but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured."—PROV. xiii. 18.

"By pride cometh only contention, but with the well advised is wisdom."—PROV. xiii. 10.

"Whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."—PROV. xiii. 13.

This last proverb appears in another form, as, "He that giveth heed unto the word shall find good, and whoso trusteth in the Lord happy is he."—PROV. xvi. 20.

By a proud man we mean one who esteems himself better than others; by a humble man we mean one who counts others better than himself. The proud man is so convinced of his intrinsic superiority that if appearances are against him, if others obtain more recognition, honour, wealth than he, the fault seems to him to lie in the evil constitution of the world, which cannot recognise merit; for his own intrinsic superiority is the axiom which is always to be taken for granted; "his neighbours therefore find no favour in his eyes, and he even desires their calamity and ruin," in order, as he would put it, that every one may be set in his due place.† Meanwhile he is always boasting of possessions, dignities, and gifts which do not yet, but some day will, appear to the public eye. He is like clouds which overcast the sky, and wind which frets the earth, without bringing any wholesome rain.‡ If, on the other hand, appearances are with him, if wealth, dignity, and honour fall to his share, he is affably convinced

* Prov. xxiv. 26.

† Prov. xi. 9.

‡ Prov. xii. 6.

§ Prov. xiv. 3.

|| Prov. xiv. 5, 25.

¶ Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

** Note the intimate connection between conduct and speech in such a proverb as xvii. 4. When we do evil we are always ready to listen to evil talk, when we talk deceitfully we are preparing to go on to worse deeds of evil, to listen to tongues of destruction. Note, too, how in xii. 5 the thoughts and the counsels of the heart come before the words and the mouth in v. 6.

†† Prov. xi. 12.

‡‡ Prov. xvii. 27.

§§ Prov. xvii. 28. Cf. the old Norse proverb:—

"An unwise man when he comes among the people

Had best be silent: no one knows

That he nothing knows unless he talks too much."

¶¶ Prov. xxiv. 7.

¶¶ Prov. xiv. 15.

*** James i. 26.

* Prov. xvi. 1. † Prov. xxi. 10. ‡ Prov. xxv. 14.

of his own supreme excellence; the proof of his own conviction is written large in his broad acres, his swelling dividends, and his ever-increasing troops of flatterers and friends; and he moves smoothly on to—what?—strange to say, little as he thinks it, to destruction, for “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* If he only knew he would say, “Better is it to be of a lowly spirit with the meek than to divide the spoil with the proud;”* for “before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility.”† The event shows, if not in this world, yet the more surely in the next, that it is well to “let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”‡

When our eyes are open to see things as they are, we are no longer in the least impressed by the “proud and haughty man whose name is scorner working in the arrogance of pride.”§ We may not live to see it, but we are quite persuaded that “a man’s pride shall bring him low, but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honour.”|| “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.”¶

Now what are the evil effects of pride, and what are the blessings that follow on humility?

First of all, pride cuts a man off from all the salutary effects of reproof, rebuke, criticism, and counsel, without which it is not possible for any of us to become wise. “A wise son” is the result of “a father’s correction,” says the text, and such a son makes his father glad;** but the pride in a child’s heart will often prevent him from receiving even the correction of a father, and will lead him to despise his mother. And if the parents have not firmness and wisdom enough to overcome this childish resistance, it will grow with years, and prove more and more disastrous. “He is in the way of life that heedeth correction, but he that forsaketh reproof erreth.”†† If he had loved reproof he would have acquired knowledge, but hating it he becomes brutish.‡‡ It is evident then that this pride is folly. He is a fool that despises his father’s correction, but he that regardeth reproof getteth prudence.§§ He that refuseth correction despiseth his own soul, but he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth understanding.||||

When we are grown up, and no longer under the tutelage of parents who love us, pride is still more likely to harden our hearts against criticism and counsel. The word of warning falls on the proud ear in vain, just because it is the word of warning, and often does the wilful heart mourn as it suffers the penalty of its stubbornness.¶¶ A man who refuses correction is a synonym for poverty and shame.*** These words which we in our pride despise might be an incalculable benefit to us. Even the most witless criticism may be useful to a humble mind, even the most unjust attacks may lead us to wholesome self-searching, and to a more careful re-

moval of possible offences. While if the criticism is fair, and prompted by a kind heart, or if the rebuke is administered by one whose wisdom and justice we respect, it is likely to do us far more good than praise and approval. “A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool.”* “Better is open rebuke than love that is hid.”† If we were wise we should value this plain and honest speaking much more than the insipid flattery which is often dictated by interested motives.‡ In fact, praise is a very questionable benefit; it is of no use at all unless we carefully test it, and try it, and accept it with the greatest caution, for only a small part of it is pure metal, most of it is mere dross;§ and praise that is not deserved is the most dangerous and deleterious of delights. But rebuke and criticism cannot do us much harm. Many great and noble men have been ruined by admiration and popularity, who might have thriven, growing greater and nobler, in the fiercest and most relentless criticism. Donatello, the great Florentine sculptor, went at one time of his life to Padua, where he was received with the utmost enthusiasm, and loaded with approbation and honours. But soon he declared his intention of returning to Florence, on the ground that the sharp assaults and the cutting criticisms which always assailed him in his native city were much more favourable to his art than the atmosphere of admiration and eulogy. In this way he thought that he would be stimulated to greater efforts, and ultimately attain to a surer reputation. In the same spirit the greatest of modern art critics has told us how valuable to him were the criticisms which his humble Italian servant made on his drawings. Certainly, “with those who allow themselves to be advised is wisdom.”|| “He that trusteth in his own heart,” and cannot receive the advice of others, “is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely he shall be delivered,” sometimes perhaps by the humble suggestions of very simple people.¶

Yes, “with the lowly is wisdom.”** they “hearken to counsel,”†† and in doing so they get the advantage of many other wits, while the proud man is confined strictly to his own, and however great his capacity may be, it is hardly probable that he will sum up all human wisdom in himself. The lowly gives heed to the word, no matter who speaks it, and finds good;‡‡ he abides among the wise, because he is always ready to learn; consequently, he becomes wise, and eventually he gets the honour which he deserves.§§ It is in this way that people of lowly station and very moderate abilities often come to the front. “A servant that deals wisely has rule over a son that causes shame, and has part in the inheritance among the brethren.”|||| To a crafty son no good shall be, but to a servant

* Prov. xvii. 10.

† Prov. xxvii. 5.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 23.

§ Prov. xxvii. 21: “The fining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man for the mouth of his praise.” This somewhat obscure aphorism is most simply explained thus:—A man should make his conscience a kind of furnace, in which he tries all the laudatory things which are said of him, accepting only the refined and pure metal which results from such a test, and rejecting the dross. This is simpler than, with Delitzsch, to explain, “a man is tested by the praise which is bestowed upon him as silver and gold are tested in the fire.”

|| Prov. xiii. 10.

¶ Prov. xxviii. 26.

** Prov. xi. 2.

†† Prov. xii. 15b.

‡‡ Prov. xvi. 20.

§§ Prov. xv. 31, 33.

|||| Prov. xvii. 2.

* Prov. xvi. 18, 19.

† Prov. xviii. 12.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 2.

§ Prov. xxi. 24.

|| Prov. xxix. 23.

¶ Prov. xv. 32.

¶ Prov. xxvi. 12.

** Prov. xiii. 1; xv. 20.

†† Prov. x. 17.

‡‡ Prov. xii. 1.

§§ Prov. xv. 8.

¶¶ Prov. xiii. 13 should be translated: “Whoso despiseth the word (sc. of warning and rebuke) shall be under a pledge to it (i. e., he has contracted an obligation to the word by hearing it, and in case of disobedience will have to redeem this implicit pledge by suffering and remorse), but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.”

*** Prov. xiii. 17.

who is wise his actions shall prosper and his way be made straight.* The consciousness of not being clever, and a wise diffidence in our own judgment, will often make us very thankful to learn from others and save us from the follies of wilfulness; and thus very much to their own astonishment the humble find that they have outdistanced their more brilliant competitors in the race, and, walking in their humility, unexpectedly light upon recognition and admiration, honour and love.

This first point, then, becomes very clear in the light of experience. One of the most injurious effects of Pride is to cut off its miserable victim from all the vast help and service which rebuke and criticism can render to the humble. One of the sweetest results of a genuine humility is that it brings us to the feet of all wise teachers; it multiplies lessons for us in all the objects which surround us; it enables us to learn even from those who seem to be too captious to teach, or too malevolent to be even wise. The humble mind has all the wisdom of the ages as its possession, and all the folly of fools as an invaluable warning.

Secondly, by pride comes nothing but strife,† and he loveth transgression that loveth strife; he that raiseth high his gate, *i. e.*, builds a lofty house, seeketh destruction.‡ It is the pride of monarchs and nations which produces war; the sense of personal dignity which is always sudden and quick in quarrel; the feeling of swollen self-importance which is afraid to make peace lest it should suffer in the eyes of men. And in the affairs of private life our pride, rather than our sense of right, usually creates, fosters, and embitters divisions, alienations, and quarrels. "I am perfectly innocent," says Pride; "I bear no resentment, but it would be absurd for me to make the first advances; when those advances are made, I am willing to forgive and to forget." "I think I am innocent," says Humility, "but then I may have been very provoking, and I may have given offence without knowing it; in any case, I may as well make an offer of apology; if I fail, I fail."

Nor is this the only way in which strife grows out of pride, for "by pride comes *nothing but* strife." All the foolish extravagances of social competition are to be traced to the same source. One man "raises high his gate," builds a fine house, and furnishes it in the best way. He flatters himself that his "little place" is tolerably comfortable, and he speaks with some contemptuous pity of all his neighbours' houses. Immediately all his neighbours enviously strive to excel him, and pride vies with pride, heart-burnings are many and bitter. Then there comes on the scene one who in wealth and ostentation of wealth exceeds them all, and the first man is now racked with envy, strains every nerve to outdo the insolent intruder, suffers his debts to far exceed his assets, and soon incurs the inevitable crash. That is how pride works in one very obvious department of social life. But it is the same in every other department. Who can calculate the miseries which are produced by the grotesque assumptions of poor mortals to be superior to their fellow-mortals? Parents

will mar their children's lives by refusing their consent to marriages with those who, for some perfectly artificial reason, are held to be beneath them; or will still more fatally ruin their children's happiness by insisting on alliances with those who are held to be above them. Those who prosper in the world will heartlessly turn their backs on relations who have not prospered. Men who earn their living in one particular way, or in no particular way, will loftily condemn those who earn their living in another particular way. Those who dress in the fashion will look in another direction when they pass people who do not dress in the fashion, though they may be under deep obligations to these slighted friends. This is all the work of pride. Then there are the sneers, the taunts, the sarcasms, the proud man's scorn, like "a rod in the mouth" indeed,* which falls with cutting cruelty on many tender backs and gentle faces. The overbearing temper of one who "bears himself insolently and is confident"† will sometimes take all the sweetness out of life for some delicate woman, or shrinking child, or humble dependent, bruising the poor spirit, rending the terrified heart, unnerving and paralysing the weaker and more helpless nature.

From first to last this haughty spirit is a curse and a torment to every one, and not least to itself. It is like a cold and biting wind. It is like an erosive acid. It produces more sorrows than the north wind produces icicles. It mars more lives than anyone but God is able to count. It breaks the hearts of the humble, it excites the passions of the wrathful, it corrupts the conduct of the weak. It ruins children, it poisons social life, it inflames differences, and plunges great nations into war.

If it were permitted to enter heaven, it would turn heaven into hell, it would range the hosts of heaven in envious cliques and mutually scornful castes, it would make the meek spirit sigh for earth, where there was at least the hope of death, and would turn the very presence and power of God into a constant object of envy and an incentive to rebellion. It is obvious, then, that pride cannot enter heaven, and the proud man, if he is to enter, must humble himself as a little child.

Third—and this leads us to contemplate the worst result of Pride and the loveliest outcome of Humility—"Every one that is proud of heart is an abomination to the Lord; though hand join in hand he shall not be unpunished."‡ "The Lord will root up the house of the proud; but He will establish the border of the widow."§ In a word, Pride is hateful to God, who resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. The proud man, whether he knows it or not, comes into direct conflict with God: he may not intend it, but he is pitting himself against the Omnipotent. That hardening of the face is a sign of evil, just as the patient humble ordering of the way is a sign of righteousness.¶ In that high look and proud heart there seems to be something dignified, flashing, and luminous; it is undoubtedly much admired by men. By God it is not admired; it is regarded merely as the lamp of the wicked, and as sin.¶¶ The light, such as it is, comes from hell; it is the same light

* This is an addition of the LXX. to xiii. 13, and may represent an original Hebrew text. For the idea cf. Eccles. x. 25, "Unto the servant that is wise shall they that are free do service."

† Prov. xiii. 10.

‡ Prov. xvii. 19.

* Prov. xiv. 3.

† Prov. xiv. 16.

‡ Prov. xvi. 5.

§ Prov. xv. 25.

¶ Prov. xxi. 29.

¶¶ Prov. xxi. 4.

that burned on the faces of the apostate angels "o'erwhelmed with floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire." The proud man dares the thunderbolts of God. He scorns men whom he sees, and in doing so he scorns God whom he has not seen; the men whom he consciously scorns cannot, but the God whom he unwittingly scorns will, take vengeance upon him. He has hardened his heart, he has grown great in his own eyes, he has despised the creatures made in God's image; he will suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy.

On the other hand, by humility men learn to know and to fear the Lord.* God reveals Himself to the humble heart, not as a King of Terrors, but kind and good, with healing in His wings, leading the contrite spirit to implicit trust in Himself, and "whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."† When we realise this we cannot wonder that so few people seem to know God; men are too proud; they think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, and consequently they do not think at all of Him; they receive honour one of another, and eagerly desire such honour, and consequently they cannot believe in Him, for to believe in Him implies the desire of no honour except such as comes from Him.

It is a strange truth that God should dwell in a human heart at all, but it is almost self-evident that if He is to dwell in any human heart it must be in one which has been emptied of all pride, one which has, as it were, thrown down all the barriers of self-importance, and laid itself open to the incoming Spirit. If we cling to ever so little of our natural egotism; if we dwell on any imagined excellence, purity, or power of our own; if we are conscious of any elation, any springing sense of merit, which would set us, in our own judgment, on some equality with God,—how could the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity enter in? That thought of vanity would seek to divide our nature with Him, would enter into negotiations for a joint occupation, and the insulted Spirit of God would depart.

If in ordinary human affairs "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility;"‡ if even in our dealings with one another happiness and success and prosperity depend on the cultivation of a modest spirit, how much more when we come to deal with God must haughtiness appear the presage of destruction, and humility the only way of approach to Him!

It is not possible to think too humbly of yourself, it is not possible to be too lowly, you cannot abase yourself too much in His Holy Presence. Your only attitude is that of Moses when he took off his shoes because the place he stood on was holy ground; or that of Isaiah when he cried out that he was "a man of unclean lips." To those who know you your humiliations may sound excessive,—as we are told the disciples of St. Francis remonstrated with him for his self-depreciation §—but not to God or to your own

heart. And He, if He has set His love upon you, and purposes to make you a temple for His indwelling, will use method after method of humbling you to prepare for His entrance. Again and again you will say, Surely now I am low enough, am I not humbled in the dust? But His hand will still be upon you, and He will show you heads of pride which have yet to be levelled down. In the last humbling you will find that there is rising within you a certain pride in the humility itself. That also will He subdue. And some day, if you are willing, you shall be lowly enough for the Most High to dwell in, humble enough to offer a perpetual incense of praise.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INWARD UNAPPROACHABLE LIFE.

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy."—PROV. xiv. 10.

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth is heaviness."—PROV. xiv. 13.

"Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the encircling flow,
And then their endless bounds they know."

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

WE know each other's appearance, it is true, but there, for the most part, our mutual knowledge ceases. Some of us unveil nothing of ourselves to anyone; some of us unveil a little to all; some a good deal to a few; but none of us can unveil all even to the most intimate friend. It is possible to live on terms of complete confidence and even close intimacy with a person for many years, to become thoroughly acquainted with his habits, his turns of expression, his modes of thought, to be able to say with a certain infallibility what course he will take in such and such circumstances—and yet to find by some chance uplifting of a curtain in his life that he cherished feelings which you never even suspected, suffered pains of which you had seen no trace, and enjoyed pleasures which never came to any outward expression.

How true this is we realise at once if we turn inwards and review all the thoughts which chase each other through our brain, and all the emotions which throb in our heart for a single day, and then deduct those which are known to any human being, known or even suspected; the sum total we find is hardly affected at all. We are quite startled to discover how absolutely alone we live, how impossible it is for a stranger, or even for an intimate friend, to meddle with more than a fragment of our inner life. This is not because we have any wish to conceal, but rather because we are not able to reveal, our silent unseen selves; it is not because others would not like to know, but because they have not the instruments to investigate, that within us which we on our part are quite helpless to express.

For instance, "the desire accomplished is sweet to the soul,"* yet no one can know how sweet but he who cherished the desire. When

the worst of men, for others have not had such favours at His hands."

* Prov. xiii. 19.

* Prov. xxii. 4. The probable rendering is, "The outcome of humility is the fear of the Lord, riches, honour, and life."

† Prov. xvi. 20.

‡ Prov. xviii. 12.

§ The answer of the saint was very characteristic. Could he really believe that he was so vile as he said, when he compared himself with others who were obviously worse? "Ah," he said, "it is when I recount all God's exceptional mercies to me that I seem to myself

a man has laboured for many years to secure an adequate maintenance for his family, and at length finds himself in easy circumstances, with his children growing up around him well and happy, no one besides himself can in the least gauge the sense of satisfaction, contentment, and gratitude which animates his heart, because no one can realise without actual experience the long and anxious days, the sickening fears, the blighted hopes, the rigorous sacrifices, through which he passed to attain his end. Or, when an artist has been toiling for many years to realise upon canvas a vision of beauty which floats before the inward eye, and at last succeeds, by some happy combination of colours, or by some dexterous sweep of the brush, or by some half-inspired harmony of form and composition, in actually bodying forth to the senses that which has haunted his imagination, it is hopeless for any one else to understand the thrilling joy, the light-hearted ecstasy, which are hidden rather than expressed by the quiet flush on the cheek and the sparkling glance of the eye.

The mystical joy of a love which has just won an answering love; the deep-toned joy of the mother in the dawning life of her child; the joy of the poet who feels all the beauty of the earth and the sky pulsing through his nerves and raising his heart to quick intuitions and melodious numbers; the joy of the student, when the luminous outlines of truth begin to shape themselves before his mind in connected form and startling beauty; the joy of one who has toiled for the restoration of lost souls, and sees the fallen and degraded awaking to a new life, cleansed, radiant, and strong; the joy of the martyr of humanity, whose dying moments are lit with visions, and who hears through the mysterious silences of death the voices of those who will one day call him blessed,—joys like these may be described in words, but they who experience them know that the words are, relatively speaking, meaningless, and they who do not experience them can form no conception of them. "When the desire cometh it is a tree of life,"* which suddenly springs up in the garden of the heart, puts forth its jubilant leaves of healing, flashes with white wings of scented blossom, and droops with its full offering of golden fruit, as if by magic, and we are surprised ourselves that those around us do not see the wonder, do not smell the perfume, do not taste the fruit: we alone can sit under its branches, we alone can catch the murmur of the wind, the music of achievement, in its leaves.

But this thought becomes very pathetic when we think of the heart's bitterness, which the heart alone can know,—the hope deferred which makes it sick,† the broken spirit which dries up the bones,‡ the spirit which for so long bore a man's infirmity, and then at last broke because it could bear no more, and became itself intolerable.§ The circumstances of a man's life do not give us any clue to his sorrows; the rich have troubles which to the poor would seem incredible, and the poor have troubles which their poverty does not explain. There are little constitutional ailments, defects in the blood, slight deformities, unobserved disabilities, which fill the heart with a bitterness untold and unimaginable. There are crosses of the affections,

disappointments of the ambitions; there are frets of the family, worries of business; there are the haunting Furies of past indiscretions, the pitiless reminders of half-forgotten pledges. There are weary doubts and misgivings, suspicions and fears, which poison all inward peace, and take light out of the eye and elasticity out of the step. These things the heart knows, but no one else knows.

What adds to the pathos is that these sorrows are often covered with laughter as with a veil, and no one suspects that the end of all this apparently spontaneous mirth is to be heaviness.* The bright talker, the merry jester, the singer of the gay song, goes home when the party separates, and on his threshold he meets the veiled sorrow of his life, and plunges into the chilly shadow in which his days are spent.

The bitterness which surges in our brother's heart would probably be unintelligible to us if he revealed it; but he will not reveal it, he cannot. He will tell us some of his troubles, many of them, but the bitterness he must keep to himself.

How strange it seems! Here are men and women around us who are unfathomable; the heart is a kind of infinite; we skim the surface, we cannot sound the depths. Here is a merry heart which makes a cheerful countenance, but here is a countenance unclouded and smiling which covers a spirit quite broken.† Here is a cheerful heart which enjoys a continual feast,‡ and finds in its own merriment a medicine for its troubles;§ but we cannot find the secret of the cheerfulness, or catch the tone of the merriment, any more than we can comprehend what it is which is making all the days of the afflicted evil.||

We are confined as it were to the superficial effects, the lights and shadows which cross the face, and the feelings which express themselves in the tones of the voice. We can guess a little of what lies underneath, but our guesses are as often wrong as right. The index is disconnected, perhaps purposely, from the reality. Sometimes we know that a heart is bitter, but do not even surmise the cause; more often it is bitter and we do not know it. We are veiled to one another; we know our own troubles, we feel our own joys, that is all we can say.

And yet the strangest thing of all is that we hunger for sympathy: we all want to see that light in the eyes of our friends which rejoices the heart, and to hear those good things which make the bones fat.¶ Our joy is eager to disclose itself, and often shrinks back appalled to find that our companions did not understand it, but mistook it for an affectation or an illusion. Our sorrow yearns for comprehension, and is constantly doubled in quantity and intensity by finding that it cannot explain itself or become intelligible to others. This rigid and necessary isolation of the human heart, along with such a deep-rooted desire for sympathy, is one of the most perplexing paradoxes of our nature; and though we know well that it is a fact, we are constantly re-discovering it with a fresh surprise. Forgetting it, we assume that every one will know how we need sympathy, though we have never hung out the signals of distress, and have even presented a most repellent front to all ad-

* Prov. xiii. 14.
† Prov. xiii. 12.

‡ Prov. xvii. 22.
§ Prov. xviii. 14.

* Prov. xiv. 13.
† Prov. xv. 13.
‡ Prov. xv. 15b.

§ Prov. xvii. 22.
|| Prov. xv. 15.
¶ Prov. xv. 30.

vances; forgetting it, we give expression to our joy, singing songs to heavy hearts, and disturbing others by unseasonable mirth, as if no icy channels separated us from our neighbours' hearts, making our gladness seem frigid and our merriment discordant before it reaches their ears. Yet the paradox forces itself on our attention again; human hearts are isolated, alone, without adequate communication, and essentially uncommunicative, yet all of them eagerly desiring to be understood, to be searched, to be fused. Is it a paradox which admits of any explanation? Let us see.

It has been very truly said, "Man is only partially understood, or pitied, or loved by man; but for the fulness of these things he must go to some far-off country." In proportion as we are conscious of being misunderstood, and of being quite unable to satisfy our longing for sympathy and comprehension at human fountains, we are impelled by a spiritual instinct to ask for God; the thought arises in us that He, though He be very far off, must, as our Creator, understand us; and as this thought takes possession of the heart a tremulous hope awakes that perhaps He is not very far off. There lie before us now some beautiful sayings which are partly the expression of this human conviction, and seem partly to be inspired by the Divine response to it. "If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this man; doth not He that weigheth the heart consider, and he that keepeth the soul, doth not He know?"* "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them."† How obvious is the inference that the Maker of the ear and the eye hears those silent things which escape the ear itself, and sees those recesses of the human heart which the human eye is never able to search! "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good."‡ "Sheol and Abaddon are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men."§ He sees in the heart what the heart itself does not see. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits."|| In fact, the spirit of man itself, the consciousness which clears into self-consciousness, and becomes in moral matters conscience, this "spirit, is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of the belly,"¶ so that a "man's goings are of the Lord;" and he is often moved by this indwelling spirit and guided by this mysterious lamp in a way which "he can hardly understand."**

This intimacy of knowledge is not without its most solemn, and even terrible, side. It means of course that the Lord knows "the thoughts of the righteous which are just, and the counsels of the wicked which are deceit."†† It means that out of His minute and infallible knowledge He will render to every man according to his works, judging with faultless accuracy according to that "desire of a man which is the measure of his kindness," recognising the "wish of the poor man," which, though he has not power to perform it, is more valuable than the boasted performances of those who never act up to their power of service.‡‡ It means that

"the Lord trieth the hearts just as the fining pot tries the silver, and the furnace the gold."* It means* that in thought of such a searching eye, such a comprehensive understanding on the part of the Holy One, none of us can ever say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin."†

All this it means, and there must be some terror in the thought; but the terror, as we begin to understand, becomes our greatest comfort; for He who thus understands us is the Holy One. Terrible would it be to be searched and known in this minute way by one who was not holy, by one who was morally indifferent, by one who took a curious interest in studying the pathology of the conscience, or by one who had a malignant delight in cherishing vices and rewarding evil thoughts. Though we sometimes desire human sympathy in our corrupt passions and unhallowed desires, and are eager for our confederates in sin to understand our pleasures and our pains,—and out of this desire, it may be observed, comes much of our base literature, and all of our joining with a company to do evil,—yet after all we only desire this confederacy on the understanding that we can reveal as little, and conceal as much, as we like; we should no longer be eager to share our feelings if we understood that in the first contact our whole heart would be laid bare, and all the intricacies of our mind would be explored. We must desire that He who is to search us through and through should be holy, and even though He be strict to mark iniquity, should be one who tries the heart in order to purify it. And when we are awakened and understand, we learn to rejoice exceedingly that He who comes with His lamp to search the inmost recesses of our nature is He who can by no means tolerate iniquity, or pass over transgression, but must burn as a mighty fire wherever He finds the fuel of sin to burn.

Have we not found a solution of the paradox? The human heart is isolated; it longs for sympathy, but cannot obtain it; it seems to depend for its happiness on being comprehended, but no fellow-creature can comprehend it; it knows its own bitterness, which no one else can know; it broods over its own joys, but no one can share them. Then it makes discovery of the truth that God can give it what it requires, that He fully understands, that He can enter into all these silent thoughts and unobserved emotions, that He can offer an unfailing sympathy and a faultless comprehension. In its need the lonely heart takes refuge in Him, and makes no murmur that His coming requires the searching, the chastisement, and the purging of sin.

No human being needs to be misunderstood or to suffer under the sense of misunderstanding. Let him turn at once to God. It is childish to murmur against our fellows, who only treat us as we treat them; they do not comprehend us, neither do we comprehend them; they do not give us, as we think, our due, neither do we give them theirs; but God comprehends both them and us, and He gives to them and to us accurately what is due.

No human being is compelled to bear his bitterness alone, for though he cannot tell it or explain to his fellows, he can tell it, and he need

* Prov. xxiv. 12, marginal reading.

† Prov. xx. 12.

‡ Prov. xv. 3.

§ Prov. xv. 11.

|| Prov. xvi. 2, rep. xxi. 2.

¶ Prov. xx. 27.

** Prov. xx. 24.

†† Prov. xii. 5.

‡‡ Prov. xix. 22.

* Prov. xvii. 3.

† Prov. xx. 9.

CHAPTER XV.

A PASSIONATE DISPOSITION.

not explain it, to God. Is the bitterness an outcome of sin, as most of our bitterness is? Is it the bitterness of a wounded egotism, or of a remorseful conscience, or of spiritual despondency? Or is it the bitterness which springs from the cravings of an unsatisfied heart, the thirst for self-completeness, the longing for a perfect love? In either case God is perfectly able and willing to meet the need. He delights to turn His knowledge of our nature to the purpose of cleansing and transforming the sinful heart: "By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many," He says. He is ready, too, to shed abroad His own rich love in our hearts, leaving no room for the hankering desire, and creating the peace of a complete fulfilment.

No human being need imagine that he is unappreciated; his fellow-men may not want him, but God does. "The Lord hath made every thing for His own purpose, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."* He apprehends all that is good in your heart, and will not suffer a grain of pure gold to be lost; while He sees too every particle of evil, and will not suffer it to continue. He knows where the will is set upon righteousness, where the desire is turned towards Him, and will delicately encourage the will, and bountifully satisfy the desire. He sees, too, when the will is hardened against Him, and the desire is set upon iniquity, and He is mercifully resolved to visit the corrupt will and the evil desire with "eternal destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His might,"—mercifully, I say, for no torture could be more terrible and hopeless than for the evil man to live eternally in the presence of God.

Finally, no human being need be without a sharer of his joy: and that is a great consideration, for joy unshared quickly dies, and is from the beginning haunted by a vague sense of a shadow that is falling upon it. In the heart of the Eternal dwells eternal joy. All loveliness, all sweetness, all goodness, all truth, are the objects of His happy contemplation; therefore every really joyful heart has an immediate sympathiser in God; and prayer is quite as much the means by which we share our gladness as the vehicle by which we convey our sorrows to the Divine heart. Is it not beautiful to think of all those timid and retiring human spirits, who cherish sweet ecstasies, and feel glowing exultations, and are frequently caught up in heavenly raptures, which the shy countenance and stammering tongue never could record? They feel their hearts melt with joy in the prospect of broad skies and sunlit fields, in the sound of morning birds and rushing streams; they hear great choirs of happy spirits chanting perpetually in heaven and in earth, and on every side of their obscure way open vistas of inspired vision. No stranger meddles with their joy, or even knows of it. God is not a stranger; to Him they tell it all, with Him they share it, and their joy is part of the joy of the Eternal.

* Prov. xvi. 4. This strange saying, interpreted in the light of the Gospel, cannot mean that wicked people are actually made in order to exhibit the righteousness and judgment of God in their punishment on the day of wrath, though that was probably the thought in the mind of the writer. But it reminds us of the truth that every human being is a direct concern of the Maker, who has His own wise purpose to fulfil in even the most inconsiderable and apparently abortive life.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but a grievous word stirreth up anger." In the LXX. there is another clause inserted at the beginning. Ὁργή ἀπόλλυσι καὶ φρονίμους, ἀπόκρισις δὲ ὑποπίπτουσα ἀποστρέφει θυμόν, λόγος δὲ λυπηρὸς ἐγείρει ὀργάς.—PROV. xv. 1.

"A meek tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit."—PROV. xv. 4.

"A wrathful man stirreth up contention; but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife."—PROV. xv. 18.

BAD temper causes more suffering than the modified severity with which we judge it would imply. It is in a home what toothache is in the body: the pain is insufferable and yet it is not treated as serious. A passionate man or woman spreads a pervading sense of irritation in the house or in the workshop, and all the other occupants of the place are as if they dwelt in a country subject to earthquakes; life for them is divided between anxiety to avoid the explosion and a painful effort to repair its devastations. We are not severe enough on these faults of temper in ourselves or in others; we are too prone to excuse them on the ground of temperament, as if we were no more responsible for outbreaks of passion than for the colour of our hair or the tone of our complexion. It will, therefore, do us good to see what the Wise Man says on the subject.

First of all, we have several proverbs which remind us how irritating an angry disposition is: it is the constant occasion of strife; it grows itself by each fresh annoyance that it gives, so that it quickly becomes ungovernable, and thus "the wrathful man aboundeth in transgression."* A fierce ungovernable temper will set a whole city in a flame,† and lead to disasters of national and even world-wide extent. However peaceful and happy a community may be, if a choleric man enters it, signs of combustion will soon begin to appear. There are always hot embers which wise men are earnestly trying to damp down,‡ there are trivial irritations, petty annoyances, incipient envies, which are only too easily inflamed; the cool spirit and the conciliatory word and the ingenious diversion of thought will keep the embers choked until the heat dies away, but "as coals to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife."§

We may well be cautioned to give such an inflammatory character a wide berth: "Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."¶ Even a sweet temper may be chafed into peevishness by constant irritations; with passionate people the gentlest become passionate in self-defense. When this unbridled, ill-disciplined nature approaches, we should avoid it as if it were a bear robbed of her whelps, for such is this fool in his folly.||

This leads us to notice that anger and folly are very closely allied. The passionate nature is constantly betrayed into actions which sober wisdom must condemn,—“He that is soon angry will deal foolishly. . . . He that is slow to anger is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.”¶¶ Any one with a grain of

* Prov. xxix. 22.

† Prov. xxix. 8.

‡ Prov. xxvi. 21.

§ Prov. xxii. 12.

¶ Prov. xvii. 12.

¶¶ Prov. xiv. 17, 29.

sense will put a check upon his rising temper; his discretion makes him slow to anger, and he never feels to have won such true glory as when he bridles his wrath and passes by an offence without a sign of annoyance or resentment.* You may almost be sure that a man is wise if you find that he has a cool spirit.† When you see a person who cautiously avoids the ground where strife is apt to be excited, and builds his house on a spot where contention is impossible, you instinctively respect him, for you know it betokens wisdom; but when you see a man always getting involved in quarrels, always showing his teeth,‡ you rightly conclude that he is a fool.§ “A fool uttereth all his anger: but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it.”|| If we are naturally irritable or splenetic, wisdom will incline us to avoid occasions which excite us, and to keep a watchful guard over our spirits where the occasions are inevitable. If we neglect such precautions we shall justly be counted fools, and the consequent outbreaks of passion will lead us into fresh exhibitions of folly, and more completely justify the harsh judgment which has been passed upon us.

But not the least sign of the folly which is inherent in passion is the shocking effect which it has upon those who give way to it. As the LXX. version says at the beginning of this chapter, “Anger destroys even the wise.” And one whose spirit is without restraint is forcibly compared to a city that is broken down and has no wall;¶ every foe can go up and possess it, every thoughtless child can fling a firebrand into it; the barest word, hint, smirk, shrug of the shoulders, any unintentional slight or reflection, nay, even silence itself, will suddenly set the powder-train on fire, and the consequent explosion will be more destructive to the city itself than to those who are outside. “A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty,” and, poor fellow, perhaps it is best that he should, for if you deliver him from the consequence of his passion, that will only encourage him in further outbreaks, and so he will become worse, and your deliverance will be an endless task.**

Our great King Henry II. was subject to fits of uncontrollable passion, in which he would roll on the floor and bite the dust, impotent with rage; and all the sorrows of his life and reign, falling heavily upon him in his later years, were occasioned by this unhappy temper. At the present time we are told that the Chinese frequently indulge in fits of passionate wrath, which react terribly upon their health and make them physically ill. The wrathful man does mischief to many, but his wrath is like an old

* Prov. xix. 11. “When Lanfranc was prior of Bec he ventured to oppose Duke William’s Flemish marriage. In a wild burst of wrath William bade his men burn a manor house of Bec and drive out Lanfranc from Norman ground. He came to see the work done, and found Lanfranc hobbling on a lame horse toward the frontier. He angrily bade him hasten, and Lanfranc replied by a cool promise to go faster out of his land if he would give him a better steed. ‘You are the first criminal that ever asked gifts from his judge,’ retorted William, but a burst of laughter told that the wrath had gone, and William and Lanfranc drew together again.”—Green’s “Conquest of England,” p. 551.

† Prov. xvii. 27.

‡ This word הַתְּנִיעַ, which only occurs here (xx. 3) and in xvii. 14 and xviii. 1, would seem from the cognate root in Arab. and Syr. to mean “setting the teeth together,” which is a much more vivid and specific idea than quarrelling.

§ Prov. xx. 3.

|| Prov. xxix. 11.

¶ Prov. xxv. 28.

** Prov. xix. 19.

arquebus, which, when it is fired, hurts the bearer almost as much as the enemy. It may fail to hit the mark, but it is sure to knock down the marksman.

Probably here the plea will be urged that we cannot help our temper, and it may be said, the suffering which it brings upon us is the best proof that it is an infirmity rather than a vice. Now this excuse cannot be allowed to pass; a certain good bishop on one occasion hearing it urged, in extenuation of a man’s conduct, that he had such an unfortunate temper, exclaimed, “Temper, why temper is nine-tenths of Christianity!” If we are not to be blamed for bad temper, then there is no fault or defect or vice which we cannot shift off our own shoulders and lay to the charge of our constitution. But our constitution is no excuse for sin; the most that can be urged is that if we are constitutionally inclined to any particular sin we must seek for a special strength to fortify us against it. If in building a city an ancient engineer had one side more exposed than the rest, protected by no natural escarpments of rock or bends of the river, there he would concentrate all his skill to make the wall impregnable. If you find that one of your bodily organs betrays a tendency to disease, you are careful to avoid the exposure, or the strain, or the derangement, which would unfavourably affect it. If your lungs are delicate you shun fogs and chills; if your heart is feeble you are careful to avoid any sudden excitement; if your eyes are weak you notice very particularly by what light you read, and are sensitive to the least weariness in those delicate instruments. In the same way, if your special infirmity lies in the temper; if you are easily provoked, or apt to fall into sullenness; if a sudden annoyance excites an uncontrollable passion in your mind, or drops into your heart seeds of bitterness which rapidly grow and become ineradicable; you have your work cut out for you; your daily task will be to avoid the things which produce such ill effects, and to cultivate the habits which lessen the virulent action of these irritant poisons. Few of us realise how wonderfully our constitution is subjected to our own control, and how much we ourselves have to do with the making of it.

You know, we will suppose, that you are easily entangled in a quarrel; you must then prepare yourself before you go out into the business of the day.—“Go not forth hastily to strive, lest . . . What wilt thou do in the end, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame?”* This realisation of what will probably result from your hasty temper will act as a check upon it, and you will be inclined, if you have any ground of offence against your neighbour, to go quietly and debate it with him alone.† Or if the contention has been sprung upon you unawares, take care that over the floodgates of your passion has been written this wholesome warning, “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before there be any setting of the teeth.”‡ Knowing your danger you must summon to your aid all the heroism of your nature, and remember that this is the time and the occasion to exercise it. Others have to win their spurs on the battlefield; this is your battlefield, and here your spurs are to be won. Others have to win kingdoms

* Prov. xxv. 8.

† Prov. xxv. 9.

‡ Prov. xvii. 14. See note † preceding.

or capture cities; here is the kingdom where you are to reign, this is the city which you are to take. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."*

Get at some grand root principle like this: "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all transgressions."† Ah, yes, if you are disposed to be angry with men, fill your spirit with love to them; that will soothe your irritable nerves, and will flow over their transgressions so that they cease to annoy you because you cease to see them; when we are fervent in love to one another, the love covers a multitude of sins.‡ Where love comes into the soul we are more anxious to convert those who offend us than to be angry with them.§ Love saves us from the self-vaunting which exposes us to the annoyances, and provokes the attacks, of the malignant;|| and it enables us to bear all things, almost without a ruffle or a perturbation. Strange to say, passionate temperaments are often very affectionate; let them cultivate the love in themselves, and it will be the destruction of the evil temper. And where the evil passion comes from a true moroseness, then the fruit can only be destroyed with the root, and the root can only be destroyed when love is shed abroad in the heart.

Or possibly your anger is not of the passionate kind, but rather stern and resentful, arising from an exaggerated sense of self-importance. A meek¶ heart is not wrathful, and it is the life of the flesh; but where meekness fails, envy enters as rottenness of the bones, and with envy, hatred and malice.** A meek¶ tongue not only checks wrath in itself, but soothes it in others; it is a tree of life, just as perverseness in it is a breaking of the spirit.†† If you thought less of yourself, you would not so frequently feel your dignity offended; you would not require this weapon of wrath always at hand to leap forth and avenge your outraged pride. From the meek heart vengeance dies away. "Say not thou, I will recompense evil: wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee."‡‡ You are sudden and quick in quarrel, because you think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; and because others do not share your opinion of yourself, you must summon all your artillery of wrath to make them bend the stubborn knee and offer you the due tribute of deference or admiration. For if bad temper comes often from constitutional infirmities which must be carefully watched and controlled, it comes just as frequently from that subtle enemy of our souls, Pride.

But now we come to the important question. How are our evil passions to be cured? And we must frankly admit that our book has no suggestions to offer. Its tendency is to regard our disposition as fixed, our temperament as irreversible, our character as unchangeable. It points out with crystalline clearness the mischief of wrath and the merit of meekness, but it never so much as entertains the possibility

that the wrathful man might become meek, the passionate man patient and gentle.

We have in our analysis of the evil observed that in order to avoid it we must be vigilant to mark and control the first risings of passion; we have noted too that if we were truly loving, anger would die away, and if we were truly humble, the resentments which stir our anger would have nothing to feed upon. But the main difficulty is, how are we to become watchful, since it is the special characteristic of a hasty temper that it overpowers our sentinels before it assaults the city? And how are we to become loving and humble? It is only throwing the difficulty back a step or two, and showing us how insuperable it is, to say that we must become good in one direction in order to escape the evil which lies in another direction. It does not help the Ethiopian to become a European to tell him that Europeans have white skins instead of black; nor can a leopard change his kind because he learns that his spots are his distinctive mark.

There must be a deeper message than that of the Proverbs to solve this practical difficulty; though we may well feel that the book is invaluable in setting before us how greatly we need a deeper message. No infirmity of human nature proves more forcibly than the one with which we are dealing that "some thing out of Nature" must come in if a change is to be effected. "We must be born again;" it is only a regenerate heart which will have the impulse and the ability to watch against the eruption of a passionate disposition. It is only a regenerate heart which can love in such a way that irritations cease to fret, or that can be humble enough to escape the exasperations of wounded pride. Many of us think lightly of these particular faults, and scarcely designate ill-temper a sin at all; but however we may regard it, the wrathful disposition requires nothing less than Christ, and Him crucified, to cure it, and God deemed it worth while to send His only-begotten Son in order to effect the cure. In Christ Jesus are forces, moral and spiritual, strong enough to control the most uncontrollable rage and to soothe the most irritable temper; and as we can point to no other power which is sufficient for such a change, so few things manifest so strikingly the blessed presence of Christ in the heart as the softened and gentle temper, the removal of all those explosive elements which before He entered were constantly causing trouble and suffering and alarm.

Here is an example taken from a country where the knowledge of the Gospel is comparatively recent. A Japanese gentleman living at Fujioka, who was much addicted to the use of *sake*, a strong intoxicant, which produced the worst results on his temper, was led through reading a tract on the subject to renounce the evil habit, and to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour. In proportion as the Divine Power mastered him he became a new creature. One day his wife had been careless about some silkworms' eggs, which had become partially destroyed, and she trembled with fear that he would become enraged when he discovered it, and punish her severely, as he had done before. But to her great astonishment, when he found out what had happened he remained perfectly calm, and then said, "We can distribute them among our poor neighbours, and so they will

* Prov. xvi. 32.

† Prov. x. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

§ 1 Peter iv. 8.

|| James v. 20.

¶ This meaning of מַלְּכָה, as was observed in Lecture XII., p. 491, seems to yield the best sense in these two passages (*cf.* xii. 18; xiii. 17), as in Eccl. x. 3, "gentleness allayeth great offences," which is a good commentary on our text.

** Prov. xiv. 30.

†† Prov. xv. 4.

‡‡ Prov. xx. 22.

have a larger crop. Thus it will perhaps be better than if we had sold them and taken all the money ourselves." His wife was so impressed with this change of character that she said, "This is the result of Christianity; I want to become a Christian too." She sought and found, and her whole family sought and found. And not only so, but the neighbours were struck by this "living epistle," and shortly afterwards when the missionary went to Fujioka there were ten persons awaiting baptism. At the present time a good Christian Church is growing up in the place.*

Where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns evil passions subside and die away. "Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly of heart." "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." One who is born again, one whose life is hidden with Christ in God, is necessarily meek, meek as the Lord Himself: not, as we well know, devoid of noble anger or fiery indignation, for indeed it is only the meek heart from which all personal pretensions have been eradicated, and to which no personal feeling can be attributed, that is able to pour out vials of wrath, undeterred and unquenchable, upon all that is base and mean, impure and false, corrupt and cruel; but meek in this beautiful sense, that it never takes offence, never suspects evil, never resents any wrong except moral wrong that is done to others, or spiritual wrong done to God. All the tinder on which angry passions feed has been removed by the Cross of Christ, and therefore the only wrath which can be entertained is such wrath as God feels,—the deep intense glow of consuming indignation against sin.

For our evil tempers, then, our passion, our wrath, our sullen pride, our fretful irritability, our outbreaks of sarcasm, our malignant sneers, there is only one possible cure; we must bring the heart, out of which all the evil comes, to Jesus Christ, that He may create it anew; we must accept our failures as evidence of an imperfect surrender, and come afresh with a more insistent cry, and a more perfect faith, that He may reign in our hearts as undisputed Lord, checking, subduing, warring down, every evil motion there.

CHAPTER XVI.

A JUST BALANCE.

"A just balance and scales are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are His work."—PROV. xvi. 11.

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight."—PROV. xi. 1.

"Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord."—PROV. xx. 10.

"Divers weights are an abomination to the Lord; and a false balance is not good."—PROV. xx. 23.

THE sixteenth chapter opens—and we may annex to it the last verse of chap. xv.—with a series of sayings which are grouped together on the principle that the name of the Lord occurs in each. There is no obvious connection between the successive verses, and some of them have been already touched on in previous lectures, but it will be worth while to glance at the series as a whole.

The Lord's presence must be recognised and revered before we can make any progress in

wisdom, and in His presence we must humble ourselves before we can expect any honour.* We are entirely dependent upon Him; although our hearts may form plans, we cannot utter anything aright unless He controls our tongue.† However self-satisfied we may be with our own ways, however convinced we may be of our own innocence, He weighs our spirit, and will often find a guilt which our conceit ignores, an impurity which our vanity would hide.‡ We should do well, therefore, to commit all our works to Him, in order that He may revise and correct our purposes and establish those which are good.§ We cannot think too much of His all-inclusive wisdom and knowledge; everything lies in His hands and is designed for His ends; even the wicked who rebel against Him—men like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Judas, Elymas—must in their inevitable punishment glorify His righteousness and truth.|| For punishment is absolutely sure; the proud are an abomination to Him, and although they combine to oppose His will and to escape the penalty, it will be quite in vain.¶ On the other hand, where He sees mercy and truth He will purge iniquity, and when men fear Him they will depart from evil.** When His smile is upon them and He approves their ways, He will make their path plain, pacifying their enemies, and making their hearts glad.†† He will guide them, even directing their steps, in such a manner that their own imperfect counsels shall turn to a happy and successful issue.‡‡ "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." §§ Indeed we cannot exaggerate the minute observation of the Lord; no detail escapes His eye, no event is beyond His control; even what is generally called Chance is but another name for His unmarked and unknown direction; the very lot—that lot which settles contentions and separates the strong|||—cast into the lap is actually disposed by him; ¶¶ much more, therefore, are the deliberate transactions of commerce—those subtle bonds of the cash nexus which twine man to man and nation to nation—under His constant inspection and a subject of His most interested concern,—“a just balance and scales are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are His work.”

It is, then, as part of the Lord's watchful activity and direct, detailed connection with all the affairs of human life, that He is interested in our business and trade. We may notice at once that this is very characteristic of the Old Testament religion. In the Deuteronomic Law it was written: "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great

* Prov. xv. 33.

† Prov. xvi. 1.

‡ Prov. xvi. 2.

§ Prov. xvi. 3.

|| Prov. xvi. 9.

¶ Prov. xvi. 10.

¶¶ Prov. xvi. 20.

||| Prov. xviii. 18.

¶¶ Prov. xvi. 33.

|| Prov. xxi. 4. See note, p. 385.

¶ Prov. xvi. 5.

** Prov. xvi. 6.

†† Prov. xvi. 7.

Cf. Prov. xix. 21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

John Paton, the missionary to the New Hebrides, uncertain whether to go back to Scotland and plead for more missionaries, and receiving no light from human counsel, says, "After many prayers and wrappings and tears, I went alone before the Lord, and on my knees cast lots with a solemn appeal to God, and the answer came 'Go home.' In my heart I believe that . . . the Lord condescended to decide for me the path of duty otherwise unknown; and I believe it the more truly now in view of the aftercome of thirty years of service to Christ that flowed out of the steps then deliberately and devoutly taken." See the "Autobiography," Second Part (Hodder & Stoughton, 1889).

¶¶ Prov. xvi. 33.

* *Missionary Review of the World*, Feb., 1889, p. 143.

and a small. A perfect and a just weight shalt thou have; a perfect and a just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, even all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God."* Again, in the Levitical Law we find: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt."†

The Israelite was encouraged to think that all the work in which he engaged was ordained by, and therefore under the observation of, his God. "Hate not laborious work, neither husbandry which the Most High hath ordained," says Ecclesiasticus.‡ And there is a striking passage in Isaiah where the operations of agriculture are described in detail, and all are attributed to God, who instructs the husbandman aright and teaches him. It all comes from the "Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom."§

But at present we are concerned only with trade as a department of industrial life, and especially with the actual chaffering of exchange, the barter of goods for goods, the weights and measures which settle the quantities, and the rules which must govern all such transactions. We should gather that the commercial fraud of those primitive times took this comparatively simple form: the merchant would have, let us say, a half shekel which came a little short of the regulation weight; or he would have a cubit measure (1 ft. 9 in.) half an inch under a cubit; or he would have a vessel professing to hold a *hin* (i. e., a little more than a gallon), but actually holding a little less than a gallon; or he would have a dry measure, marked as an *ephah* (i. e., about three pecks), but incapable of holding the ostensible quantity. In an ordinary way he would use these inadequate measures, and thus nibble a little from every article which he sold to a customer. But in the event of a purchaser presenting himself who had a fuller knowledge or might conceivably act as an inspector and report the fraud to the judge, there would be a just half shekel weight in the bag, a full cubit rule hidden behind the counter, a *hin* or an *ephah* measure of legal dimensions within easy reach. You may smile at such primitive methods of deception, but it requires many generations for a civilised society to elaborate commercial fraud on the large scale.

Now passing at once to our own times and bringing the truth of our text to illuminate them, I should like to say a little to people engaged in business, whether as employers or employed, whether the business is wholesale or retail. And let me assure you that I am not going to attempt a detailed examination and criticism of your business concerns. Such an attempt would be grossly impertinent, and might well expose me, not only to your indignation, but to your ridicule. No, I do not believe that it is the part of the preacher to meddle with matters which he does not understand; he only discredits his message by affecting an omniscience which he cannot possibly possess. I have no doubt that the youth who has been in a warehouse or behind the counter for six months already knows

more of commercial habits, of trade practices, of the temptations and difficulties which practically press upon people in business, than I know, or am likely to know if I live to twice my present age. I shall not therefore insult you by attempting to point out evils and expose abuses, to denounce particular frauds, and to hold up any special people or classes of people to moral reprobation. My task is quite different; it is this:—I am to remind you, first, that God possesses that omniscience to which I can lay no claim, and therefore is intimately acquainted with all the transactions of your bank, your warehouse, your office, your counter, your workshop; and, secondly, that He regards with intense satisfaction all fair dealing, and with vindictive indignation every fraud, and trick, and lie. And on the strength of this I am to ask you very earnestly to review your lives and your practices in the light of His judgment, and to consider how you may bring all your doings in business into conformity with His will.

Perhaps you will let me, as a man speaking to his fellow-men, as a Christian, I hope, speaking to his fellow-Christians, expand these three points a little.

First. We are all of us tempted to think that a considerable proportion of our life is too insignificant to attract the particular attention of God. We can understand that He takes notice of our entrance into, and our exit from, the world, but we think that between the two limits He leaves us to "devise our own ways." Or possibly we can recognise His interest in the crisis of our life, but are inclined to question His minute care of the common and monotonous routine. He marks what business we enter, but, when we are in it, lets us alone. He is interested in our marriage, but, when we are married, leaves husband and wife to adjust their own relations. Or He marks a large business transaction in which there is room for a really gigantic fraud, but cannot pay any attention to a minute sale over the counter, the trivial adulteration of a common article, the ingenious subterfuge for disposing of a damaged or useless stock. Is not this our unspoken but implicit mode of reasoning? And could anything be more illogical? The Divine Power which would create this infinitely diversified universe must be able to mark every tiniest detail of the tiniest object in it. Great and small are relative terms, and have no significance to Him. Naturalists tell us that in the scale of living creatures, arranged according to size, the common beetle occupies the middle point, the smallest living creature being as much smaller as the largest is larger than it. And yet the microscope, so far from showing that God takes less care with the infinitesimal creations of His hand, rather inclines us to say that the smaller the creature is, the more delicate adjustment, the more exquisite proportions, the more brilliant hues, does it display. Our Lord brought home to us this minuteness of the Divine Mind, this infinite power of embracing the veriest trifles of the creation in His thought and care, by assuring us that not a sparrow falls without His notice and that the hairs of our heads are all numbered.

There is, then, no logical resting-place, when we are thinking of the Mind of God. If He knows us at all, He knows all about us. If He marks what we consider the important things in our life, He marks equally what we consider the

* Deut. xxvi. 13-16.

† Lev. xix. 33, 36.

‡ Eccles. vii. 15.

§ Isa. xxviii. 23-29.

unimportant things. The whole life, with every detail from birth to death, is accurately photographed in the light of His omniscience; and as the exposed plate of the camera receives many details which escape the observation of our eyes, so the smallest and least observed transaction in the daily business, every figure entered truly or falsely in the ledger, every coin dropped justly or dishonestly into the till, every bale, every packet, every thread, every pin, which changes hands in the market, passes at once into the observant and comprehending mind of God.*

Second. But in this exhaustive and detailed knowledge of the way in which you are conducting your business, His warm approval follows everything that is honest and just. His vehement censure lights on all that is dishonest or unjust. It may come as a great comfort to you to know that a little business matter which cost you a considerable struggle the other day was duly noted and recorded by the Lord. I was not present at the time, nor did any one who was near you in the least surmise what was passing. But you suddenly recognised the possibility of making a large profit by simply adopting a very slight subterfuge; what made the case peculiarly difficult was that neighbouring and rival firms to your certain knowledge did the like every day; the innocent faces of wife and children at home seemed to urge you, for what a difference would this sum of money make to their comfort and welfare in the coming year! you weighed the little trick over and over again, and set it now in this light, now in that, until at last the black began to seem grey, and the grey almost white. After all, was it a subterfuge? was it not merely a quite legitimate reserve, an even laudable commercial prudence? And then, as you wavered, some clear light of truth fell upon your mind; you saw distinctly what was the right course, and very quietly you took it; the prospect of gain was surrendered, you saw the advantage pass over to your rival; he availed himself of it, and went to church next Sunday just the same. Sometimes you have wondered whether after all you were not too scrupulous.

Now all *that* God knows; it is His delight; He has recorded it already in His Book, and also in your own moral nature, which is the stronger and the better for it.

On the other hand, it must be a subject of some concern to many that the same all-observing, all-recording Mind regards with hatred all the sharp practices by which in business we deceive and defraud one another. I suppose there is a way of making up books which would pass any accountant in London, and yet would not pass the audit of God. I suppose there are gains which to the average commercial conscience of to-day appear fair enough, and yet to the One who weighs the spirits of men seem to be quite illicit. There must be men who made their money long ago in certain ways best known to themselves, and are now living in great comfort; but all the time in the books of God a terrible

record stands against them, and as the eye of God falls upon those pages, the moan of the ruined, the cry of the fatherless and the widow, and the horrified entreaties of the helpless come up into His ear.

We have no reason for thinking that the unjust balance has become any less abominable to the Lord because the eager and relentless competition of modern industrial life has multiplied, while it has refined, the methods of fraud, and has created a condition of things in which, as so many people urge, questionable practices have become actually necessary for one who would keep his head above water. We have no reason to think that God regards it as at all essential that any of us should keep his head above water. The warm and honourable reception given to Lazarus in heaven, when his head had gone under the waters on earth, might lead us to think that what we call failures here may possibly be regarded as grand successes there. But we have every reason to think that double-dealing, no matter what may be the plea, is abominable in the sight of the Lord.

It is in vain to point to the great prosperity which has fallen to the lot of some whose dishonourable practices have been notorious. It is beyond a doubt that knavery may be successful in its way and a clever rogue may outdistance an honest dullard. The proverb "Honesty is the best policy" is not, as some people seem to think, in the Bible; honesty may or may not be the best policy, according to the object which you have in view. If your object is simply to amass wealth, the saying will read, "Honesty is the best policy; and where it is not, be dishonest." God does not judge in the least by worldly prosperity. From the parable just alluded to one would conclude that it is, in heaven, a certain presumption against a man; there may yet prove to be truth in the hard saying, "He that dies rich is damned." If God hates these questionable practices which are said to exist in modern trade, and if He enters them all in His black books, they who prosper by employing them are none the less failures: their ruin is sure; their remorse will be as inevitable as their recovery will be impossible.

Third. I come therefore now to urge upon all of you that you should order all your business ways as in the sight of God, and concern yourselves chiefly with the thought how they may be in conformity with His holy Will. Do not be content with estimating your conduct by the judgment which other men would pass upon it. While such an estimate might reveal many things which would not pass muster, it is doubtful whether their problematical censure will afford an adequate motive for reform, and it is sure to overlook many of the evils which they are bound to wink at, because their own hands are not clean. Do not be content even with estimating your conduct by the standard of your own unaided conscience. Your conscience may at any given time be in a degraded state; in order to keep it quiet you may have brought it down to the level of your conduct. A thief's conscience seldom troubles him unless his theft is unsuccessful, in which case it reproaches him for not being more careful and more skillful. You may, like St. Paul, know nothing against yourself and yet not be thereby justified. For doubtless most of the evil practices of our time represent a conscience that has been stupefied with

* It seems impossible that a general and perfect morality in business can ever be attained apart from this apprehension of an Omniscient Mind weighing and judging, as well as accurately observing, everything done even in secret. In mediæval Europe, when this faith was practically unquestioned, there was a certain honesty and sincerity in handicrafts and in general dealing, until the Church made the fatal blunder of granting indulgences for men's peccadilloes, and professing to exonerate them from the consequences of the truth which she herself in theory held.

sophistry and deadened with selfishness, so that the worst culprits are the first to put on an air of injured innocence, and those who are least guilty suffer most just because the conscience is still sensitive and has not yet been seared with the usual hot iron.

No, the only safe and effectual method is to bring all your business habits, all the practices of the counter and the counting-house, under the searching eye of the All-seeing One. Unless you realise that He sees and knows, and unless you humbly submit everything to His judgment, you are sure to go wrong; your standard will insensibly fall, and you will insensibly fall away even from the fallen standard. It is said that peculiar difficulties beset you in the present day; it is said that it was never so hard to be straight-forward and above-board in commercial dealings; it is said that the insane Moloch of competition imperatively demands the blood of our youth, and even makes assaults on the established virtues of maturity. It may be so, though we are generally inclined to exaggerate the peculiar temptations of our own time in comparison with those of a former age; but if it is so, then there is all the more urgent a necessity that you should bring your affairs to God's judgment, seek diligently to understand His will, and then ask Him for a peculiar strength to enable you to overcome these peculiar temptations. You will not alter His judgment of your conduct by attempting to ignore it. But by seeking to understand it, and by laying your heart open to be influenced by it, you will find that your conduct is perceptibly altered and apparent impossibilities are overcome, because "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." *

CHAPTER XVII.

FRIENDSHIP.

"A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother is born for adversity."—PROV. xvii. 17. (This rendering, based upon the margin of the R. V., yields a much better sense than the loosely connected, "And a brother is born for adversity.")

ONE of the most striking contrasts between the ancient and the modern world is in the place which is given to Friendship by moralists and religious teachers. In Aristotle's famous treatise on Ethics two books out of nine are devoted to the moral bearings of Friendship, and these books form the climax of the work, and are the natural transition to the work on Politics, or the science of the State. This central position given to the subject by the greatest and most systematic teacher of antiquity, compared with the very subordinate part which friendship plays in Christian ethics, is calculated to make us reflect and enquire. Is not the explanation probably this? Our Lord gave a great new commandment to His disciples, that they should love one another; and though Christian men have as yet but imperfectly understood what He meant, or carried out what they have understood, an ideal was created which far transcended that lower relationship of antiquity. Greek friendship was to be merged in Christian love. The meaning of such a change will appear if we remember two characteristics of mere friendship, on which Aristotle dwells. One is

that it is necessarily based upon selfishness; springing from a wish to realise oneself in the life of another, fed by the benefit or pleasure derived from the mutual intercourse, it lies under the necessary limitation that we shall not wish for our friend a good which would remove him from us, or an improvement which would raise him too far above us. For the second point is that friendship can only exist between equals, and the best friendship is that between good men who stand upon the same level of virtue. Christian love, on the other hand, springs from a complete abnegation of Self. It seeks nothing: it gives all. So far from laying stress upon the equality of conditions, it is never better pleased than when it can raise another to a position of excellence far surpassing its own, and instead of seeking its highest satisfaction in intercourse with its spiritual peers,—the good, the great, the saintly,—it attains its apotheosis when it is allowed to embrace the weak, the sinful, the fallen, and to lavish all its Divine resources upon those who may never be able to repay it even with gratitude.

It is obvious, then, that friendship is on a lower plane than Christian love, and it marks a great advance in ideal ethics when the lesser star pales in presence of the greater; but it may be urged with truth that friendship still has its place in life, and deserves a more careful attention than it receives. In the individual, as in the race, friendship may be a prelude and a practice of the nobler and wider relation. And there is this further reason for trying to understand the nature of friendship, that it is more than once in the Bible used as a type and a figure of the relationship which may exist between the soul and its God.

We will proceed then to examine some of the characteristics of friendship referred to in the book of Proverbs.

Friends, according to the original sense of the Hebrew word, are those who delight in one another's companionship; either they are useful to one another because each possesses gifts which the other has not, or they are agreeable to one another because they have certain tastes in common. Thus there may of course be a friendship in evil, in vice, in destructive practices; thieves may enter into a league to carry out their anti-social designs, and may be very true to one another; vicious men may find a bond of friendship in the common indulgence of their vices; and in this way friendship, so called, may be a means of ruining the friends. "There are friends for mutual shattering," just as "there is a lover that cleaves more than a brother." * There may also be an interested comradeship which is entirely hypocritical; such a friendship is usually marked by a loud and ostentatious demonstration. "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse for him." † But, in the main, friendship implies a certain amount of goodness; for it is in itself a virtue. The suspicious, malignant nature of evil men speedily snaps the ties which bind them together for a time; and where honour exists among thieves it affords a

* Prov. xviii. 24. This sense is obtained by what appears a necessary change in the text; we must read שׁוֹׁ for שׂוֹׁ. A similar error occurs 2 Sam. xiv. 19 and Micah v. 10.

† Prov. xxvii. 14.

* Prov. xvi. 6.

strong presumption that the thieves are the product of a wrong social state, rather than of a naturally evil disposition.

We may then practically, in thinking of friendship, confine our attention to that which exists between well-meaning people, and tends on the whole to bless, to strengthen, and to improve them. We may come to look at some of the uses and the delights of friendship. "As in water face answers to face, so in the heart man answers to man."* In the heart of our friend we see our own character reflected just as gazing into a still pool we see the reflection of our own face. It is in the frank and sympathetic intercourse of friendship that we really get to know ourselves, and to realise what is in us. We unfold to one another, we discover our similarities and mark our differences. Points which remained unobserved in our own hearts are immediately detected and understood when we see them also in our friends; faculties which remained unused are brought into play to supplement the discovered defects in our friend's nature. We hardly guess what a fund of happy humour is in us until we are encouraged to display it by observing how its flashes light up the face we love. Our capacities of sympathy and tenderness remain undeveloped until we wish eagerly to comfort our friend in a sudden sorrow. In a true friendship we find that we are living a life which is doubled in all its faculties of enjoyment and of service;† we quite shudder to think what cold, apathetic, undeveloped creatures we should have been but for that genial touch which unfolded us, and warmed our hearts into genuine feeling while it brought our minds into active play. This intellectual value of friendship is brought out in the happy saying: "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."‡ A friendless person has a lack-lustre face; his talk has a dull edge; his emotions a poor and feeble flow. That delightful readiness of thought and expression which makes all the charm of social intercourse, the easy tact which rubs off the angles and smooths all the relations of life, the bright coruscations which seem like sunlight playing over summer seas, are usually the result of close and intimate communion with congenial friends. Reading may make a learned man, and without hard study few people can accomplish much permanent good in the world, but reading does not necessarily make a really social man, one who brings his fellow-creatures together in happy and helpful relationships; that beautiful faculty is only acquired by the fostering and stimulating influences of heart companionships. When we have real friends, though they be only a few, we diffuse a friendly feeling amongst others, wherever we go. Possibly also in the simile of the iron lies a reminder of the discipline which friendship gives to character, a discipline which is not always unaccompanied by pain. Friends "rub each other's angles down," and sometimes the friction is a little distressing to both sides. The blades are sharpened, by a few imperceptible filings being ground off each of their edges. The use of friendship depends very largely on its frankness, just as its sweetness depends upon mutual consideration. When

the frankness hurts we have to remind ourselves of the wholesome truth that the soft speaking is not always a token of love, and the hard sayings of our friend may be uttered at a great personal cost, for our good* rather than his. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are profuse."*

If, however, friendship ripens through many years of kindly growth, or if a swift elective affinity forestalls at once the fruit of years, all the pain of mutual counsel and correction disappears, and may be changed into a joy very sweet to the soul. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of soul counsel."† It is a very beautiful condition of things which is referred to in this proverb. Two people have learnt thoroughly to understand one another, and have become in a certain sense one. Each recognises the service that the other renders, and welcomes the advice or even the rebuke which is made possible by their relationship. The interchange of affection is naturally sweet, but as sweet, or even sometimes sweeter, is the delicate aroma which arises when one sees a fault in the other, and with a tenderness begotten of affection, and a humility which trembles to presume, speaks gently but frankly to his friend. Never do the eyes more eagerly respond to one another, never is the hand-clasp so firm and hearty, as after such a passage between true friends.

But the decisive test and the most beautiful proof of real friendship will be found in the day of adversity. A friend is never known till needed.‡ When calamity falls upon us, false friends make excuses and go; lip-friends relapse into silence; but we begin then for the first time to find out who is a friend indeed. Then it appears that the true friend is entirely unchanged by the changed aspect of affairs; it seems as if he had been born into a brotherhood with us for this express occasion. There is no wish to cry off; he seems even to press the brotherly tie in a way which we should not have presumed to expect, and thus he contrives to lighten the oppressive burden of obligation for the favour that he confers on us, by making it appear that he was bound to act as he does by a necessity of kinship. This seems to be the meaning of our text. Such a friend, if he be near at hand and in constant contact with us, is of more service than our own brother;§ and when through his timely aid or effectual comfort we have come out of the furnace, and our tears are dried, we say constantly to ourselves that we doubt whether our own brother would have clung to us so faithfully, would have borne with our querulous murmurs so patiently, or relieved our necessities so delicately and so liberally.||

If you have such a friend as this, your own or your father's, take care to retain him; do not alienate him by negligence or a deficient consideration. Put yourself out of the way to show that you appreciate and value him; do not allow a false reserve or a foolish shyness to check your expression of gratitude. A friendship is a delicate growth; and even when it has become robust, it can easily be blighted. The results of years may be lost in a few days. And if a root of bitterness springs up, if a division occurs, it

*Prov. xxvii. 19.

† "Sorrows by being communicated grow less and joys greater."—BACON.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 17.

*Prov. xxvii. 6.

† "Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur."—CICERO.

§ Prov. xxvii. 10.

|| Prov. xviii. 24.

may be quite impossible by every effort in your power to heal the breach or to pluck up that obstinate root. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and such contentions are like the bars of a castle."* The closer the intimacy had been, the tenderer the friendship, so much the sterner will be these bars, so much more inexpugnable the castle. For it will be felt, if such protestations, such interchange of affection, such mutual delights, could have been deceptive, mere hypocrisies or delusions, what hope can there be that the same things broken and patched up again can be of any worth? A difference with a chance acquaintance is easily removed; further knowledge may improve our opinion of one another, and even if we separate we have no deep resentment. But a difference between true friends may quickly become irreparable. They feel that there is no more to know; they have seen the best and that has proved disappointing. The resentment springs from a sense of abused confidence and injured love.

If you have real friends then, take pains to keep them. Watch carefully for the small beginnings of a rupture and hasten to heal it. Think no effort is wasted, and no apology or explanation is too humiliating, which may avert that great calamity,—the loss of a true soul-comrade; one whom you have learnt to honour with the name and dignity of friend.

"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,"

says our wise poet,

"Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."

Such a friendship as we have been considering, rare and beautiful as it is, forms a noble stepping-stone to the loftier relationship of Christian love. In tone and quality it is almost the same; it differs only in its range and in its motive. What one man feels to another in an ideal friendship, the Christian is called upon, according to his capacity and opportunity, to feel to man as man, to all his fellow-creatures. We cannot of course fulfil all the offices of friendship to every one, and we are not as Christians required to abate one jot of our love to those who are our friends by affinity and by choice. But where the heart is truly Christian it will become more expansive, and it will be conscious of the powerful claims which weakness, misery, solitude, or even moral failings, make upon its friendship; it will shrink from the selfishness inherent in all affections which are merely selective and exclusive; it will earnestly desire to feel an affection which is inclusive and quite unselfish. Where is to be found the motive for such an enlarged spirit of friendship? Whence is to come the impulse to such a self-surrender?

Surely such a motive and such an impulse are to be discovered only in that relation of friendship which God Himself deigns to sustain towards the human soul. Jehoshaphat in his prayer appeals to God on the ground that He had given the land to "Abraham His friend for ever."† And we read of Moses that "the Lord spake unto him face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend."‡ But in this position of one who is called the father of the faithful, and of one who was the leader of his people, we cannot

but recognise a promise and a foreshadowing of a relation with God which was meant to become more general. The whole tendency of the Gospel is to put every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ on a spiritual level with the most favoured and richly endowed of a former dispensation. And since the Incarnate Son lived on earth, and called the simple peasants of Galilee to be, not His servants, but His friends, if they did whatsoever He commanded them,* we may without presumption—nay, we must if we would not grieve Him by unbelief—accept the mysteriously dignified position of God's friends. The feeblest and the poorest, as well as the strongest and most gifted, believing in Jesus Christ, in proportion as he heartily accepts the authority and obeys the commandment of his Lord, is a friend of God. It is a very unequal friendship, as we must all feel. He has all the strength, all the wisdom, all the goodness, all the gifts; but the sense of inequality is removed by His own gracious friendliness: He attaches such importance to a heartfelt love that He is willing to accept that as the fair equivalent of all that He does and gives to us; and He remedies the terrible inferiority of His friends by realising His own life in them and merging their imperfection in His perfectness, their limitations in His infinity.

Now, shall we venture to assume that you and God are friends; that the beautiful relation which we have examined, the delight in mutual companionship, the interchange of thought and feeling, the quick and quickening response of love and comprehension, exist between you and Him? Come and read some of these sayings again and apply them to Him. You may gaze into the heart of God, and as face answers to face in a quiet pool, you may find yourself in Him,—a larger self, a truer self, a holier self, than you could ever find in any human fellowship, or than you had ever dared to imagine. This familiar intercourse with God, which has its roots in a profound reverence and its fruits in an unutterable joy, is the new creation of a human soul. A man will be known by his friends, and most assuredly he will be known, if his Friend and most constant Companion is God. He will regard that status as his highest title and distinction, just as Lord Brooks was so proud of knowing Sir Philip Sidney that he wished his epitaph to be "Here lies Sir Philip Sidney's friend."

Again, in this close fellowship with God, in His warnings and encouragements and chastisements, even in the "faithful wounds" that He inflicts, does not the heart perceive His sweetness as an ointment and perfume? Does not the quiet place where these passages of tender friendship between your soul and God occur become redolent with a precious fragrance, as of incense or of fresh flowers?

And then the deep meaning which the friendship of God brings into our text, "A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother"—yes, our Divine Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ—"is born for adversity;" or into that other saying, "There is a lover that cleaves more than a brother"! Let us have no loud pharisaical ways in blessing our Friend,† but let no effort seem too exacting to retain unbroken this priceless blessing of the Divine Communion!

Now, where the soul counts God its nearest and dearest Friend,—the Friend of whom noth-

* Prov. xviii. 19. † 2 Chron. xx. 7. ‡ Exod. xxxiii. 11.

* John xv. 14.

† Prov. xxvii. 14.

ing in life or death can rob it,—this effect follows by a beautiful necessity: the chief and all-inclusive friendship being secured, we are at leisure from ourselves to soothe and sympathise, we are able to extend our thoughts and our ministries of love to all around us, and to reflect in our relations with men that exquisite relation which God has deigned to establish with us. Our own private friendships then produce no exclusiveness, but rather they become the types of our feelings to others, and the ever-springing fountainhead of friendly thoughts and courteous deeds; while these private friendships and our wider relations alike are all brought up into the lofty and purifying friendship which we hold with our God and He with us.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EVIL OF ISOLATION.

"He that separates himself follows after his own desire, but against all sound wisdom he shows his teeth."—PROV. xviii. 1.

FROM the value of friendship there is a natural and easy transition to the evil of isolation. We must try to fathom the profound meaning which is hidden under this simple but striking proverb. To begin with, what are we to understand by "one that separates himself"? This same word occurs in 2 Sam. i. 23 concerning Saul and Jonathan, that "in their death they were not separated." Theirs was a togetherness which accompanied them to the grave. On the other hand, there are people who shun all togetherness in their lives,—they are voluntarily, deliberately separated from their kind, and they seem for the first time to blend with their fellows when their undistinguished dust mixes with the dust of others in the common grave. We are to think of a person who has no ties with any of his fellow-creatures, who has broken such ties as bound him to them, or is of that morbid and unnatural humour that makes all intercourse with others distasteful. We are to think more especially of one who chooses this life of solitariness in order to follow out his own desire rather than from any necessity of circumstance or disposition; one who finds his pleasure in ignoring mankind, and wishes for intercourse with them only that he may vent his spleen against them; in a word, we are to think of a Misanthrope.

We must be careful in catching the precise idea because there are men who shut themselves off from their kind, rightly or wrongly, in order to seek the common welfare. A student or an inventor, sometimes even a teacher or a preacher, will find the solitude of the study or the laboratory the only condition on which he can accomplish the work to which he is called. The loss of domestic life or of social pleasures, the withdrawal from all the "kindly ways of men," may be a positive pain to him, a cross which he bears for the direct good of those whose company he forswears, or for the cause of Truth, in whose service alone it is possible to permanently benefit his fellows. Such a "separation" as this—painful, difficult, unrewarded—we must exclude from the intention of our text, although possibly our text might convey a warning even to these benevolent eremites, that unless the heart is kept warm by human sympathies, unless the mind is

kept in touch with the common cares and joys of our kind, the value of even intellectual work will be considerably diminished, while the worker himself must inevitably and perhaps needlessly suffer. But, on the whole, we must except these nobler instances of isolation, if we would feel the full force of the judgment which is pronounced in the text.

The misanthrope is one who has no faith in his fellows, and shrinks into himself to escape them; who pursues his own private ends, avoiding all unnecessary speech with those who are around him, living alone, dying unobserved, except for the mischief which, consciously or unconsciously, he does to those who survive him. Such an one is aptly described as showing his teeth* in an angry snarl against all the approaches of a true wisdom.

Shakespeare might have had this proverb before him in that grim delineation of Richard the Third, who boasts that he has neither pity, love, nor fear. He was, he had been told, born with teeth in his mouth.

"And so I was," he exclaims; "which plainly signified That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog."

And then he explains his terrible character in these significant lines:—

"I have no brother, I am like no brother:
And this word Love, which greybeards call divine
Be resident in *men like one another*,
And not in me; *I am myself alone.*"†

Yes, Love can only exist among men who are like one another; and no more damning indictment can be brought against a human being than this, that he is *himself alone*.

The truth is that every man is not only a "self," a personality, but he is a very complex being made up of many relations with other men. He is a son, a brother, a friend, a father, a citizen. Suppose him to be stripped of all sonship, brotherhood, friendship, fatherhood, and citizenship; there is left, not a *man*, but a mere *self*, and that is his hideous condemnation. In the same way, a woman that is neither daughter, nor sister, nor wife, nor friend, nor ministrant, does not deserve the grand name of woman; she is a mere *self*, a point of exigent and querulous desires. The most appalling discovery in a great city is that multitudes have become mere *selves*,—hungry, hollow, ravening, thirsty, shrivelled selves. The father and mother are dead, or left far away, probably never known; no one is brother to them, they are brothers to no one. Friend has no significance to their understanding, or means only one who, from most interested motives, ministers to their craving appetites; they are not citizens of London, nor of any other city; they are not Englishmen, though they were born in England, nor have they any other nationality,—hideous, clamorous, esurient selves, nothing more. An old Greek saying declared that one who lives alone is either a god or a wild beast;‡ while, as we have already seen, there are a few of the isolated ones who are isolated from noble and even Divine motives, the vast majority are in this condition because they have fallen from the level of humanity into the roving and predatory state of wild animals, that seek their meat by night and lurk in a lonely lair by day.

* See note on התנפל in Lecture XV., p. 399.

† III. "King Henry VI." Act v. sc. 6.

‡ ὁ θεὸς ἢ θῆριον.

The "sound wisdom" against which the isolated rage is nothing less than the kindly law which makes us men, and ordains that we should not live to ourselves alone, but should fulfil our noble part as members one of another. The Social Instinct is one of two or three striking characteristics which mark us out as human: a man by himself is only an animal, and a very poor animal too; in size he is far beneath the greatest of the creatures that inhabit land and sea; he is not as swift as the winged denizens of the air; his strength in proportion to his bulk is debility compared with that of the tiniest insects. His distinction in the creation, and his excelling dignity, are derived from the social relations which make him in combination strong, in the intercourse of speech and thought, wise, and in the loving response of heart to heart, noble. If by some unhappy accident a human being wanders early from his place into the forest, is suckled by wild beasts, and grows up among them, the result is an animal inconceivably repulsive, fierce, cunning, and ugly; vulpine, but without the wolf's agile grace; bearish, but without the bear's slow-pacing dignity.

The "sound wisdom" is the wisdom of the Creator, who from the beginning determined that it is not good for men to live alone, and marked His conception of the unity which should bind them together by the gift of the woman to the man, to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

It becomes therefore a necessity to every wise human being to recognise, to maintain, and to cultivate all those wholesome relationships which make us truly human. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." * Sometimes when a great ship is far off in mid-ocean, a tired land-bird will fall panting and exhausted upon the deck: the wings can beat no longer; the eyes glaze; and the eager wanderer fails and dies. The true bird-life is the life of the woods, of the toilsomely-woven nest, of the mate and the brood and the fledglings. In the same way on those ocean steamers—ay, and in many a weary bye-path and lonely desert of the earth—may be found men who have broken away from the ties which formed their strength and their truer being, and now fall, faint and purposeless, to languish and to die. For true human life is the life of our fellows, of the diligent laborious housebuilding, of the home, of the young, of the rising nestlings which are to form the next link in the long chain of the generations.

Neighbourliness is the larger part of life; we are not to go to our distant "brother's house in the day of our calamity, for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off." † Our life is rich and true and helpful just in proportion as we are entwined with those who live around us in bonds of mutual respect and consideration, of reciprocal helpfulness and service, of intimate and intelligent friendship.

It is hardly necessary to say that there is neighbourliness *and* neighbourliness. Our relation to our neighbours may be that of mere busybodies, tattlers, and whisperers; it may be devoid of tact and consideration: there is need therefore of a warning to "hold back thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be sated with thee, and hate thee." ‡ But this possible

abuse does not affect the broad and salutary principle: we are meant to live in one another; our nature can realise itself, and accomplish its mission, only in generous and noble relations with those who are about us. The home is at the foundation of all; a good son or daughter will generally make a good man or woman, good brothers will prove good citizens, good sisters good ministrants and teachers to the poor and the ignorant; good fathers will be the best rulers in Church and State. The home will be the preparation for the larger life of the town, or the social circle, or the state. And thus from the cradle to the grave no man should live alone, but every one should be a member of a larger body, holding a definite place in a system or organism, depending on others, with others depending on him. Nerves should run through the body politic, motor nerves and sensory nerves; the joys and pains of a community should be shared, the activities of a community should be united. No one should live to himself; all should live, and rejoice to live, in the great co-operative society of the world, in which personal interests are mutual interests and the gains of each are the gains of all.

But we can hardly probe to the depths of this Proverbial Philosophy without becoming aware that we are touching on an idea which is the mainspring of Christianity on its earthly and visible side. We seem to have detected in all the preceding discussion echoes, however faint, of the Apostolic teaching which gave practical shape and body to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The relation of Christ, as the Son of God, to the human race as a whole, immediately opened up the possibility of a world-wide society in which all nations, all classes, all castes, all degrees, all individualities, should be not so much merged as distinctly articulated and recognised in a complete and complex whole. The kingdom of heaven, while borrowing its terminology from earthly kingdoms, was unlike any one of them because it was to include them all. Into that kingdom all the peoples, nations, and languages should pass.

The Catholic Church, as the first attempt to realise this grand idea, presented for a time a certain faint and wavering reflection of the image in the heavens. The fault of seeking the unity of the race in a priesthood instead of in the people was of course a fatal one to its own ultimate success, but at least one great service was rendered to humanity; the idea became familiar of a Unity, in which the narrower unities of the family, the social circle, and the nation were to find their completion. And when the intelligence and the faith of men broke with the Catholic Church, it was not a breach with the Catholic idea, but merely a transition to a nobler and a more living realisation of the idea. At present the idea is daily clearing and assuming vaster proportions; humanity is seen to be one; the Great Father presides over a family which may be sundered, but cannot be really parted; over a race which is divided, but not actually separated.

Strange and rapturous have been the emotions of men as they have entered into the realisation of this idea, and the thrill of their vast fellowship has passed through their hearts. Sometimes they have turned away in bitterness of revolt from the Christian Church, which with harsh

* Prov. xxvii. 8.

† Prov. xxvii. 10.

‡ Prov. xxv. 17.

dogmatisms and fierce anathemas, with cruel exclusiveness and sectarian narrowness, seems rather to check than to further the sublime thought of the One Father, of whom all the family is named in heaven and in earth. But whatever justification there may be for complaint against the Church, we cannot afford to turn our thoughts from the Son of Man, who has redeemed the race to which we belong, and who, as the Divine Power, is alone able to carry out in effect the great conception which He has given us in thought.

And now I am going to ask you for a moment to consider how the text reads in the light of the work and the presence and the person of Jesus Christ, who has come to gather together in one those that are scattered abroad.

The person of Christ is the link which binds all men together; the presence of Christ is the guarantee of the union; the work of Christ, which consists in the removal of sin, is the main condition of a heart-unity for all mankind. When therefore you put your trust in Christ and your sinful nature is subdued, you are incorporated into a body of which He is the head, and you must pass out of the narrow self-life into the broad Christ-life; you can no longer live for yourself alone, because as the member of a body you exist only in relation to all the other members. "But," it is said, "am I not to seek my own salvation, and then to work it out with fear and trembling? am I not to withdraw from the world, and to labour hard to make my calling and election sure?" In a certain sense, the answer to that question is, Yes. But then it is only in a certain sense; for you make sure of your own salvation precisely in proportion as you are really incorporated into Christ, and are made a genuine member of the body: as St. John says, "We know that we are passed from death unto life *because we love the brethren*," and "if we walk in the light we *have fellowship one with another*, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." We work out our salvation therefore only by losing the self in others; we withdraw from the world and make our calling sure, just as our thoughts become identified with God's thoughts, and as our lives are passed in cheerful and victorious service.

If, then, on the ground of our humanity we are cautioned against separating ourselves, because by so doing we set our teeth against all sound wisdom, on the ground of our Christianity we must be warned not to separate ourselves, because that means to harden our hearts against the faith itself. When we say to ourselves, "We will live our Christian life alone," that is equivalent to saying, "We will not live the Christian life at all." We do not know what the life in heaven may be,—though from the casual glimpses we obtain of it, we should say that it is a great social gathering, at which we shall sit down with Abraham and all the saints of God, a kind of marriage festivity to celebrate the union of the Lord with His bride,—but it is plain that the Christian life, as it is revealed to us here, *must be the life of a community*, for it is likened to a vine, from which all dead branches are cut off, and plainly all cut-off branches are dead.

"But," say many people amongst us, "we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; we trust to Him; why should you impose any further conditions?" Do they put their faith in Him?

Does not faith imply obedience? Did He not require His disciples to be united in a fellowship, and did He not give His body and His blood as a symbol of this fellowship, and command them to take the symbols in remembrance of Him until He comes? Are these isolated believers obeying Him, or are they not cutting at the root of His glorious purpose of human fellowship in the Divine Head? And if they are thus breaking His expressed commandment, has He not warned them that he will say, "I never knew you, depart from Me," although they have taught in His name, and even cast out devils and done many wonderful works?

And in thus reminding you of our Lord's thought, I am not speaking only of what we call the fellowship of the Church; for there are many who are merely nominal members of the Church, and though their names are enrolled they "separate themselves" and live the life of unhallowed isolation, just as they did before they professedly entered into the Christian society. This is a larger question than that of Church membership; Church membership derives its vast importance from being a part of this larger question. Will you, therefore, let me close with a personal appeal addressed to each one of you?

You know that the Son of Man would make men one; you know that He calls His disciples into a holy family of mutual love and service, so that men may know that they are His, and may recognise Him because they love one another. Are you venturing to disregard His commandment and to frustrate His will by separating yourself for your own desire? have you fallen out of all relations with His family, so that the sonship, the brotherhood, the friendship, the fatherhood, the citizenship, of the heavenly kingdom are as good as meaningless to you? If so, may I say in the words of the text, you are setting "your teeth against all sound wisdom"?

CHAPTER XIX.

HUMAN FREEDOM.

"The foolishness of man subverteth his way;
And his heart fretteth against the Lord."—PROV. xix. 3.

THERE is such a valuable expansion and commentary on this proverb in the book of Ecclesiasticus that it seems worth while to quote it in full: "Say not, it is through the Lord that I fell away, for the things He hates thou shalt not do. Say not, it is He that caused me to err, for He has no use for a sinful man. Every abomination the Lord hates, neither is it lovely to those that fear Him. He Himself at the outset made Man, and left him in the power of his own control, that, if thou wilt, thou shouldst keep His commandments, and to do faithfully what is pleasing to Him. He set fire and water before thee, that thou shouldst stretch out thy hand to which thou wilt. In front of men is life and death, and whichever a man pleases shall be given to him. Because wide is the wisdom of the Lord; He is mighty in power, beholding all things; and His eyes are upon them that fear Him, and He Himself will take note of every work of man. He never enjoined any one to do wickedly, and He never gave to any one license to sin."*

* Eccles. xv. 11-20.

It is our constant tendency to claim whatever good we do as our own doing, and to charge whatever evil we do on causes which are beyond our control,—on heredity, on circumstances of our birth and upbringing, or even on God. The Scriptures, on the other hand, regard all our good deeds as the work which God works within us, when our will is given to Him, while all our evil is ascribed to our own foolish and corrupt will, for which we are, and shall be, held responsible. This is certainly a very remarkable contrast, and we shall do well to take account of it. It is not necessary to run into any extreme statement, to deny the effects either of taints in the blood which we receive from our parents, or of early surroundings and education, or even the enormous influence which other people exercise over us in later life; but when all allowance is made for these recognised facts, the contention of the text is that what really subverts our lives is our own folly,—and not uncontrollable circumstances,—and our folly is due, not to our misfortune, but to our fault.

Now we will not attempt to deal with all the modifications and reservations and refinements which ingenuity might offer to this doctrine; however charity may require us to make allowance for others on the ground of disadvantages, it is questionable whether we help them, and it is certain that we weaken ourselves, by turning attention constantly from the central fact to the surrounding circumstances; we will therefore try to steadily look at this truth of Individual Responsibility, and lay it to heart. When we have acquitted ourselves of blame, and have obtained a discharge in the forum of our own conscience, it will be time to seek other causes of our guilt, and to "fret against the Lord."

But before we turn inwards and appeal to our own consciousness, may we not observe how absurd it is that the Lord should be charged with responsibility for our sins? What do we know of the Lord except that He hates and abominates sin? It is as the Hater of sin that He is revealed to us in ever-clearer forms from the first page of revelation to the last. But more, the most powerful proof that we possess of His existence is to be found in the voice of conscience within us; we instinctively identify Him with that stern monitor that denounces so vigorously and unsparingly all our offences against holiness. The God of revelation is from the first declared to be "He who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." The God of conscience is by the very nature of the case identified with the uncompromising sentence against evil; is it not then obviously inconsistent to lay our sins to the charge of God? We are more assured of His Holiness than of His omnipotence; we cannot therefore bring His omnipotence to impeach His Holiness. We see Him as the Avenger of sin before we see Him in any other capacity; we cannot therefore bring any subsequent vision of Him to discredit the first. It is surely the dictate of plain common sense, as St. James says, that "God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death."*

* James i. 13-15.

Now our actual responsibility for our own sins, and the troubles which result from them, will perhaps come out in the clear light of conscience, if we regard our conduct in the following way. We must make an appeal to consciousness. There are actions which, consciousness tells us, rest entirely on our own choice, and concerning which no sophistry, however ingenious, can furnish an adequate exculpation. There was in these cases, as we well remember, the plain offer of an alternative "Fire or Water, Life or Death." We knew at the time that we were equally able to take either of them; we felt no compulsion; there was, it is true, a great tumult of conflicting motives, but when the motives were balanced and the resulting verdict was declared, we were perfectly conscious that we could, if we chose, reverse the verdict and give our judgment against it. Our first deviations from truth, from purity, from charity, come up before us as we reflect; the struggle which went on survives vividly in memory; and when we yielded to the evil power we were conscious at the time, as we remember still, that our will was to blame. As the lie glided from the lips, as the unhallowed thought was allowed to pass into act, as the rein was thrown on the neck of the evil passion, we knew that we were doing wrong, we felt that by an adequate exercise of the will we could do right. Cast your eye back on the steps by which your character was formed, on the gradual destruction of your finer feelings, on the steady decline of your spiritual instincts, on the slow deadening and searing of your moral sense. Do you not remember how deliberately you submitted to the fascinations of that dangerous friend, whom your conscience entirely disapproved? how wilfully you opened and perused the pages of that foul book, which swept over your soul like a mud-torrent and left its slimy sediment there ever after? how you consciously avoided the influence of good people, made every excuse to escape the prayer, the reading, the sermon, which was to you a conscience-stirring influence, an appeal of God to the soul?

As you retrace those fatal steps, you will be surprised to discover how entirely your own master you were at the time, although the evil deeds done then have forged a chain which limits your freedom now. If at any of those critical moments some one had said to you, Are you free to do just which of the two things you please? you would have replied at once, Why, of course I am. Indeed, if there had been any compulsion to evil, you would have rebelled against it and resisted it. It was really the complete liberty, the sense of power, the delight in following your own desire, that determined your choice. The evil companion persuaded, your conscience dissuaded, neither compelled; when the balance hung even you threw the weight of your will into the scale. The book lay open; curiosity, prurience, impurity, bade you read; your best conviction shamed you and called you away: when the two forces pulled even, you deliberately gave *your* support to the evil force. The solemn voice of prayer and worship called you, moving you with mystical power, waking strange desires and hopes and aspirations; the half-mocking voice of the earth was also in your ear, tempting, luring, exciting, and when the sounds were about balanced, you raised up your own voice for the one and gave it the pre-dominance.

Or if now in the bondage of evil you can no longer realise that you were once free, you can look at others who are now where you were then; notice even when you try to tempt your younger companions into evil, how the blush of shame, the furtive glance, the sudden collapse of resistance, plainly proves that the action is one consciously determined by an evil choice; notice how your first blasphemies, your first devil-born doubts, suggestions, and innuendoes, bring the pained expression to the face, and raise a conflict which the will has to decide. In this appeal to consciousness or to observation we must be scrupulously honest with ourselves; we must take infinite pains not to garble the evidence to suit a foregone conclusion or to excuse an accomplished fall. I think we may say that when men are honest with themselves, and in proportion as they are pure and innocent, and not yet bound hand and foot by the bondage of their own sins, they know that they have been free, that in the face of all circumstances they still stood uncommitted; that if they yielded to temptation it was their own "foolishness that subverted their way."

But now we may pass from these inward moral decisions which have determined our character and made us what we are, to the ordinary actions which form the greater part of our everyday conduct. Here again we are generally inclined to take credit for every course which has a happy issue, and for every unfortunate decision to cast the blame on others. We are reminded, however, that our misfortunes are generally the result of our own folly; we are too impatient, too hasty, too impetuous, too self-willed. "Desire without knowledge is not good, and he that hasteth with his feet misseth the way."* If we look back upon our mistakes in life, it is surprising to see how many were due to our own headstrong determination to follow our own way, and our complete disregard of the prudent counsels which our wiser friends ventured to offer us. "The way of the foolish is right in his own eyes; but he that is wise harkeneth unto counsel."† "Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."‡ Hear counsel," is the command of this chapter, "and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end."§ "Every purpose is established by counsel,"—affairs of state, whether civil|| or military,¶—and so by counsel a man is made strong and is able to carry out the warfare of his own personal life.** It is well for us therefore not only to accept counsel which is proffered to us, but to be at pains to get it, for it often lies, like the waters of a well, deep down in a man's mind, and requires some patience and skill in order to elicit it.††

Our false steps are due to a rash precipitancy which prevents us from looking at the question on all its sides, and learning the views of those who have had experience and know. The calamities which befell us were foreseen by many onlookers, and were even foretold by our friends, but we could accept no advice, no warning. And while therefore it is perfectly true that our own judgment was not sufficient to ward off the evil or prevent the *faux pas*, we

are none the less to blame, our own foolishness has none the less subverted our way, for it was our own fault that we refused to be advised, it was our own incredible folly that made us form so wrong an idea of our wisdom.

Suppose then that in our retrospect of life and in the estimation of our errors, we mark off all those sins for which our conscience duly charges us with direct responsibility, and all those blunders which might have been avoided if we had wisely submitted to more prudent judgments than our own, what is there that remains? Can we point out any group of actions or any kind of errors which are yet unaccounted for, and may possibly be charged on some other person or thing than ourselves? Is there yet some opening by which we may escape responsibility? Are there any effectual and valid excuses that we can successfully urge?

Now it appears that all these possible excuses are netted and completely removed—and every avenue of escape is finally blocked—by this broad consideration; God is at hand as the wisest of Counsellors, and we might by simple appeal to Him, and by reverently obeying His commandments, avoid all the evils and the dangers to which we are exposed. So far from being able to excuse ourselves and to lay the blame on God, it is our chief and all-inclusive fault, it is the clearest mark of our foolishness, that we do not resort to Him for help, but constantly follow our own devices; that we do not rely upon His goodness, but idly fret against Him and all His ordinances. "There are many devices in a man's heart," but over against these feeble, fluctuating, and inconsistent ideas of ours is "the counsel of the Lord, which shall stand."* "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."† There is a way of life, there is a plain commandment, a law of God's appointing: "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul: but he that is careless of his ways shall die."‡ It is simply our own carelessness that is our ruin; if we would pay the slightest heed, if there were one grain of seriousness in us, we should be wise, we should get understanding, and so find good in the salvation of the soul;§ we should not, as we so often do, "hear instruction, only to err from the words of knowledge."||

We may wonder at the strong conviction with which this truth was urged even under the Jewish law; it may seem to us that the requirements then were so great, and the details so numerous, and the revelation so uncertain, that a man could scarcely be held responsible if he missed the way of life through inadvertence or defective knowledge. Yet even then the path was plain, and if a man missed it he had but himself and his own folly to blame. But how much more plain and sure is everything made for us! Our Lord has not only declared the way, but He is the Way; He has not only given us a commandment to keep, but He has Himself kept it, and offers to the believing soul the powers of an inward life, by which the yoke of obedience becomes easy, and the burden of service is made light. He has become "the end of the law to every one that believeth." He has made His offer of Himself not only general, but universal, so that no human being can say that he is

* Prov. xix. 2.

† Prov. xii. 15.

‡ Prov. xv. 22.

§ Prov. xix. 20.

|| Prov. xi. 14.

¶ Prov. xx. 18.

** Prov. xxiv. 5, 6,

†† Prov. xx. 5.

* Prov. xix. 21.

† Prov. xix. 23.

‡ Prov. xix. 16.

§ Prov. xix. 8.

|| Prov. xix. 27.

excluded, or murmur that he is not able to "keep his soul." His word has gone out into all the world, and while they have not heard it, being without a law are yet a law unto themselves, and are responsible by virtue of that self-witness which God has given everywhere in Nature, in Society, and in the conscience of man, how can we sufficiently emphasise our own responsibility, to whom God has spoken in the latter days by His own Son! Surely "whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself."*

If even in that old and darker dispensation the light was so clear that it was chargeable to a man's own folly when he disobeyed,—and "judgments were prepared for scorers, and stripes for the backs of fools," †—what must come upon us who have the clearer light if we wilfully and foolishly disobey? The counsel of the Lord stands sure: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord."‡ No authority of wise men, no sneer of wits, no devices of the clever, can in the least avail to set aside His mighty ordinance or to excuse us from disregarding it. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but victory is of the Lord."§ There can be no evasion, no escape. He Himself, by His own invincible power, will bring home to the hearts of the rebellious the evil of their rebellion, and will send the cruel messenger against them.||

Does it not behove us to remember and consider? to remember our offences, to consider our guilt and the Lord's power? Here is a way of life marked out before you, and there is the way of death; here is the water held out to you, and there is the fire; and you may choose. The way of life is in the Gospel of God's dear Son; you know that its precepts are perfect, converting the soul, and that Christ Himself is holy, such an one as the earth never bore before or since, you know too that this Holy One came to give His life a ransom for many, that He invited all to come unto Him, and promised to all who came everlasting life. You know that He did give His life a ransom,—as the Good Shepherd He gave Himself for the sheep, and then took again the life which He laid down. You know that He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and that His saving power was not exercised for the last time years and years ago, but this very day, probably just at the moment that I am now speaking to you. The way is plain, and the choice is free; the truth shines, and you can open your eyes to it; the life is offered, and you can accept it. What pretext can you give for not choosing Christ, for not coming to the truth, for not accepting the life?

Is it not clear to you that if you refuse Him that speaketh, and your way is thus subverted,—as indeed it must be,—it is your own folly that is to blame? You fret against the Lord now, and you charge Him foolishly, but some day you will see clearly that this is all a blind and a subterfuge; you will admit that the choice was open to you, and you chose amiss; that life and death were offered to you, and you preferred death.

If any question might be entertained about those who have only the light of conscience to guide them, and have not heard of the direct

relation of succour and support which God is ready to give to those who depend upon Him, there can be no doubt of the complete freedom of every human being, who hears the message of the Gospel, to accept it. You may put it aside, you may decline to accept it on the ground of disinclination, or because you consider the historical evidence insufficient, but you will be the first to admit that in doing so you exercise your discretion and consciously choose the course which you take.

Nay, leaving all metaphysical discussion about the freedom of the will, I put it to you simply, Can you not, if you choose, come to Christ now?

Oh, hear counsel and receive instruction: is not the Spirit pleading with you, counselling, teaching, warning you? Do not harden your heart, do not turn away. Attend to Christ now, admit Him now, that you may be wise in your latter end.*

CHAPTER XX.

IDLENESS.

"After the autumn gathering the slothful does not plough; he asks in the harvest, and there is nothing."—PROV. xx. 4.

WE have already in the sixth lecture caught a glimpse of the sluggard, and in the ninth we have seen in passing that diligence in work is enjoined by the teacher; but we must give a more concentrated attention to this subject if we would realise the stress which this book of Wisdom lays on work as the grand condition of life in this earnest world. They who will not work have no place in an order of things which is maintained by work, and in which the toil itself is the great discipline of character and the preparation of joy. It is no churlish or envious spirit which pronounces a doom on the idle, but it is the very necessity of the case; that idleness which in moments of excessive strain we so eagerly covet is, if it is accepted as the regular and continuous state of the soul, a more ruinous and miserable curse than the hardest labour. By a law which we all break at our peril, we are required to have an honest end and a strenuous occupation in our life; and we are further required to labour diligently for the end, and to spare no pains to achieve it. We have many faculties lying dormant, and we must wake them into activity; we have many gifts half used or not used at all; we must turn them all to account, if we would be wholesome, happy, and in the true sense successful.

First of all, let us look at the portrait of the sluggard as it is delineated in some of these proverbial sayings. We see him in bed, at the board, in the house, out of doors. He will not get up in the morning; he turns from side to side, just like a door which swings backwards and forwards on its hinges, but of course never gets any further.† "Yet a little sleep," he says, "a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in sleep."‡ Or when at last he has brought himself to get up and to sit down to table, he is too lethargic even to eat: "He buries his hand in the dish, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again;"§ or

* Prov. xiii. 13. † Prov. xix. 29. ‡ Prov. xxi. 30.

§ Prov. xxi. 31.

|| Prov. xvii. 11.

* Prov. xix. 20.

† Prov. xxvi. 14.

‡ Prov. xxiv. 34.

§ Prov. xix. 24.

if he raises the morsel to his lips, he does it with an air of indescribable languor and weariness.* Then the time comes for him to go out to his daily duties. But he has a number of ingenious, though utterly absurd, excuses why he should not leave the house: "There is a lion in the streets," he says, "a lion in the way;"† "There is a lion without; I shall be murdered in the streets."‡ When he is told that this is a delusion, he is prepared to argue the matter, and to show that his fear is well grounded; he is quite scornful of all the people who assure him to the contrary, because they have been out and seen for themselves: "The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men that can render a reason."§ And when at length he is launched on the business of the day, arriving late, his wits gone wool-gathering, his will as inactive as his mind is inattentive, he drags through every duty with the air of one who is walking "through a hedge of thorns."|| Where another person would proceed with easy alacrity, he seems held back by invisible obstacles; his garments are always getting caught in the briars; there is not impetus enough to carry him over the slightest difficulty; and after frequent and somnolent pauses, the end of the day finds him more weary than the busiest, though he has nothing to show but futile efforts and abortive results.

That is a complete picture of the sluggard. We do not of course see him fully developed very often; but we recognise at once the several tendencies in our own characters—the slothfulness, the listlessness, the idle procrastination, the inertia—which may, if unresisted and unconquered, gradually bring us nearer to this finished portrait.

The result of this sluggishness must now be sketched. "Love not sleep," we are told, "lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread."¶ The means of subsistence in this world are the result of labour; toilers win them from the reluctant earth and sea; the only condition on which we can partake in them is that we should toil, either directly in producing the means of subsistence, or indirectly in doing for the producers helpful service for which they are willing to exchange the fruits of their labour. One who sleeps away the golden hours of work, cast by slothfulness into a deep sleep, has no claim whatever on the earth or the community for daily food; he shall suffer hunger.** And if by craft or chance he is able to get his bread without any service rendered to the workers, he shall suffer from a soul-hunger more terrible than starvation—the unutterable ennui, weariness, disgust, and self-loathing which an idle and useless life inevitably produces.

As the text reminds us, there is an alternation of seasons. There is a time to plough, when the earth has yielded her full autumn fruits; there is a time to sow; there is a harvest. If a man is too lazy to plough at the right time and to sow at the right time, his fields will of course give him no crops: "Slothfulness catcheth not his prey."†† Nor must we think that God in any grudging spirit has ordered this law of the seasons. The appetite which forces us to labour, because "our mouth craves it of us,"‡‡ the ap-

parent rigour with which nature requires us to be up betimes and not to let the opportunity slip, and the threat of poverty which hangs over our heads if we neglect her requirements, are all parts of a beneficent law,—the law that by work itself our life is sweetened and our spirit is developed. They are not to be congratulated who, escaping the spur of appetite, and liberated by the toil of others from the rigorous edicts of nature which require the laborious ploughing and sowing, are enabled to eat the bread of idleness. The hardest worker, worn to the bone and ill-remunerated, is really more enviable than they. The abundance of food is a poor equivalent for the loss of discipline which the desire of food was designed to exact through honest and earnest work. Men come to us and say in effect, "Behold after the autumn gathering we did not plough, and we asked in harvest, and got all that our hearts desired," and we are constrained to pity rather than to congratulate them. It is not good for men to slip through the laws of God and nature thus, for their chastisement is heavier in the end than in the beginning.

The truth of this appears when we remember that a worse result of slothfulness than poverty is the spiritual rust, decay, and degradation which slothfulness itself implies: "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour;"* "He also that is slack in his work is brother to him that is a destroyer."† It is indeed a strange illusion which makes man desire idleness. Idleness is ruin; the soul rusts away like the sword in "Hudibras, which—

". . . ate into itself, for lack
Of something else to hew and hack."

It is death, it is deadly; the idle soul slowly dies, and spreads destruction around it. It is the same with a country. Idleness is its ruin; whether it be that the generosity of nature removes the necessity of work, as in the South Seas, where the missionaries find one of their chief difficulties in the absolute laziness resulting from the softness of the climate and the fertility of the soil; or that the vast accumulations of wealth procure idleness for its possessors, and enforce idleness on thousands of the unfortunate unemployed,—the melancholy result ensues in the enervation of manhood and the corruption of womanhood. On the other hand, as Thucydides observed in the case of Attica, a rigorous climate and a niggardly soil, eliciting all the energies of the people in order to improve their condition or even to live, have been found favourable to the development of a noble nationality. Slackness of work, from whatever cause it may arise, brings its victims into this sorrowful kinship with the destroyer.

It may be noted that the idle, whether they be rich or poor, are denominated "vain persons," and sensible people are cautioned solemnly to avoid their society, as their emptiness is contagious, and the habits which are quickly acquired in their company lead straight to ruin: "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding;"‡ "He that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough."§

The truth which is here enforced receives ample illustration in our own society. Two centu-

* Prov. xxvi. 15.

† Prov. xxvi. 13.

‡ Prov. xxii. 13.

§ Prov. xxvi. 16.

†† Prov. xvi. 26.

|| Prov. xv. 19.

¶ Prov. xx. 13.

** Prov. xix. 15.

†† Prov. xii. 27.

* Prov. xxi. 25.

† Prov. xviii. 9.

‡ Prov. xii. 11.

§ Prov. xxviii. 19.

ries ago Daniel Defoe defined the English as the "most lazy diligent nation" in the world. Hard work is common; idleness is equally common. Our people are on the whole highly gifted, and produce rapidly when they give their attention to their work; but we seem to have a strange vein of dissoluteness and laziness running through us, and consequently the worst and most shameful idleness is often found amongst the best workmen, who through their own bad habits have missed their opportunities, and become a burden to themselves and to the community. In no country is the leisured class, of those who do nothing at all, or pass their aimless days in a round of engagements which are only strenuous idleness, so large; in no country is the unemployed or the pauper class so ruinously great in proportion to the population. Hence this curious paradox: the foreigner hears that England is the richest and the most industrious country in the world; he comes to our shores expecting to see cities of gold and fields teeming with produce. On his arrival he becomes aware of a degrading poverty such as cannot be matched in the poorest country on earth; he finds a vast population of the unemployed rich lounging in the streets and the parks, and of the unemployed poor hanging about the doors of the innumerable drink-shops, and infesting every highway and byway of the country. He finds the land of the agricultural districts often lying idle and unproductive; those who till it untaught, ill-fed, and discontented; those who possess it discontented, though well fed and instructed. Our subject does not lead us to inquire into the deeper causes of these anomalies, but it leads us to this observation: we are a "lazy diligent nation" because we have not yet learned, or have forgotten, that the thing most to be dreaded is not poverty, but idleness; and the thing most to be desired is not wealth, but strenuous, earnest, and useful toil. Our desperate and eager work is not for the work's sake, but in order to get rich; our ambition is to be idle rather than to be employed, to be raised above the necessity of labour which is our health by the possession of wealth which is our ruin. We have cherished the fatal and foolish error that work was degrading, and have ranked those highest who did the least. "Where no oxen are," we have said in our fastidious way, "the crib is clean," forgetting the other side of the matter, that "much increase is by the strength of the ox."* Thus we have ignorantly despised the workers who make us rich, looking down upon trade, upon business, and more than all upon manual labour; and have with strange fatuity admired most those who were most useless, whose peculiar boast would be that they never did a day's work in their lives.

Happily now there are signs of a revolution in our thought. We are beginning to see that work is good, not for what it earns, but for the occupation and the training which it gives to the body and the mind; and that idleness is an evil, not only where work is a necessity, and the appetite craves it of us, but everywhere and under all circumstances. In useful employment we find our life; in the sluggard's life we see our death.

We must observe then the good effects which result from honest and earnest toil. But, first, we cannot help noticing what an important place is here given to agriculture. This is not acci-

dental to the time in which the book was written. It is an eternal principle. Out of the soil comes our wealth; by the soil therefore we live; and accordingly God has ordained that in the tilling of the ground man shall find his wholesomest, sweetest, and most strengthening employment—that no community shall inwardly flourish when its agricultural life declines; and that therefore the happiest and soundest society will be that in which the largest proportional number are engaged in producing the fruits of the earth, and are directly and vitally attached to their mother soil. "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread."* When a nation is in the case of the sluggard, when you pass by its fields and its vineyards and see them grown over with thorns and nettles and its stone walls broken down, you will find Pauperism coming as a robber, and Want, gaunt and hideous, stalking through the land like an armed man.† "Be thou diligent," therefore we are told, "to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds"—(take care that no foolish pride or negligence prevent you from seeing that the agricultural life is properly maintained, for it is the only sure basis of prosperity); "riches are not for ever, and even the government of kings does not endure to all generations." But in the sweet ordinances of nature the great Giver provides His unfailing wealth: "The hay is carried, and immediately the tender grass begins to grow again, and even the barren mountains yield their herbs for ingathering. The lambs appear every spring with their wool for our clothing, and the field will maintain goats equal in value to its own price. And from these miraculous sources of eternal reproduction our food and our maintenance are to be drawn."‡

Thus at the foundation of all industries is the agricultural industry. At the root of all social and economical questions is the land question. When you wish to commend diligence and to discourage idleness in a nation that is "lazy diligent," the first thing is to inquire into the condition or the use of the land. The land is God's gift to a people. English land is God's gift to the English people. If it is misapplied, ill-used, neglected; if it does not produce its full tale of wealth; if it does not support its full burden of living creatures, and give employment to its full number of hands, we are flying in the face of God's ordinances; we must not expect to prosper; His gracious will is frustrated, and we must have the shame and sorrow of seeing our million of paupers, and our second million of enforced idlers, and our myriads of lazy cumberers of the ground, and our whole population disorganised and unsettled, torn with the frenzy of insane work, or gangrened with the corruption of destroying idleness. For the gifts of God are without repentance, and the abuse of His gifts is without remedy.

But turning now to the good effects which result from honest and earnest toil, we are taught to distinguish three more particularly—plenty, power, and personal worth.

First, Plenty. "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."§ Nor must we think that diligence is only manual; it is also mental. It implies thought, forethought, planning, arranging. We have a contrast drawn between

* Prov. xiv. 4.

* Prov. xxviii. 19.

† Prov. xxiv. 30-34.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 23-24

§ Prov. xiii. 4.

the really diligent man, whose prudence foresees, and whose reflection orders his work for the best ends, and the fussy, unreflecting activity of one who is always busy, but never accomplishes anything. It is only the diligence of the first kind that leads to the desired end; the diligence of mere restlessness is not much better than idleness. We learn that "the thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness, but every one that is hasty hasteth only to want." * Effectual labour implies thought; only a wise man, with all his faculties brought into full and harmonious play, can work with any good result, or can thriftily use the fruits of his labour; a foolish, thoughtless, witless person may work hard and earn a good deal of money, but it is gone even faster than it came. Thus "there is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swalloweth it up." † There are exceptions, no doubt; but the general rule is borne out by experience, that they who honestly and earnestly use the gifts of mind and body which God has given them, obtain the things which are needful in this life, if not to overflowing, yet in sufficiency; and where means fail we generally have to admit that our own industry or prudence was at fault.

Then, *secondly*, it is industry rather than genius which commends us to our fellow-men, and leads us to positions of influence and power: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men;" ‡ "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be put under task-work." § It is this golden faculty of persistence, concentration, diligence, which makes every great ruler and leader of men, and raises even the very ordinary person out of the drudgery of mere task-work into the dignity of large and noble and delightful toil.

For, *thirdly*, it is diligence, the capacity of taking pains, that gives to a man his actual worth, making him compact and strong and serviceable: "The precious substance of men is to be diligent." || It is the quality itself which is all-important. The greatest gifts are of little worth, unless there is this guarantee of the conscientious and intelligent employment of them. While if the gifts with which God has endowed us are of the simplest order, if we can only use a spade or a saw or a broom effectively, that faculty diligently exercised is our value to the world; and a great value it is—greater than the value of high genius which is erratic, unbridled, undirected, and uncertain. Of every man or woman in this world the highest praise which can be uttered is that which underlies the commendation of the good wife: "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." ¶ There is the epitome of all trust-worthy and honourable character.

We have been dwelling all this time on a simple virtue of a very mundane type. But all that has been said may be immediately raised to a higher plane by one observation. Our Lord and Master was diligent about His Father's business, and has left on record this saying: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is called to-day; for the night cometh, in which no one can work." As each one of us comes under his influence and passes into His faith and obedi-

ence, the joyful seriousness of our life-work deepens; it is lit by the rich glow of a sunset glory. We want to do diligently what our hand finds to do—to do it earnestly as unto the Lord. By patient and industrious exercise of every faculty which He has given us, we wish to be prepared for any task which He may appoint here or hereafter. Some of us He only apprentices in this world; and according to the faithfulness with which we discharge our humble and unnoticed duties will be the service to which He will one day appoint us. Others are called out of apprenticeship into the rough and eager work of the journeyman, and His eye is always upon us as He tries us to find whether we may ever be appointed over one, or five, or ten cities. A few supreme souls have been called even on earth to shape, to create, to control; a Paul, an Augustine, a Luther, can work with an emancipated hand. But the law is one all through the work shops, the fields, the vineyards of our Lord. The diligent shall stand before Him, and the slothful shall be shamed. He that does not plough will not reap. Wasted opportunities vanish for ever, and leave only their doleful record in the emasculated and nerveless soul.

CHAPTER XXI.

WINE.

"He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man;
He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich."

—PROV. xxi. 17.

THE Septuagint translation has an interesting addition to the proverb in xii. 11. After "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding," it adds, "He who is sweet in pastimes of wine-drinking shall have dishonour in his strongholds." Drinking is the natural opposite of hard and honest work. When the love of it takes possession of a man he is sure to become a useless and unproductive member of society. A drunken people are in the end an incapable people; their wealth declines, their industries pass over to soberer rivals, their qualities of brain and muscle gradually disappear. This is partly owing to the deterioration of mind and body which results from the excessive use of stimulants; but it is still more due to a wider cause: drinking in all its branches is indulged in as a pleasure. Why do we not admit it? why do we always try to present it in another light, saying that it is for health's sake, by a doctor's orders; or for work's sake, by a proved necessity? Is it not that we are secretly conscious of taking the drink because we like it? We know it is a self-indulgence, and we are a little ashamed of it; and as self-indulgence is always fatal in the long run to all the habits and activities which men very properly honour, we should dearly like to screen it under a decent pretext which might preserve our self-respect. We know quite well that "he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." * Drinking is after all only a pronounced symptom of a large vice—self-indulgence.

A great step is taken when we have learnt to

* Prov. xxi. 5.

† Prov. xxi. 20.

‡ Prov. xxii. 29.

§ Prov. xii. 24.

|| Prov. xii. 27.

¶ Prov. xxxi. 27.

* Prov. xxi. 17.

quietly and candidly face this fact: we drink, as a society, as a nation,—each of us drinks in public or in private,—simply because it is pleasant. It is a habit governed by one supreme and absolute law—*we like it*. We know quite well that alcohol is not a food; that is proved by the most irrefragable scientific evidence; and if in alcoholic drinks there are certain nutritive elements, we could if we chose secure the benefit of them without any admixture of alcohol. We know that in many cases the alcohol is actually deleterious, that it produces specific and very terrible diseases, that it lowers the tone of the whole system and makes us liable to all kinds of secondary troubles. We may urge that alcohol is a medicine, and a useful medicine; but it is not as a medicine we use it. If a doctor prescribes castor-oil, or quinine, we throw aside the medicine on the first opportunity, often before it has done its work. Alcohol is the only medicine which we continue to take for a lifetime because the doctor prescribed it for a month. Would it not be better then to clear our minds of cant, and to set the whole matter on its right basis? Intoxicants are drunk as a form, as the most universal form, of self-indulgence. In some mysterious way, for some mysterious reasons which we cannot fathom, they gratify an instinctive appetite, they are naturally and generally attractive, they exercise a spell over the physical system. If the taste is, as some people say, acquired, it was acquired by mankind in prehistoric times, and is part of our inherited constitution as men. For instance, Mr. Gaule, a police-court missionary in Birmingham, relates a recent experience, one out of many in his fourteen years of labour. A young married woman, twenty-eight years of age, died a shocking death from drinking. Up to the age of twenty-six she had been a teetotaler, and did not know what the taste of drink was. She was a leading member of the Gospel Temperance Mission, and sang the solos at the meetings. Then she was taken ill, the doctor ordered brandy, and it proved like the first taste of blood to a tame tiger. She could never again be kept from it, and at last it killed her. The craving there must have been in the very blood.

We have a taste for these intoxicants, latent or realised. The stimulating influence is pleasant, the narcotic influence is pleasant. The immediate effect on the body is pleasant, the immediate effect on the mind is pleasant. Drink produces a sense of great self-satisfaction, promotes a flow of conversation and a feeling of good-fellowship; it quickens at first several of our mental faculties; it excites the imagination, and carries its devotee far away from the actual, which is painful and harassing, into a kind of ideal world, which is cheerful and agreeable. So powerful is its temporary influence that in the "words of King Lemuel" there is positively a recommendation to "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."* An injunction which must not of course be mistaken for a Divine precept, but only for a reminder of the fact—a fact which may be observed without any moral judgment being passed upon it—that while men who require all their mental and moral faculties to be in full activity† must eschew the use of intoxicating drinks, the dying, the despairing,

the very poor and miserable, may find a certain relief in drinking. Men who are in the enjoyment of health, and wish to discharge effectively the day's duties, have no excuse for the employment of an agent which only serves to lull the mind into forgetfulness and to reduce the pain of consciousness to the lowest possible point.

Strange to say, while men are thus naturally inclined to use intoxicants, nature has been most lavish in pandering to their tastes. There are trees in tropical climates which have but to be gashed, and an intoxicating juice flows out, ready at once for use. Almost every natural juice ferments if it is left alone. The palm-tree, the potato-plant, the sugar-cane, beet-root, the cereals, as well as the grape, yield readily these intoxicating drinks, at a surprisingly low cost. Very little human labour is needed, very simple apparatus will suffice, so that a very few enterprising firms can deluge a whole continent with fiery intoxicants.

We drink because we like it,—not for our good, as we pretend, but for our pleasure, as we are half ashamed to confess. The taste is natural to us,—natural to savages, natural to civilised men, natural, so far as we know, to men of all climates and all races. And nature has made it singularly easy to gratify the taste.

Now one might almost suppose that the conclusion to be drawn would be, "Let us drink, let us take this element as a good gift of God." And that was the feeling of more primitive times. In the Vedas, for instance, Indra is praised as reeling with the intoxicating Soma which his worshippers have offered to him; drunkenness is regarded as a kind of inspiration. But no; as Wisdom asserts herself, and demands a hearing, she more and more decisively classes this taste for intoxicants with certain other tastes which are natural to us, but none the less dangerous; and she treats the bountiful provision which nature has made for the gratification of the taste as one of those innumerable temptations with which men in this present life are surrounded,—in conflict with which they prove their manhood,—by victory over which they acquire strength of moral principle and consistency in virtue.

As the reason within gathers power and authority, and as her clear light is replenished by the revelation of Divine Wisdom, all the spurious attractions of drinking are weakened, the glamour is destroyed, and the truth is recognised that "wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whosoever erreth thereby is not wise;"* more and more it appears that the power of wine is the power of the animal within us, and that the widespread influence of it is a sign that the animal within us dies slowly; we learn to measure the growth of reason by the degree of mastery which has been obtained over the low appetite; and we understand that striking antithesis of the New Testament religion, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit."

The way then in which we are brought to look at the drink question is this: here is a powerful natural temptation, a seduction which nature herself offers to the body, a foe which always has a traitor in collusion with it inside the assaulted citadel. This enemy is ingenious in its argumentation: it approaches usually under the guise of a friend; it says—and not without truth—that it

* Prov. xxxi. 6, 7.

† Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.

* Prov. xx. 1.

comes to give pleasure to poor harassed and toil-worn mortals; it persuades them that it is a wholesome food, and when that contention is shattered it would have them believe that it is a medicine. When it has gained an entrance into the fortress, by fair means or foul, it at first proceeds very dourly, and seems to justify its presence by numberless obvious benefits. Sometimes it will successfully hide all the evil it is working, as if its purpose were to beguile new victims and to acquire a more unbounded sway over the old.

As religious men, as spiritual beings, whom God claims to become His children, we are called upon to face this subtle, powerful, and all-persuasive foe. We are to do our best to understand its ways—we look to science to help us and to teach us. We are then to take every weapon within our reach to resist its approach,—argument, persuasion, entreaty; we are to lose no opportunity of unveiling the tactics of the foe, and rousing those who are imperilled to a sense of their danger; then as Christian citizens we are bound to use all the influence we possess to hold this terrible natural temptation within the strictest limits, and to fortify all the powers of resistance in our fellow-men to the highest possible degree.

In such a crusade against the enemy of our race, few things are more effectual than a vivid and accurate delineation of the effects which drink produces—such a delineation, for instance, as that which is given in chap. xxiii. 29-35. Let us proceed to examine this remarkable passage.

"Whose is Oh? whose is woe?" asks the Teacher. Who is it whose constant and appropriate language is that of lamentation—the piteous cry of pain, the agonised exclamation of remorse? "Whose are contentions?" Who is it that lives in an atmosphere of perpetual strife and loud quarrellings? "Whose is groaning?"—that sustained sigh of desponding and irredeemable misery. "Whose are causeless wounds?"—not only the bruise and the gash which result from furious sparrings or unforeseen falls, but also wounds of the spirit, self-loathing and shame, the thought of what might have been, the realisation of a ruined home, and of suffering wife and little ones, and the conviction that the evil can now never be undone. "Whose is the darkling of the eyes?"* Who is it whose eyes have that horrible inflamed, lack-lustre look, which is the exact opposite of the light and clearness and sparkle proper to the human eye?

The answer to these questions is given in a sentence, "Theirs who tarry over the wine, theirs who go to try the mixture." It is not of course suggested that all who drink wine, nor even all who take it habitually, fall into the horrible condition which has just been described; this condition is the result of lingering over the drink, spending hours in tippling, de-

voting time and thought to tasting various brands and samples, becoming a connoisseur of strong beverages, allowing the subject to occupy an appreciable proportion of one's time. It is not the use, but the abuse, of the thing which in this passage is reprobated. But now we are reminded of the great difficulty which occurs in distinguishing between the use and the abuse. There is no sharply-defined limit. There is no mechanical monitor which at once reminds us, "Here use ceases and abuse begins." Almost the only rule that can be given is, that whenever the cup seems in the least degree attractive, then danger is near and it is necessary to abstain. "Look not on wine when it reddens, when it gives its gleam in the cup; it goes down so smoothly!" It is the peculiarity of this substance that it can only be taken safely when it has comparatively no attractions, when it is taken under orders, and as it were against the grain. If it is really pleasant to us, we can never tell where the pleasantness melts into a dangerous fascination, where the colour and the sparkle and the agreeable tingle which make it pass so easily down the throat have become the lure and the spell of a poisonous reptile. For this pleasant indulgence, which seems to be perfectly innocent, what is the issue of it? "Its end—like a serpent it bites, and like a basilisk it stings." One evil result of it is that it rouses into perilous activity the dormant passions; even pure men and women under this potent influence become impure. The eyes which are excited with wine will turn readily to loose and degraded women.* The fall which might have been easily avoided in a state of sobriety will be inevitable when the reason is silenced, the will enfeebled, and the desire inflamed by this seductive poison.

Another evil effect is that the sense of truth entirely disappears. What a misleading maxim is that of the Romans, *In vino veritas*! While it is a fact that the intoxicated man will blab many things which were best kept concealed, there is nothing which deteriorates truthfulness so rapidly as the use of alcohol. The drinker becomes crafty and deceitful and untrustworthy. The miserable brain is haunted with chimeras, the imperious appetite suggests all kinds of subterfuges and evasions, the very "heart speaks frauds." Yes, nothing could be more accurate than this: the effect of drink is not so much to make the lips lie, as to make the inner man essentially insincere and deceptive. No man admits that he is a drunkard, even to his own heart; long after all his friends know it, and are beginning to despair of him, even when he has had several attacks of *delirium tremens* and is a confirmed dipsomaniac, the most he will allow is that he has sometimes taken a little more than is good for him, but so very little seems to upset him. Ah, "thine heart shall utter froward things," i. e., frauds. Every one who has had any dealings with the miserable victims of drink will sorrowfully confirm this statement.

The insecurity of the habit is incredible. It leads to the destruction of every faculty which

*The difficulty of the word חֲכָלָיִת, which means "dimming," is that in the only other place where it occurs (Gen. xlix. 12: "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk") the redness is evidently regarded as an advantageous attribute. But perhaps the explanation is to be sought in the fact that the immediate effect of wine upon the eye is to darken it in one sense, and the ultimate effect is to darken it in another. In the first moment of excitement the pupil of the drinker's eye dilates and flashes with a darkling fire; but it is not long before the eye becomes heavy, dim, watery, and maudlin. It is in this last sense that we must understand the word here.

* Prov. xxiii. 33. חֲכָלָיִת must, as in xxii. 14, be rendered "strange women" (Bertheau). The alternative rendering, "the strange, or the rare" (Norwack) is logically inadmissible, because the verse is obviously describing the moral effects of drink, and no one can say that to see strange or rare visions is a moral effect to be specially deprecated.

God has mercifully given us to protect us from danger and guide us through life. The ready perception of things is marred, the quick rallying of the attention is delayed, the exercise of the understanding is prevented, the will is paralysed, the conscience dies. "Thou shalt be as he who lieth down in the heart of the sea,"—as one in a calenture who strides into the merciless waves under the impression that he is walking on flowery meadows. Thou shalt be "as he that goeth to bed on the mast's head,"—where the position is precarious even if the sea be perfectly calm, but becomes sure destruction if the winds awake and the ship begins to climb large billows and to plunge down into their unquiet troughs.

And then, worst of all, when there is a temporary recovery from this abominable state of drunkenness, and the feeble wails of repentance begin to be heard, what can be more disconnected—more futile—more abject—more irrational than his words? "They have smitten me," he says; "I have not been sick,"—as if forsooth he were the victim of some violence offered to him by others, instead of being the author of his own stripes; as if he were quite right and well, and the disease were not deep in his own passion-haunted heart. "They have stricken me," he continues to whine, "I have not known it." Footpads have attacked him, he would have us believe, and that is the explanation of his begrimed and blood-smeared face, his torn clothes, and his empty pockets. "When shall I awake?" he mutters, as the swimming sensation in the head, and the unsteady stagger in his step, remind him that he is not quite himself. And then—is it possible? Yes, his next remark is, "I will seek it again." I will go and get another drink. His miserable mind, the victim and the mint of lies, having persuaded him that all the mischief came from some cause other than himself, and had nothing to do with the one degrading habit which really produced it, he proposes at once to seek the very agent which is his undoing, to heal his intoxication by getting drunk again.*

This vivid and forcible picture of the miserable sufferings, the contemptible vices, and the helpless bondage which result from intoxicating drink is all the more impressive because there is no attempt made to enforce total abstinence as a principle. If, however, it is duly considered and understood, it is very likely to produce total abstinence as a practice, just as the object lesson of the drunken helot led every Spartan youth to turn with unspeakable loathing from the embruting vice. Modest minds, observing how the mighty are fallen, how this one cause has ruined the strongest, the best, and the most attractive of their fellow-creatures, insidiously leading them on, mocking them, and luring them into dangerous and poisonous marshes, will be inclined to say, as Daniel said, "I will abstain; I may be safe or I may not; if I am safe all I gain is a certain amount of animal pleasure; if I am not, what I lose is health, honour, wealth, even life itself,—not the body only, but the soul too." The gain from the use of these things is very measurable and insignificant; the loss

from their abuse is immeasurable, and the passage from use to abuse escapes at once our observation and control.

But, after all, wisdom urges temperance in drinking only as a part of a much larger principle. If temperance in drinking stands alone and unconnected with this larger principle, it is a blessing of a very doubtful kind, so doubtful indeed that the pharisaism, the intolerance, the dogmatism, which are able to subsist with "Temperance" in the limited sense, have often been the most serious hindrance to temperance in its larger and nobler meaning.

It is the desire of pleasure which is at the root of the mischief: "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." Men are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* The appetites which are natural to us hold undisputed sway, they are fleshly; the great spiritual appetites, which are supernatural, are quite feeble and inoperative. Men ask for that which is pleasant, and even when they become religious it is only to obtain pleasure, a greater and a more lasting pleasure; thus there is an intemperance, which we call fanaticism, even in religious beliefs and in religious practices. But what men need is that the desire of God, for His own sake, should be so inflamed in them as to burn up all other desires. And this desire can only be created by His Holy Spirit. The competing and manifold desires of pleasure can only be mastered and expelled when that great, absorbing, and embracing desire of God has been securely settled in the human heart by the Holy Spirit. True temperance is really one of the ninefold fruits of the Spirit, and is of little value, a mere spurious product, unless it is accompanied by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and meekness. Such passages as we have been considering in the book of Proverbs may give us a wholesome horror and hatred of drunkenness, and may even lead us to a prudential temperance—they may even make us as sober as pious Mohammedans or Buddhists; but if we are to become really temperate a higher power must intervene, we must be "born of the Spirit." Is it not remarkable how nothing short of the highest remedy—the new birth—is effectual for curing even the slightest of human infirmities and sins?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TREATMENT OF THE POOR.

"The rich and the needy meet together; The Lord is the maker of them all."—PROV. xxii. 2.

"He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth of his bread to the poor."—PROV. xxii. 9.

"He that oppresseth the poor, it is for his increase; he that giveth to the rich, it is for want."—PROV. xxii. 16.

"Rob not the poor because he is poor, neither oppress the humble in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and despoil of life those that despoil them."—PROV. xxii. 22, 23.

If we would understand and lay to heart the very striking lessons of this book on the treatment of the poor, it will be well for us to observe that there are four words in the Hebrew

* 2 Tim. iii. 4—*φιλόδοτοι μάλλον ἢ φιλόθεοι*, pleasure-loving rather than God-loving; which means, not that men place pleasure before them consciously as a substitute for God, but only that the instinctive desire of pleasure has not been mastered by the love of God.

* "The primary discomforts of an act of drunkenness," says Dr. G. W. Balfour, "are readily removed for the time by a repetition of the cause. Thus what has been an act may readily become a habit, all the more readily that each repetition more and more enfeebles both the will and the judgment."—Art. "Drunkenness" in "Encycl. Brit."

original which are rendered by our English words "poor" or "needy." These words we will try to discriminate and to use with more exactness in the present lecture, that we may not miss any of the teaching by the blur and obscurity of careless language. *First*, there is a word (לָדָן) for which we will reserve our English word "poor"; it signifies a person who is weak and uninfluential, but not necessarily destitute or even in want. The "poor" are those who form the vast majority of every society, and are sometimes described by the word "masses." *Secondly*, there is a word (עָנִי) which may be rendered "needy." It covers those who are in actual want, people who through bereavement, or infirmity, or unavoidable calamity are unable to secure a sufficiency of the necessities of life. *Thirdly*, there is a word (עָנָו) which we may perhaps render by "humble," for though it more literally describes the afflicted and sad, it contains within it a hint of moral commendation which suggests a transition from the idea of simple weakness and helplessness to that of patient and humble dependence on God. *Lastly*, there is a word (אֲבִיָּוָה) which we will render "destitute." If we keep these notions—"poor," "needy," "humble," "destitute"—distinct, and yet combined, to form one conception, we shall find that the proverbs before us refer to that large section of mankind who are in a worldly and material sense considered the least fortunate; those to whom it is a lifelong effort merely to live; those who have no margin of security on which to fall back in case of disaster or sickness; those who are engaged in precarious employments or in casual labour; those who may keep their heads above water by diligence and unremitting exertions, but may at any time go under; those who owing to this constant pressure of the elementary needs have but little leisure to cultivate their faculties, and little opportunity to maintain their rights. We are to think of the large class of persons who in more primitive times are slaves, who in feudal times are serfs, who in modern times are called the proletariat; those in whose interest the laws of society have not hitherto been framed, because they have not until quite recently been admitted to any substantial share in the work of legislation; those who have always found it peculiarly difficult to secure justice, because justice is a costly commodity, and they have no means to spare, since "the destruction of the poor is precisely their poverty."* We are not to think of the idle and the vicious, who are so often classed with the poor, because they, like the poor, are without means,—we must rigorously exclude these, for they are not in the mind of the writer when he gives us these golden precepts. We must remember that it is part of our peculiar English system, the result of our boasted Poor Law, to discredit the very word poverty, by refusing to discriminate between the poor in the scriptural sense, who are honourable and even noble, and the pauper in the modern sense, who is almost always the scum of a corrupt social order, in four cases out of five a drunkard, and in the fifth case the product of some one else's moral failings. It requires quite an effort for us to see and realise what the Scriptures mean by the poor. We have to

slip away from all the wretched associations of the Poor House, the Poor Law, and the Guardians. We have to bring before our minds a class which in a wholesome state of society would be a small, numerable minority, but in our own unwholesome state of society are a large and well-nigh innumerable majority,—not only the destitute and the actually needy, but all the people who have no land on which to live, no house which they can call their own, no reserve fund, no possibility of a reserve fund, against the unavoidable calamities and chances of life, the people who are trodden down—who tread each other down—in the race of competition; all those, too, who, according to the godless dogma of the day, must go to the wall because they are weak, and must give up the idea of surviving because only the fittest must expect to survive. There rise up before our imagination the toiling millions of Europe—of England—worn, pale, despondent, apathetic, and resigned; or bitter, desperate, and resentful; not destitute, though they include the destitute; not needy, though they include the needy; but poor, without strength except in combination, and often when combined without light or leading.

I. Now the first thing we have to observe is that *the poor*, in the sense we have tried to define, are a special concern to the Lord. "Rob not the poor," says the text, "because he is poor, neither oppress the humble in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause, and despoil of life those that despoil them." "Remove not the ancient landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is strong. He shall plead their cause against thee."* "The Lord will establish the border of the widow."† So intimate is the connection between the Lord and His poor creatures that "he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker, but he that hath mercy on the destitute honoureth Him."‡ "Whoso mocketh the needy reproacheth his Maker, and he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished."§ On the other hand, "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will He pay him again."||

Not, of course, that there is any favouritism with God, not that He has an interest in a man because of his means or lack of means; but just because of His large and comprehensive impartiality. "The needy man and the oppressor meet together; the Lord lighteneth the eyes of them both."¶ "The rich and the needy meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all."** His special interest in the poor arises only from their special need, from the mute cry which goes up to Him, from the appeal to Him as their only friend, deliverer, and protector: just as His lesser interest in the rich arises from their self-satisfied independence of Him, from their inflated trust in themselves, and from their conviction that already all things belong to them. We should make a mistake if we supposed that the Lord recognises any class distinctions, or that He valued a man because he is poor, just as we value a man because he is rich. The truth rather is that He absolutely ignores the class distinctions, regarding the mingled mass of human beings, rich and poor, oppressor and op-

* Prov. xxiii. 10, 11.

† Prov. xv. 25.

‡ Prov. xiv. 31.

§ Prov. xvii. 5.

|| Prov. xix. 17.

¶ Prov. xix. 13.

* Prov. x. 15.

** Prov. xxii. 2.

pressed, as on a plane of dead equality, and then distinguishing between them on a totally different principle,—on a moral, a spiritual principle; and, if there is any preference, it is on the ground of certain valuable moral effects which poverty sometimes produces that He takes the poor into His peculiar and tender care, honouring them with so close a friendship that service to them becomes service to Him.

This is certainly good news to the masses. "You are undistinguished, and unobserved,"—the voice of wisdom seems to say,—“In this world, with its false distinctions and perverted ideals, you feel at a constant disadvantage. You dare hardly claim the rights of your manhood and your womanhood. This great personage, possessing half a city, drawing as much unearned money every day as you can earn by unremitting toil in fifteen or twenty years, seems to overshadow and to dwarf you. And there are these multitudes of easy, comfortable, resplendent persons who live in large mansions and dress in costly garments, while you and your family live in a couple of precarious rooms at a weekly rental, and find it all you can do to get clean and decent clothes for your backs. These moneyed people are held in much estimation; you, so far as you know, are held in none. Their doings—births, marriages, deaths—create quite a stir in the world; you slip into the world, through it, and out of it, without attracting any attention. But be assured things wear a different appearance from the standpoint of God. Realise how you and your fellow-men appear to Him, and you at once recover self-respect, and hold up your head in His presence as a man. That simple truth which the Ayrshire peasant sang * you may take as God's truth, as His revelation; it is the way in which He habitually thinks of you.”

How the scales seem to fall away from one's eyes directly we are enabled to see men and things as God sees them! The sacred worth of humanity shines far brighter than any of its tinsel trappings. We learn to estimate ourselves aright, undisturbed and unabashed by the false estimates which are current in the world. Our true distinction is that we are men, that we belong to a race which was made in the image of God, was dear to His heart, and is redeemed by His love. The equality we claim for men is not a levelling down—it is quite the reverse; it is raising them up to the higher level which they have deserted and forgotten; it is teaching them to live as men, distinguished not by their accidental circumstances or possessions, but by their manhood itself. It is giving men self-respect instead of self-esteem, teaching them not to vaunt themselves as one against another, but to claim their high and honourable title, one and all, as the sons of God.

II. But now it follows that, if the Lord Himself espouses the cause of the poor, and even identifies Himself with them, ill-treatment of them, injustice to them, or even a wilful neglect of them and disregard of their interests, must be a sin and a very terrible sin. “He that despiseth

his neighbour sinneth; but he that hath pity on the humble, happy is he.” *

In the East to this day the proverb, “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it,” † has its full significance. But even in the West, where the name of Christ is borne by the nations, it is a common thing for one or two greedy and selfish capitalists to form a “corner”—as the commercial slang of the day denominates it—in some article of industry, *i. e.*, to secure all the raw material in the market, and to hold it until a famine price can be demanded. Meanwhile, the mills are idle, the looms are silent, the workpeople are unemployed, and their families suffer. Our moral sense is not yet sufficiently cultivated to condemn this hideous selfishness as severely as it deserves, and to regard the perpetrators of it as enemies of the human race. “The people curse” them, that is all. But as we have seen that the cause of the wage-earners is the cause of the Lord, we may rest quite confident that He to whom vengeance belongs enters every action of the kind in His unerasable accounts, and reserves the inevitable punishment for these “oppressors of the poor.”

There is another evil of modern industrial life which is alluded to in the Proverbs before us. No oppression of the poor is more terrible than that which is exercised by those who themselves are needy. The system which results from necessity of this kind is termed “sweating.” The hungry contractor undertakes the job at the lowest possible price, and secures his profit by getting hungrier and weaker creatures than himself to do the work at a price lower than possible, literally at starvation wages. What force, then, to modern ears is there in the saying, “A needy man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food”? ‡

The Divine oversight of these industrial

* Prov. xiv. 21.

† Prov. xi. 26. The following description of Persia, in the *Missionary Review of the World*, October, 1889, p. 782, aptly illustrates the practices against which the text inveighs:—“The sole end for which the Persian Government exists is the collection of the revenue, the fleecing of the people. Large portions of the land, confiscated from time to time, belong to the Sovereign, and are farmed out on terms well-nigh ruinous to the tenant. Even where property belongs to the subject, it is taxed to the last degree as a starting-point, while the successions of sub-rulers and collectors make still further drains upon the moiety that must save the labourer's family from absolute want. The whole burden of taxation thus comes really upon the labouring class. Added to this extortion is the constant uncertainty as to whether the planter will be permitted to reap his crop at all. Downright robbery of fields or households by the retainers of petty chiefs is of frequent occurrence, and the poor are liable any day to be deprived of their very last resource. Agriculture and other industries so discouraged and paralysed barely sustain the lives of the people at the best, and when drought is added thousands must perish.” In times of scarcity, “The king sets the example—locks up his granaries, and withholds every kernel of wheat except at famine prices. Every nabob and landowner who has a stock on hand follows this example. Rapacity and cupidity rule; money is coined out of the sufferings of the poor.”

‡ Prov. xxviii. 3. Oddly enough the commentators, who seem never to have heard of “sweating,” propose to read for רש, either עשיר = rich, or ראש = head, for the head of the State; an example of conjectural emendation which may well make us cautious of the mere scholar's method of treating the sacred text.

“The cruellest landlords, receiving 10, 20, and 30 per cent. from detestable habitations (in London), are nearly connected by birth and circumstance to those they oppress” (*Lecture delivered at Essex Hall, November 18th, 1889, by Thomas Locke Worthington*).

* “What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin-grey, and a' that;
Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
Their tinsel show and a' that,
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.”

abuses is not, as we sometimes suppose, pretermitted. Wisdom and Justice and Love hold the reins, and though the rapacity and cupidity of men seem to have a wide range, they are inevitably pulled up in the end, if not in this partial and transient life, yet in that long Eternity through which the Eternal will work out His purposes. As He Himself sides with the poor and pities them, and turns with indignation against their oppressors, it follows necessarily that "he that augments his substance by usury and increase gathereth it for him that pities the poor." * In fact, the merciful and pitiful nature has all the forces that rule the universe on its side, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary: "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh." †

It is the strange paradox of all selfishness that the selfish man is really quite blind to his own true interests. He most conscientiously lives for himself, and seeks his own good, but the good he sought proves to be his evil, and of all his innumerable foes he finds at last that he himself is the worst. The selfish man is always coming to want, while the unselfish man whose whole thought has been for others is richly provided for. "He that giveth unto the needy shall not lack, but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse." ‡ "There is that scattereth and increaseth yet more, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want." §

"He that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse!" Yes, nothing is more striking than this truth, that not only positive oppression of the poor, but mere indifference to their state, mere neglect of their sufferings, involves us in sin. There are many who can honestly say that they have not deliberately wronged their fellow-men, and will on that ground plead innocent; but that is not enough. We are as members one of another responsible in a degree for all the injustice and cruelty which are practised in the society to which we belong. If we are drawing an income from invested money, we are responsible for the cruel exactions of excessive work, for the heartless disregard of life and limb, and for the constant under-payment of the workers

which makes the dividends so princely.* Nay, when we buy and use the cheap goods, which are cheap because they have been made at the cost of health and happiness and life to our brothers and our sisters, their blood is upon our heads, though we choose to forget it. For listen—"Whoso stoppeth ears at the cry of the poor," whoso tries to ignore that there is a labour question, and that the cry for increased or even regular wages, and for tolerable homes, and wholesome conditions of work, is a reality, and in form of unions, or strikes, or low wails of despair, is addressed to us all—"he shall cry and shall not be heard." † Such is the inexorable law of God. And again: "Deliver those that are carried away unto death,"—those who are sacrificing the sweetness of life, the sap of the bones, the health of the marrow, to the ruthless exigencies of the industrial machine: "and those tottering to slaughter see thou hold back,"—not leaving them to "dree their own sad weird," helpless and unregarded. "If thou say, Behold we knew not this man,"—how could we make ourselves acquainted with all the toiling masses of the city by whose labour we lived and were maintained in comfort?—"Doth not He that weigheth the hearts consider it; and He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it, and shall not He render to every man according to his work?" ‡ That is to say, if we plead, "When saw we Thee ahungered, or athirst, or sick and in prison, and came not to Thee?" our Lord will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me." And we "shall go away" into everlasting punishment, while the righteous go into life eternal.

III. For it follows, from the whole consideration of this subject, that those who make their life a ministry to the poor obtain a blessing,—

* Can the shareholders of the G. W. R., for instance, hold themselves free from responsibility in the case referred to in the following paragraph from the *Journal of the People's Palace*? "The *Saturday Review*, always trustworthy and read-worthy on subjects of law, calls attention to a case which concerns a great many. It is a case in which the decision is most unfortunate to the interests of all working men. One Membervy was employed at Paddington to shunt trucks: he was taken on by a contractor, but his real employers were the G. W. R. The trucks were drawn by a horse, and the horse ought to have had a boy to hitch on or off at a moment's notice; but the contractor refused to supply boys. Membervy in vain asked for one, pointing out the great dangers to which he was exposed. He complained on the very day of the accident by which he was knocked down and injured seriously. He sued the Company; he won his case with damages; the Company, being a rich body, appealed. Now, considering the vexation, the anxiety, and the expense of carrying on such a case, a Company which appeals ought in justice to have the damages doubled if it loses. The Company lost. They appealed to the Lords, still on the principle of being rich and their opponent poor. This time the Company won. The Lords have ruled that the Company did not employ Membervy, and that he was not obliged to work without a boy; he might have refused to work at all. Indeed! Then, if he refused to work, what about the children at home? A more mischievous doctrine was never upheld. Why, there are thousands and thousands of men and women who work daily under ineffectual protest,—who work at trades unwholesome, for wages inefficient, and for excessive hours; yet they work because they must—because they must. Membervy worked without a boy, knowing that he would some day be run over and perhaps killed, because he must: he had no choice. When all the Trade Unions are merged into one immense Trade Union, it will not be the wages alone that will be determined, but the cases of such unfortunate men as Membervy."

† Prov. xxi. 13.

‡ Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.

* Prov. xxviii. 8. The difficult verse Proverbs xxii. 16 should find a place here, "He that oppresses the poor to increase for him, he that gives to the rich only for need," but it is impossible to accurately determine its meaning. If the rendering of the English Bible is correct, we may interpret the proverb as a statement of the folly of oppression, which leads to want as inevitably as the more obvious folly of giving to the rich. But possibly Nowack is right in an interpretation which gives quite another turn to the saying, and makes it not a condemnation of the oppressor, but a suggestion of the advantage which may be gained from the oppression by the oppressed. "He who oppresses the poor—it turns to his (viz., the poor man's) gain," because it calls out all his energy and endurance, "while he who gives to the rich—it turns only to want," because it still further enervates and unfits him for the duties of life. This is not very satisfactory, and is decidedly far-fetched; but it is better than Delitzsch's suggestion, which strips the proverb of all moral significance, viz., "He that oppresses the poor, it is at any rate for his own gain; but he who gives to the rich, it is only to get want." The conclusion from this would be, that it is better to oppress the poor than to give to the rich, a sentiment quite out of harmony with the ethical teaching of the Proverbs. In a case like this we can only suppose that the saying has reached us in a mutilated form.

† Prov. xi. 17.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 27.

§ Prov. xi. 24.

yes, the only true and permanent blessing that life is capable of yielding. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."* The very form of the saying is significant. Does it not imply: "It is obvious that to give our bread to the poor is a blessing to ourselves, so obvious that it needs only to be stated to be admitted, and therefore, as the bountiful eye, the philanthropic observation, the readiness to see suffering and to search out the sufferers, necessarily leads to this generous distribution, it must be a blessing to its possessor"? Indeed, this is a true test of righteousness, as the Lord teaches in the parable just quoted. It is "the righteous that takes knowledge of the cause of the poor, while the wicked understands not to know it."† A religion which takes no knowledge of the masses is a false religion; a Church and a Ministry which "understand not to know" the condition of the people and the needs of the poor are not Christ's Church and Christ's Ministry, but flagrantly apostate; and nothing is plainer than this—that from such a Church and Ministry He will accept no orthodoxy of belief or valiant defence of the creed in lieu of obedience to all His plain and unmistakable commandments.

If we look at governments, the test is practically the same. "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."‡ And it is because the Messianic King, alone of all sovereigns and governments, rightly and fully understands and maintains the cause of the poor, that He alone of sovereigns shall be established for ever, and of the increase of His government there shall be no end. And for the flagrant neglect of this vital question on the part of all governing persons and assemblies, that King will call to account those pompous and wordy magnates who have borne the sword in vain, considering all interests rather than those of the poor, whom they were specially appointed to judge; and of the needy, to whose succour they were peculiarly bound to run.

And what holds in the state holds in the family. The virtuous woman, and head of the household—she whom God can approve and welcome into everlasting habitations—is emphatically not she who is always striving for social aggrandisement, always seeking for her children wealthy settlements and spurious honours; but is one who "spreadeth out her hand to the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."§

Well may we try to take God's view of this question, to understand what He means by the poor, and how He regards them, and how He expects us to treat them. For this, if it is not the secret and the centre of all true religious life, is at least the infallible test of whether our religious life is true or not. By our treatment of His poor, the Son of Man, who is to judge the world, declares that we shall be judged. "By that we shall be condemned or by that we shall be acquitted."

* Prov. xxii. 9.

† Prov. xxix. 7.

‡ Prov. xxix. 14. Has William II. of Germany been considering this text? If so, it is full of promise for the prosperity of Germany and of Europe. (International Labour Conference, March, 1890.)

§ Prov. xxxi. 30.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EDUCATION. THE PARENT'S THOUGHT OF THE CHILD.

"Train up a child according to his way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it."—PROV. xxii. 6.

"Withhold not correction from the child; if thou beat him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."—PROV. xxiii. 13, 14.

IN Lecture IV. we examined two of the main principles which should be inculcated on children in a Christian home. In the present lecture we approach the question of education again. It is necessary for us to examine two features of parental training on which the book of Proverbs lays repeated stress. First, the need of method in bringing up the young; and second, the way of punishing their delinquencies.

In the first we have an eternal principle, which applies and must apply as long as human nature endures, a principle which is even emphasised by the demands of our Christian faith. In the second we have a principle which is so modified and altered by the Christian spirit, that unless we make the largest allowance for the change, it may be, as it often has been, misleading and hurtful in a high degree. If we could trace out all the dark cruelties and injustice, the vindictiveness, the stupidity of parents, guardians, and teachers, who have sheltered themselves under the authority of the text, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him,"* we might read with a new application our Saviour's stern censure of accepting the letter of Scripture in place of coming to Him and learning of Him who is meek and lowly of heart.†

But our first duty is to understand the wholesome and eternally valid teaching that is here given us about education. "Train up a child in the way he should go." We gain a good deal in vividness if we go back to the meaning of the word which is rendered "train." Derived from a noun which signifies the palate and the inner part of the mouth, its literal meaning is "to put into the mouth." The metaphor suggested is that of feeding an infant. Every parent recognises the necessity of giving to the helpless children suitable nourishment. At first the mother feeds the babe at the breast. After the weaning she still feeds it with food carefully chosen and prepared. As the child grows older she changes the food, but she does not relax her care; and the father admits the responsibility of procuring the necessary diet for his little one, a responsibility which does not cease until the child is fully grown, fully formed, and fully able to provide for himself. Here is the suitable analogy for mental, moral, and spiritual teaching. The parents must feed their child with morsels suitable to his age, with the "milk of the word" at first, afterwards with strong meat. It all requires infinite care and forethought and wisdom, for there is a certain way of development, a certain ideal which the child must realise, and if the training be on the lines of that development, according to that "way," if it is to achieve that ideal, the teaching must all be

* Prov. xxii. 15.

† John v. 39.

accurately adapted to the age or stage of development, and to the particular character and disposition of the child. If the preliminary work of the parents is wisely done, if the influence exercised by them while their child is still entirely in their hands is exactly what it ought to be, there is no fear for the rest of life—"when he is old he will not depart from it." A great master of modern literature, who wandered through many ways of thought far from the opinions and faith of his parents, when in his old age he sat down to write the reminiscences of his life, discovered that the original bent given to his mind by his peasant parents had remained unexhausted to the end.* Many beliefs currently held had faded and grown dim, much of the historical foundation of his religion had crumbled away, but there was a truth which he had learned from his mother's lips and had seen exemplified in his father's life, and it returned to him in its full force, and remained unsubmerged in the tides of doubt, unaffected by the breath of change, it even acquired a fresh hold upon him in the decline of his days:—The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.

It is a good illustration of the unrivalled power of the parents over a man's life. "The Lord hath given the father honour over the children, and hath confirmed the authority of the mother over the sons," says Ecclesiasticus.† It is a rare opportunity which is given to parents. No sphere of influence which they may acquire can be like it; it may be wider, but it can never be so intense or so decisive. A father who abdicates the throne on which God has set him, who foregoes the honour which God has given him, or turns it into dishonour, must one day answer for his base renunciation before the Eternal Father. A mother who uses the authority over her sons which God has given her, merely to gratify her own vanity and selfishness, and to retain a love which she has ceased to deserve; or one who wantonly throws away the authority because its exercise makes large demands upon the spirit, has much to answer for at the Divine judgment-seat. Parental powers are so absolute, parental possibilities are so great, parental joys are so rare and wonderful, that they must of necessity be balanced by corresponding disadvantages in case of failure. "He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow, and the father of a fool hath no joy."‡ "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."§ It must therefore constantly press upon all wise parents, how are they to act, what methods are they to adopt, in order to rightly discharge their duties, and to win that precious reward of "a wise son"? || "My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall be glad, even mine, yea, my reins shall rejoice when thy lips speak right things." "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him."¶

The answer which is constantly suggested by the book of Proverbs, and especially by our

text, is this:—A successful parent will be one who makes the training of the children a constant and religious study. It is the last subject in the world to be left to haphazard. From the first a clear aim must be kept in view. "Is my great object that this boy shall be a true, a noble, a God-fearing man, serving his day and generation in the way God shall appoint? Is this object purged of all meaner thought? Can I renounce the idea of worldly success for him, and be indifferent to wealth and reputation, to comfort and ease for him?" When this question is satisfactorily settled, then comes a second. How is the aim to be realised? Is not the parent at once driven to God with the cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" A mistake may be so fatal, and it is so hard to clearly see, to rightly judge, to firmly act, that nothing can avail but the direct teaching, inspiration, and power of the Spirit of God. Happy are the father and the mother who have been forced in their helplessness to seek that Divine help from the very first!

If we only knew it, all education is useless apart from the Spirit of God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." And liberty is just what is most needed. Mechanical schemes, cut-and-dried precepts, are quite insufficient. Moving in the liberty of the Spirit you have insight and adaptiveness; at once you perceive that each child is a separate study, and must be approached in a different way. One is sanguine and over-confident, and he must constantly be humbled; another is diffident and desponding, and must be encouraged with the bright word of sympathy, spoken at the right moment. "I see it all, my child; I know what a fight it is in which you are engaged."* One is a born sceptic, and would know the reason why; he must be met with patient and comprehending arguments according to his mental powers. Another has no speculative instincts, and questions have to be raised, doubts suggested, in order to save him from drifting into the easy-going acceptance of everything which he is told. One seems naturally inclined to be religious, and must be carefully watched lest the sensitiveness should become morbid, and a dominant thought should lead to mania, melancholy, or a possible reaction. Another seems to have no religious instinct, and the opportunity must be sought for awaking the sense of need, rousing the conscience, opening the eyes to God.

But again, in proportion as parents are led by the Spirit, and make their sacred charge a matter of constant and beseeching prayer, they will in their own person and conduct represent God to the children, and so supplement all the possible defects of the express training and discipline. If the command "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"† is to have any weight with the child, he must live with those who themselves are in the fear of the Lord all the day long. A man must live near to God if he is to make God real to his children. A mother must hold very real converse with her Lord if His reality is to become obvious to her little ones. "As a child," says one,‡ "I always had a feeling that God and Jesus were such particular friends of mamma's, and were honoured more than words could tell." If such an impres-

* "I am the eldest child, born in 1795, December 4th, and trace deeply in myself the character of both parents, also the upbringing and example of both."—"Carlyle's Reminiscences," vol. i., p. 54.

† Eccles. xxx. 2.

‡ Prov. xvii. 21.

§ Prov. xvii. 25, xix. 13, 26.

|| Prov. xv. 20. Cf. x. 1, xxvii. 11, xxix. 3.

¶ Prov. xxiii. 15, 16, 24.

* See that invaluable little book, "The Education of a Christian Home," edited by Ella S. Armitage.

† Prov. xxiii. 17.

‡ "The Education of a Christian Home."

sion is to be created, depend upon it God and Jesus must *be* particular friends of yours. No talk, however pious, can create that impression unless the hallowed friendship actually exists.

Again, led by the Spirit, we are filled with Divine love; and no training of children can have any valuable or permanent effect which does not issue from, which is not guided by, and does not result in, love. For love is the Divine educator. It is this which accounts for the frequently observed anomaly that children who seem to have inferior home advantages and very inadequate education turn out better than others for whom no labour or expense or care seems to be grudged. If love is not there, all the efforts will fail. Love is the only atmosphere in which the spirits of little children can grow. Without it the wisest precepts only choke, and the best-prepared knowledge proves innutritious. It must be a large love, a wise love, an inclusive love, such as God alone can shed abroad in the heart. Love of that kind is very frequently found in "huts where poor men lie," and consequently the children issuing out of them have been better trained than those whose parents have handed them over to loveless tutors or underlings.

And this may perhaps fitly lead us to consider the other point which is before us—the prominence which is, in the Proverbs, given to chastisement. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes."* "Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope, and set not thy heart on his destruction."† "Stripes that wound are a cleansing of evil, strokes of the recesses of the belly."‡ "Withhold not correction from the child; when thou beatest him with a rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."§ "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother."|| "Correct thy son and he shall give thee rest, yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."¶

Corporal punishment seems to the Christian, and to the common sense of a society which is the product of the Christian spirit, degrading, brutalising, and essentially futile! It can only have even a modicum of good effect where it is inflicted by a loving hand, and in a loving spirit, without a trace of temper or cruelty, and obviously costing more to inflict than to bear. But even with all these conditions granted it is a most unsatisfactory method of punishment; it arouses vindictive feelings and savage passions. A whipped boy is almost sure to bully the next creature weaker than himself that he encounters; and acting only as a deterrent, it never reaches the conscience, or creates a sense of revolt from the sin for the sin's sake, which is the object of all wise, or at least of all paternal, punishment. We can only, therefore, set aside the precept to use the rod as one which was in harmony with darker and harder times before the Saviour of the world had come to reveal the inner life and to teach us how we are to deal with those mysterious and wonderful beings, our fellow-creatures.

But with this modification, and substituting "wise and merciful punishments" for "rod and stripes," these teachings remain of permanent validity. Our Heavenly Father chastens His

children; by most gracious punishments He brings home to them the sense of sin, and leads them to repentance and amendment.* And earthly parents, in proportion as they are led by the Spirit and filled with love, will correct their children, not for their own pleasure, but for their children's good. The truth which underlies these apparently harsh injunctions is this: Love inflicts punishments, nor are any punishments so severe as those which Love inflicts; and only the punishments which Love inflicts are able to reform and to save the character of the delinquent.

We all of us know that weak and sentimental nature—too common among modern parents—which shrinks from inflicting pain under all circumstances. Seizing on the ill-understood doctrine that Love is the sovereign power in life and in education, it pleads in the name of Love that the offender may be spared, that he may escape the due penalty of his fault. That is not a love like God's love: and if you are careful to observe, it has not the remedial or saving effect which the love of God has. "He that declines to punish his child hates him; he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." In the poor child's heart so much foolishness is bound up, so much wilfulness and temper, so much vanity and pride, so much sensuality and selfishness, so much unwholesome craving for amusement, it is so natural to the child to make pleasure the be-all and the end-all of life, that, if all this foolishness is to be driven away, there must be much sharp discipline and painful correction. The Divine method of punishment seems to be to let men eat of the fruit of their doings until they loathe it. They rebelliously call out for meat in the wilderness, and it turns into a satiety, a bitterness, and a plague, while it is between their teeth. Is it possible that parents too, under the guidance of the Spirit, may chasten their children in the same way, bringing home to the wilful the painful effects of wilfulness, to the vain the ridiculous effects of vanity, to the selfish the disastrous issue of selfishness, to the sensual the ruin and the misery of sensuality? Might not the most effectual punishment for every fault be an enforced quiet in which the culprit is confronted with the inevitable outcome of the sin? Does not even the hardest heart begin to melt, does not the dullest conscience begin to grow sensitive, when the sure results of evil are aptly portrayed before the mind? What pride would have courage to grow if it had a glimpse of the hard, dry, loveless, unloved, heart which is its inevitable fruit? What young man would venture to take the first downward steps in impurity if he had ever formed a conception of the devastation of brain and heart and life which must ensue?

The rod cannot open the eyes; it can but set the cunning intellect to work to find a way of enjoying the sin and escaping the rod. But the opening of the eyes—at which all true punishment must aim—reveals a rod which is bound up with the sin, sure as the sin itself. It is the parents' solemn task—and many an inward sorrow must it cost—to bring home to his child's heart these truths of experience which the child cannot at present know. Wise penalties and

* Prov. xiii. 24.

† Prov. xix. 18.

‡ Prov. xx. 30.

§ Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.

|| Prov. xxix. 15.

¶ Prov. xxix. 17.

* Lev. xxvi. 41: "If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant with Jacob."

"reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother."*

There is a voice, the voice of Divine Wisdom, which speaks continually to every parent, to every teacher of youth: "Incline thine ear," it says, "and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge"—without attention and application this heavenly wisdom cannot be known. "For it is a pleasant thing," so the voice continues, "if thou keep these words within thee, if they be established together upon thy lips. That thy trust may be in the Lord,"—without whom the best-meant efforts will fail,—"I have made them known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make thee know the certainty of the words of truth, that thou mayest carry back words of truth to them," those helpless and ignorant children whose needs "send thee" to me for instruction?†

The failures are numerous, disastrous, heart-breaking, but they are unnecessary. Your children are holy; they belong to the Saviour in whom you yourselves believe. Grasp that truth; go to Him in sublime faith. "Lord, it is not with Thee to save a part, to choose this one and save that. Thou wilt glorify Thyself in every one."‡ Surrender yourself to Him that He may use you to exhibit His Divine graces and saving love to the children. Live with Him daily, that the glory of the communion may not pass away from your face, or appear only by fits and starts—and so train up your child according to his way; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FORGIVING.

"Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause, and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work,"—PROV. xxiv. 28, 29.

"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he is overthrown, lest the Lord see it and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him."—PROV. xxiv. 17, 18.

"He that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished."—PROV. xvii. 5.

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee."—PROV. xxv. 21, 22.

THERE is no subject on which the teaching of the Proverbs more strikingly anticipates the morality of the New Testament than that of forgiveness to our enemies. Our Lord Jesus Christ could take some of these sayings and incorporate them unchanged into the law of His kingdom, for indeed it is not possible to surpass the power and beauty and truth of the command to feed those who have injured us if they are hungry, to give them drink when they are thirsty, and in this Divine way to kindle in them repentance for the injury which they have done. This is the high-water mark of moral excellence. No better state can be desired. When a human spirit is habitually in this tender and forgiving mood, it is already united with the Father of spirits, and lives.

It is almost superfluous to point out that even the saints of the Old Testament fall very far short of the lofty standard which is here set before us. The Psalmist, for example, is thinking of coals of a quite different sort when he exclaims: "As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits that they rise not up again."* That is the old elemental hate of human nature, the passionate, indignant appeal to a righteous God against those who have been guilty of a wrong or an injury. Even Jeremiah, one of the latest, and certainly not the least holy, of the prophets, could cry out concerning his enemies: "Yê, Lord, Thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me; forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from Thy sight; but let them be overthrown before Thee; deal Thou with them in the time of Thine anger."† Words painfully natural, words echoed by many a persecuted man of God, but yet quite inconsistent with the teaching of the Saviour in the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching already foreshadowed in this beautiful proverb.

But it may not be superfluous to notice that the Proverbs themselves, even those which stand at the head of this chapter, do not all touch the high-water mark of xxv. 21. Thus, for example, the motive which is suggested in xxiv. 18 for not rejoicing in the fall of an enemy is none of the highest. The idea seems to be, if you see your enemy undergoing punishment, if calamity is falling upon him from the Lord, then do not indulge in any insolent exultation, lest the Lord should be offended with you, and, in order to chastise your malignity, should cease to plague and trouble him. In such a view of the question, God is still regarded as a Nemesis that will resent any unseemly rejoicing in the calamity of another;‡ in proportion therefore as you wish to see your enemy punished, you must abstain from that joy in his punishment which would lead to its diminution. From a precept of that kind there is a vast moral stride to the simple prohibition of retaliation, announced without any reason given or suggested in xxiv. 29—"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." And from this again there is an incalculable stride to the positive spirit of love, which, not content with simply abstaining from vindictiveness, actually turns the tables, and repays good for evil, looking with quiet assurance to the Lord, and the Lord alone, for recognition and reward. Our wonder is occasioned not because all the Proverbs do not reach the moral altitude of this one, but rather that this one should be so high. When an ideal is set up far in advance of the general practice and even of the general thoughts of the time, we can ascribe it only to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

It needs no proof that forgiveness is better than revenge. We all know that—

"Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils."§

We all know that the immediate effect of forgiving our enemy is a sweet flow of tenderness in the soul, which surpasses in delight all the imag-

* Prov. xxix. 15.

† Prov. xxiii. 17-21.

* Psalm cxl. 9, 10.

‡ Prov. xvii. 5b.

‡ "The Education of a Christian Home."

† Jer. xviii. 23.

§ "Paradise Lost," ix., 171.

ined joys of vindictiveness; and that the next effect is to soften and win the foe himself; the scornful look relents, the tears of passion give place to those of penitence, the moved heart is eager to make amends. We all know that nothing more powerfully affects our fellow-men than the exhibition of this placable temper.* We all know that in forgiving we share God's prerogative, and come into harmony with His Spirit.

Yet here is the melancholy fact that notwithstanding this proverbial truth, taken up into the teaching of our Saviour, and echoed in the writings of His Apostles,† even in a Christian society, forgiveness is almost as rare as it was in the days of King Solomon. Men are not ashamed—even professing Christians are not ashamed—to say about their enemies, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." We even have a lurking admiration for such retaliatory conduct, calling it spirited, and we still are inclined to condemn one who acts on the Christly principle as weak or visionary. Still the old bad delight in seeing evil fall on the head of our enemies glows in our hearts; still the act of vengeance is performed, the bitter retort is given, the abusive letter is written, with the old sense of unhallowed pride and triumph. How is this? Ah, the simple truth is that it is a small matter to get right principles recognised, the whole difficulty lies in getting them practised. We need a power which can successfully contend against the storm of passion and self-will, in those terrible moments when all the calm lights of reason are quenched by the blinding surf of passion, and all the gentle voices of goodness are drowned by its roaring waves.

Sometimes we hear it said that the moral teaching of Christ is not original, but that all His precepts may be found in the words and writings of ancient sages, just as His teaching about forgiveness is anticipated by the proverb. Yes, but His claim does not rest upon His teaching, but upon the Divine and supernatural power which He has at His command to carry out His doctrines in the conduct of His disciples. This is the point which we must realise if this sweet and beautiful ideal is to be worked out in our lives. We have but touched the fringe of the question when we have conned His words, or shaped conceptions of what a life would be passed in conformity to them. The centre of Christian doctrine is *power*, the power of Christ, the fountain of living waters opened in the heart, the grafting of the withering branches upon a living stock, the indwelling of Christ Himself, as the spring and principle of every holy action, and the effectual restraint on all our ungovernable passions.

But before looking more closely at this, we ought to pay some attention to the constant motive which our Lord, even in His teaching, presents for the practice of a forgiving disposition. He always bases the duty of forgiveness on the need which we have of God's forgiveness; He teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and in the moving story of the unmerciful ser-

vant, who demanded the full payment from his fellow-servant just when his lord had pitifully remitted his own debt. He tells us that forgiveness of our enemies is an indispensable condition of our being forgiven by God. "His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also My Heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."* It is not therefore only, as it is sometimes stated, that we ought to be moved to pity by remembering what God has done for us. No, there is a much sterner thought in our Lord's mind; it is that if we do not forgive we shall not and cannot be forgiven. The forgiving spirit manifested to our fellow-men is that without which it is vain for us to come near and to ask God for pardon. If we have come, and are just about to offer our prayer, and if we then remember that we have aught against a brother, we must go first and be reconciled to him, before our prayer can be so much as heard.

Here is certainly a motive of a very powerful kind. Which of us would dare to cherish the bitter thought, or proceed with our plan of vengeance, if we remembered and realised that our vindictiveness would make our own pardon at the hands of God impossible? Which of the countless deeds of retaliation that stain with blood the pages of history would have been perpetrated, and which of the perpetrators would not have tremblingly relinquished all thought of reprisals, if they had seen that in those savage acts of vengeance they were not, as they supposed, executing lawful justice, but actually cutting off their own hope of pardon before the throne of God?

If we avenge ourselves, if society is constantly torn by the quarrels and the mutual recriminations of hostile men whose one thought is to give as good as they have got, it can only be because we do not believe, or do not realise, this solemn teaching of the Lord. He seems a faint and doubtful voice compared with the loud tumult of passion within: His authority seems weak and ineffectual compared with the mighty domination of the evil disposition. Powerful, therefore, as the motive is to which He constantly appeals, if He had left us nothing but His teaching on the subject we should not be materially better off than they who listened with attention to the teaching of the wise authors of these ancient Proverbs. What more has He left us?

It is His prerogative to give to those who believe in Him a changed heart. How much is meant by that, which only the changed heart can know! Outwardly we seem much alike; outwardly there is little sign of an inward transformation; but far as the east is from the west is the unregenerate heart from the regenerate, the Christless heart from one which He has taken in His hands, and by His great redemption created anew. Now without stopping to follow the processes of faith by which this mighty change is effected, let us simply mark the characteristics of the change so far as it affects the matter in hand.

The first and most radical result of the New Birth is that God takes the place which Self has occupied. All the thoughts which have clustered about your own being now turn to His Being, as stray fragments of iron turn to the magnet. Consequently, all the emotions and

* Burke said of Pitt after his fall, that the manner in which he made his own justification, without impeaching the conduct of his colleagues or taking any measure that might seem to arise from disgust or opposition, set a seal upon his character. (Lecky, "England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. iii., 61.)

† See Rom. xii. 20.

* Matt. xviii. 35.

passions which are stimulated by self-love give place to those which are stimulated by the love of God. It is as if the pipes of your aqueduct had been changed at the fountain head, disconnected from the malarious waters of the marsh, and connected with the pure and sparkling water of the hills. God's ways of regarding men, God's feelings towards men, His yearning over them, His pity for them, flow into the changed heart, and so preoccupy it that resentment, hatred, and malice are washed out like the sour dregs in a cup which is rinsed in a running stream.

There is the man who did you the wrong—very cruel and unpardonable it was!—but, as all personal elements are quite out of the question, you regard him just as if you were not the injured being. You see him only as God sees him; you trace all the malignant workings of his mind; you know how the fire of his hate is a fire which burns the heart that entertains it. You see clearly how tormenting those revengeful passions are, how the poor soul mastered by them is diseased, how the very action in which it is triumphing now must become one day a source of bitter regret and implacable self-reproach; you soon begin to regard the ill deed as a shocking wound inflicted on the doer of it, and the wells of pity are opened. As if this enemy of yours had been quite innocent of all ill-will, and had been overtaken by some terrible calamity, your one instinctive thought is to help him and relieve him. Out of the fulness of your heart, without any sense of being magnanimous, or any thought of a further end,—simply for the pity of it,—you come to proffer him bread in his hunger and water in his thirst.

Yes, it is in the atmosphere of pity that personal resentment dies away, and it is only by the power of the Son of Man that the heart can be filled with a pity large enough to pardon all the sins of our kind.

It is this thought—though without any definite statement of the means by which it is produced—that finds expression in Whittier's, touching lines:—

"My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burying-place;
Where pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face,
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of a common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and, trembling, I forgave."

Yes, one who is touched by the spirit of the Son of Man finds too much to pity in the great sorrowing world, and in its fleeting and uncertain life, to cherish vengeful feelings. Himself redeemed by the untold love of His Father, by the undeserved and freely offered pardon in Christ Jesus his Lord, he can feel for his enemies nothing but forbearance and love; if they too are Christians, he longs to win them back to the peace and joy from which their evil passion must have driven them; and if they are not, his eyes must fill with tears as he remembers how brief is their apparent triumph, how unsubstantial their gleam of joy. The desire to save them immediately masters the transitory wish to punish them.

The pity of men, for the sake of the Son of Man, wins the day.

And now we may just glance at the effect which the Christly conduct has upon the offender, and the reward which God has attached to its exercise.

It is one of the most beautiful traces of God's likeness, in even bad men, a characteristic to which there is no parallel in the animal creation, that though passion awakes passion, wrath wrath, and vengeance revenge—so that savages pass their whole time in an unbroken series of blood feuds, the hideous retaliation bandied from tribe to tribe and from man to man, generation after generation—the spirit of meekness, proceeding not from cowardice, but from love, disarms passion, soothes wrath, and changes vengeance into reconciliation. The gleam of forgiveness in the eye of the injured is so obviously the light of God that the wrongdoer is cowed and softened before it. It kindles a fire in his spirit, his heart melts, his uplifted hand falls, his angry voice grows tender. When men are so dehumanised as to be insensible to this softening effect, when they interpret the gentleness as weakness, and are moved by the forgiving spirit simply to further injury and more shameless wrong, then we may know that they are possessed,—they are no longer men,—they are passing into the category of the lost spirits, whom the forbearance of God Himself leads not to repentance but only to added sin.

But if you have ever by the sweet spirit of Christ so mastered your natural impulse as to return good for evil lovingly and whole-heartedly, and if you have seen the regenerating effect in the beautiful subjugation of your foe and his transformation into a friend, it is not necessary to say much of the reward which God has in store for you. Do you not already possess it?

Yet the reward is certainly greater than you are able at once to apprehend. For what a secret is this which you possess, the secret of turning even the malignity of foes into the sweetest affection, the secret which lay in the heart of God as the spring and the means of man's redemption.* The highest reward that God can give to His creatures is to make them partakers of His nature as He has made them in His own image. When we share in a Divine attribute we enter so far into the Divine bliss; and in proportion as this attribute seems removed from our common human nature, our spirit must exult to find that it has been really appropriated. What further reward, then, can he who avenges not himself desire? The pulse of the Divine heart beats in him; the tides of the Divine life flow through him. He is like God—God who opposes to man's ingratitude the ocean of His pardoning love; he is conscious of that which is the fountain of joy in the Divine Being; surely a man must be satisfied when he awakes in God's likeness! And that satisfaction comes to every one who has heaped coals of fire on his enemy's head by feeding him in his hunger, and giving him water when athirst. Say not, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." Love your enemies; pray for them which despitefully use you.

* Cf. the proverb, "When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7).

CHAPTER XXV.

THE KING.

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of *kings* is to search out a matter.
The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of *kings* is unsearchable.
Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer;
Take away the wicked from before the *king*, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.
Put not thyself forward in the presence of the *king*, and stand not in the presence of great men:
Far better is it that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the *prince* whom thine eyes have seen."—PROV. xxv. 2-7.

It will be remembered that in the book of Samuel there are two accounts of the monarchy and its origin lying side by side,—different, and to all appearances irreconcilable. One set of passages seem to imply that the king was appointed by God's holy purpose to fulfil the objects of His government. But another set of passages seems to represent the outcry for a king as a rebellion against the sovereignty of the Lord, and the appointment of a king as a punishment for the people's sin. It is in agreement with the first idea that provision is made in the Law for a monarchical government; but it is in agreement with the second idea that the actual kings prove to be for the most part incompetent and faithless rulers, "who do evil in the sight of the Lord," and that even the best of them fall into gross sins, or are at any rate guilty of grave errors. Thus David stumbled into a miry pit; Jehoshaphat experienced defeat in his alliance with Ahab; Josiah was slain at the battle of Megiddo; Uzziah was smitten with leprosy; and Hezekiah committed an imprudence which incidentally brought the great calamity upon his country. So it is all through.

Now the only satisfactory explanation that this twofold aspect of the kingship seems to admit of is one which goes deep down into the prophetic and inspired character of Israel and its history. The king in his ideal aspect is throughout a type and a foreshadowing of the Anointed One that was to come; and the actual failure of all the kings to realise the ideal, to govern wisely, to establish righteousness, or even to observe the moral law in their own persons, necessarily threw men's thoughts forward to Him who should sit upon the throne of David, and carry out in ways not yet realised or even conceived the noble and exalted ideas which clustered round the theocratic throne. Many hasty critics have been swift to see and to censure the ignoble failures of the men who sat upon the thrones of Judah and Israel; some critics have developed with sufficient clearness the noble ideal which always underlay the monarchy even in the moments of its deepest decline. But comparatively few have seen the significance of this contrast between the ideal and the actual; and consequently only a few have perceived with what a prolonged and emphatic voice the whole story of the Kings spoke of Christ.

The contrast just pointed out in the historic books appears with equal distinctness in this book of Wisdom; the proverbial sayings about the king exhibit the twofold thought; and the reconciliation is only found when we have realised the Kingship of Christ and can bring that idea to explain the ancient forecast. Thus the

study of the things concerning the king is to the thoughtful reader of the Proverbs a study of the things concerning Christ. The ideal elements speak of Him; the actual shortcomings cry out for Him.

First we will review what is said to the glory and honour of the king. He comes before us as the embodiment of righteousness.* "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him that speaketh right."† "A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment winnoweth away all evil with his eyes. . . . A wise king winnoweth the wicked and bringeth the threshing wheel over them."‡ As he purges the wicked, so he encourages the righteous: "He that loveth pureness of heart hath grace on his lips, the king shall be his friend."§ There is a great severity in his government: "The wrath of a king is as messengers of death; and a wise man will pacify it."|| "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion."¶ On the other hand, his mercy is one with his severity: "His favour is as dew upon the grass."¶¶ "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain."** "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upholden by mercy."†† The fact is that his government is a vice-royalty. He is the human instrument of the Divine Will. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the watercourses"—which the farmer directs and leads over his fields according to his purpose—"he turneth it whithersoever he will."‡‡ Thus the king expresses precisely the Lord's favour towards a servant that dealeth wisely, and the Lord's wrath against him that causeth shame.§§ The king manifests the Lord's spirit in dealing with the subject, judging the cause of the poor as the Lord does. "The king that judgeth faithfully the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."|||| He is, in a word, a manifestation—a revelation—of God Himself. "The glory of God is to conceal a thing," *i. e.*, to be unsearchable and unknowable, "and the glory of kings is to search a matter out;" the king, searching the deep things of God, and becoming the interpreter of the Divine will to men, is Himself in the place of God to us. "The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings there is no searching." Reflecting the righteousness, the mercy, the power of God, his throne is bathed in the celestial light. "Take away dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer; take away evil from before the king, and his throne shall be fixed in justice."¶¶¶

In the presence of such a sovereign the subject may well abase himself, even the greatest and wisest may count himself small. "Glorify

* It will be observed that, speaking generally, the early proverbs present the more favourable side of the kingship, and the later proverbs suggest a period of decline (see Introduction). Possibly the same test may serve to distinguish the passages in Deuteronomy and the book of Samuel; the brighter thought that the king was originally intended by God may come from the early days when the kings still promised well, and the darker thought which crosses the optimistic picture may emanate from the period when their failure and decline were unmistakable.

† Prov. xvi. 12, 13.

‡ Prov. xx. 8, 26.

§ Prov. xxii. 11.

|| Prov. xvi. 14.

¶ Prov. xix. 12.

** Prov. xvi. 15.

†† Prov. xx. 28.

‡‡ Prov. xxi. 1.

§§ Prov. xiv. 35.

¶ Prov. xxix. 14.

¶¶ Prov. xxv. 2-5.

not thyself before a king, and in the place of the great do not stand. For better is it that it be said to thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of a prince whom thine eyes have seen."*

Rebellion against such a sovereign is the merest infatuation. "Against him there is no rising up."† "The terror of the king is as the roaring of a lion, he that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own life."‡ "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them who are given to change; for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the destruction of them both."§

It is evident that in all this we have an ideal picture. No king that ever sat on an earthly throne, no David or Hezekiah, no Antoninus or Trajan, no Charlemagne or St. Louis, no Alfred or Edward the First, ever in the faintest degree approached the fulfilment of the ideal. The divinity which hedged them was of quite a different kind from this open vision of God, this human mediatorship, this absolute subjection to the Divine will. And when we leave the select class of great and good kings, and look at the ordinary type of the strong and capable ruler, Saul or Ahab, Alexander or Cæsar, Constantine or Diocletian, Clovis or Rollo, William the Conqueror or Henry II., Louis XIV. or Frederick the Great, the Czar Peter or Napoleon, we see at once that we have passed into a region of thought and action where the description of the Proverbs becomes unreal and visionary.

There is but one way of explaining the language before us. *It points to Christ.* In Him alone is it or can it be realised. He is the only sovereign that has any union with God which is at all like identity. He is the only Ruler who blends with absolute infallibility severity and mercy. Of what other king could it be said that "purity of heart" secures His friendship? What other king has made it his first and supreme object to judge faithfully the poor? What other government but His has sought its security in that essential duty and its fulfilment? It is Christ alone whose favour descends on the heart like dew on the grass, or as a cloud of the latter rain. His is the only rule against which rebellion is more than a political crime, and becomes an actual sin. Of Him alone can it be said with any breadth of meaning or certainty of fulfilment, "Let no falsehood from the tongue be spoken to the King, and no falsehood shall go out of his mouth. A sword is the king's tongue, and that not of flesh."|| It is only a king absolutely righteous and absolutely merciful that can ever bear down with effective force upon lies and liars. It is only He that would see in lying the prime sin, the incurable disease, the unpardonable treason.

The King is Christ. Before He came there was in the line of His foreshadowing a typical Divine right of kings. But since His coming all such kingships have been anachronisms. The appeal which used to be made to the Old Testament to support that famous political dogma was indeed its surest refutation and condemna-

tion. For all that is said there of the indefeasible prerogative, coupled as it is with an infallibility of judgment, a perfect moral goodness, and an irresistible power, applied and could apply only to Christ. Where absolute monarchy is not Christship it becomes, as so many familiar passages in the Old Testament show, a tyranny and an oppression, a cause of national corruption and decay.

Now this leads us, in the second place, to notice how the actual failure and consequent mischief of the kingship are reflected in the proverbs, and especially those later proverbs which date from the decline and fall of the monarchy. We have only to glance over the books of Samuel and Kings to see what kind of men the occupants of the throne were; few of them show any marked ability, most of them by their folly and stupidity lead their people with hurried strides towards the threatened catastrophe. So far from acting as vice-gerents of the Lord, it is their special characteristic that they are the authors of the prevailing religious apostasy. Even the more favourable exceptions, the kings who in the main did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, had not spiritual energy enough to purify the worship and restore the allegiance of their people to the Lord. Now it would be some insolent and witless tyrant who would desolate the country and drive his subjects into revolt. "A raging lion, a ravening bear, a wicked ruler over a poor people. O prince, that lackest understanding and art a great oppressor, he that hateth rapine shall prolong his days."* Now it would be a headstrong prince who would scorn all counsel, and, refusing to be advised, would himself retire from the helm of the state. "Where no wise steering is, the people falleth; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."† Setting aside the maxim, "Every purpose is established by counsel, and by wise guidance make thou war,"‡ his purposes would be disappointed.§ Now the earth would be burdened and tremble with the portent of a servant as king,|| one who as a servant might be excellent, but once on the throne would reveal all the weaknesses and vices which are essentially servile.¶ Now a liar would occupy the throne, and lying lips ill become a prince.** And now, owing to the weakness and folly of the prince, the state would fall into pieces and be torn with wildly contending factions: "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof, but by a man of understanding and knowledge right will be prolonged."†† Under the rule of the wicked, population disappears.‡‡ And while "in the multitude of people is the king's glory, in the want of people is the destruction of the prince."§§ Under the tyrant's sway "the people sigh."||| Their persons are insecure, and their property is taken from them in the form of forced gifts or benevolences.¶¶ And as the king, such are his servants; his readiness to hearken to falsehood renders them all wicked.***

* Prov. xxviii. 15, 16.

† Prov. xi. 15. The image from steering survives in our own governor (gubernator).

‡ Prov. xx. 18.

§ Prov. xv. 22.

|| See 1 Kings xvi. 7.

¶ Prov. xxx. 22.

** Prov. xvii. 7.

*** Prov. xxix. 12. Cf. Ecclesiasticus q. 2: "As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers; and what manner of man the ruler of the city is, such are they also that dwell therein."

†† Prov. xxviii. 2.

‡‡ Prov. xxviii. 12.

§§ Prov. xiv. 28.

|| Prov. xxix. 2.

¶¶ Prov. xxix. 4.

* Prov. xxv. 6, 7.

‡ Prov. xx. 2.

† Prov. xxx. 31.

§ Prov. xxiv. 21, 22.

|| The LXX. of xxiv. 23, which adds a passage not appropriate to Christ, "Whosoever is delivered up to him shall be crushed. For if his temper be exasperated, he consumes men, sinews and all, and crunches their bones, and burns them up as a flame, so that they are uneatable to the young of eagles."

The atmosphere of the court becomes corrupt: all truth, sincerity, purity disappear. The courtier is afraid to speak his mind, lest jealous listeners should report the words to the monarch's suspicious ear. The very freedom of social life disappears, and the table of the king becomes a trap to the unwary. "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently him that is before thee, and put a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite; be not desirous of his dainties, seeing they are deceitful meat." *

Here is the complete and absolute corruption of the Divine royalty. The description holds true age after age; suggested by the decline of the monarchy in Israel, it applies accurately to the Imperial government at Rome, and it might have been written to describe the character and the government of the Stuarts in England. Strong in what they supposed to be their Divine Right, they became liars and hearkened to falsehood; their servants became wicked; their government perished from its own inherent rottenness. The description holds too of the French monarchy, from the time of Louis XIV. to its fall. And it would seem, as indeed we may confidently believe that the slow and imperceptible decay of the faith in the divine right of kings has been in God's hands a long preparation for the reign of Him whose right it is to reign, Jesus Christ, the true King of men.

But there is still one other characteristic cause of the perverted kingship, to which attention is drawn in xxxi. 2-8: "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to say, Where is strong drink? Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any that is afflicted." These fleshly vices are peculiarly common and peculiarly ruinous to kings, preventing them from pleading "the cause of such as are left desolate," and from "ministering judgment to the poor and needy."† It is in realising the private life of kings, and in observing how seldom they have practised temperance, chastity, self-control, and how readily their contemporaries and even posterity have dispensed them from these primary obligations, that we plainly recognise the broad divergence between the facts of earthly monarchies and the description of the heavenly monarchy, and thus are prepared to recognise with gratitude and awe the sole sovereignty of Christ. The cry of the Florentines under the temporary excitement created by Savonarola's preaching was, "Jesus is our King, only Jesus." That is the constant and ever-swelling cry of human hearts. The types and shadows fall away; through the forms the spirit becomes apparent. It is Christ that claims and wins and enchains our loyalty. We are His subjects, He is our absolute Lord; we have no king but Jesus.

There is in every human heart a loyalty which seeks for a fitting object; if it finds no lawful king, it will attach itself to a pretender. What pathos there is in the sacrifices which men have made, and in the deeds which they have dared, for Pretenders who have had no claim upon their devotion or allegiance! "Show me my rightful

sovereign," seems to be the implicit demand of us all. And the answer has been given, "Behold, your king cometh unto you," in the lowly person, but commanding majesty, of Jesus. Many have accepted this and have cried, "Blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord." *

Shall we not bring our loyalty to Him, recognising the One whom prophets and wise men foretold, and acknowledging in His sway the authority which all other governments, even the best of them, lack? Let no false shame or fear restrain our homage; let not the sneers of those over whom "other lords have dominion" keep our knees from bending, and our tongues from confessing, "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe. Many seek the ruler's favour,"—their whole thought is to stand well with the powers that be, and to secure the recognition of the Pretender who happens at any given moment to be directing the affairs of the world,—“but a man's judgment cometh from the Lord,” his rightful King,† and to stand right with Him is all that need concern us. How well the King of men understood that because He came in humility—His birthplace a manger, His throne a fishing-boat or a wayside well, riding not in chariots of state, “but on an ass, and the foal of an ass;” because His appeal would be, not to the eye, but to the heart; not to the outward, but the inward; not to the temporal, but to the eternal,—men, with their perverted and misapplied loyalties, would reject Him and be ashamed to confess Him. False kingships have dazzled our eyes, and hidden from us the grandeur of a Sovereign who is among us as one that serveth. From the touch of His humiliation we shrink.

But if the heart recognises and owns its lawful Sovereign; if, captivated by His indescribable beauty and bowed before His indisputable authority, it seeks only in profound obeisance and absolute surrender, to worship and adore and serve, how royal is His treatment, how unstinted are His largesses. "Come up hither," He says, bringing the soul higher and higher, into fuller vision, into more buoyant life, into more effectual service. The evil ruler, we saw, made all his servants wicked. Christ, as King, makes all His servants holy, dwelling in them, and subduing their hearts to Himself in ever truer devotion; He through them carries out His vast designs of love in those portions of His dominion where rebels still rise up against Him, and where poor deluded hearts still fretfully cry, "We will not have this Man to rule over us." "In the multitude of people is the king's glory." May God hasten the time when all peoples and tongues shall bow down to and worship our King!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FOOL.

"As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool. . . . A whip for the horse, a bride for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools."

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

* Prov. xxiii. 1-3. Cf. the Eastern adage, "Dainties of a king burn the lips." It was a common occurrence at the court of Pope Alexander VI. to invite an obnoxious person to the Papal table and there dispose of him by means of poisoned food.

† Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

* Luke xix. 38.

† Prov. xxix. 25, 26.

He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off his own feet, and drinketh in damage.
 The legs of the lame hang loose: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.
 As a bag of gems in a heap of stones, so is he that giveth honour to a fool.
 As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.
 As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth the fool and he that hireth them that pass by.
 As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is a fool that repeateth his folly.
 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."—PROV. xxvi. 1, 3-12.

THIS passage points out certain characteristics of the fool, a term which occurs so frequently in the book of Proverbs that we must try to conceive clearly what is to be understood by it. The difficulty of forming a distinct conception arises from the fact that there are three different words, with different shades of meaning, all rendered by the one English expression, fool or folly. For want of carefully distinguishing these delicate varieties of the original, some of the proverbs appear in English tautological and almost meaningless. We must try then to separate and to understand these several terms.

The Hebrew word which most frequently occurs in the book to designate fool, **אֵיל**, together with its derivative, which is the usual word for folly, **אֵילָה**, signifies weakness. We are to think of that ignorant, inconsiderate, sanguine, and self-confident temper which eschews counsel, which will have its own way, which declines to be governed by reason, which forms fond expectations and baseless hopes, and which is always sure that everything will turn out according to its wish, though it takes no means to secure the desired result. Perhaps the simplest way of describing the habit of mind and the type of character intended by the Hebrew is to use the word *infatuation*. This would not do as a translation in all the passages where it occurs, but it will serve to point out the underlying idea.

The word which comes next in frequency, **בְּסִיל**—the word used uniformly throughout the particular passage before us,—has at its root the notion of grossness, the dull and heavy habit of one whose heart has waxed fat, whose ears are slow to hear, and whose higher perceptions and nobler aspirations have succumbed to the sensual and earthly nature. We have to think of moral, as well as mental stupidity, of insensibility to all that is true and good and pure. The fool in this sense is such a dullard that he commits wickedness without perceiving it,* and utters slanders almost unconsciously;† he does not know when to be silent;‡ whatever is in him quickly appears,§ but when it is known it is very worthless;|| nor has he the sense to get wisdom, even when the opportunity is in his hand;¶ his best advantages are quickly wasted and he is none the better.** Perhaps the English word which best fits the several suggestions of the Hebrew one is *senseless*.

The third term, **נָבָל**, occurs only four times in the book. It is derived from a verb signifying to fade and wither. It describes the inward shrinking and shrivelling of a depraved nature, the witlessness which results from wickedness.

It contains in itself a severer censure than the other two. Thus "He that begetteth a *senseless* man (**בְּסִיל**) doeth it to his sorrow, but the father of the *bad fool* (**נָבָל**) hath no joy."** In the one case there is trouble enough, in the other there is nothing but trouble. Thus it is one of the four things for which the earth trembles when a man of this kind is filled with meat.† This third character is sketched for us in the person of Nabal, whose name, as Abigail says, is simply the Hebrew word for fool in its worst sense, which fits exactly to its bearer. But dismissing this type of folly which is almost synonymous with consummate wickedness, of which indeed it is the outcome, we may turn to the distinction we have drawn between infatuation and senselessness in order to explain and understand some of the Proverbs in which the words occur.

First of all we may notice how difficult it is to get rid of the folly of infatuation: "Though thou shouldest bray a person possessed of it in a mortar with a pestle among bruised corn, yet will it not depart from him."‡ "It is bound up in the heart of a child,"§ and the whole object of education is to get it out; but if childhood passes into manhood, and the childish wilfulness, self-confidence, and irrationality are not expelled, the case is well-nigh hopeless. Correction is practically useless; "He must be a thorough fool," it has been said, "who can learn nothing from his own folly;" but that is precisely the condition of the infatuated people we are considering; the only correction of their infatuation is a further increase of it.|| The reason is practically choked; the connection between cause and effect is lost: thus every ill consequence of the rash act or of the vicious habit is regarded as a misfortune instead of a fault. The wretched victim of his own folly reviles fortune, nature, men, and even God, and will not recognise that his worst enemy is himself. Thus, while the wise are always learning and growing rich from experience, "the infatuation of senseless men is infatuation still."¶ It is this which makes them so hopeless to deal with; their vexation being quite irrational, and always refusing to recognise the obvious facts, is worse than a heavy stone or the piled-up overweight of sand for others to bear.** If a wise man has a case with such a person, the ill-judged fury and the misplaced laughter alike made it impossible to arrive at any sound settlement.††

The untrained, undisciplined nature, which thus declines the guidance of reason and is unteachable because of its obstinate self-confidence, is constantly falling into sin. Indeed, strictly speaking, its whole attitude is sinful, its every

* Prov. xvii. 21.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 22.

† Prov. xxx. 22.

§ Prov. xxii. 15.

|| Prov. xvi. 22.

¶ Prov. xiv. 24. This seems simpler than supposing that

the clause **אֵילָה בְּסִילִים אֵילָה** contains a play upon the

possible double meaning of **אֵילָה**, which, though it yields an excellent sense,—“the power of fools is only folly,” *i. e.*, when they have power they turn it only to a foolish account (*cf.* xxvi. 1),—must be regarded as very obscure, especially seeing that we have no positive instance of

אֵילָה as a derivative of **אֵיל** in the sense of “power.”

** Prov. xxvii. 3.

†† Prov. xxix. 9.

* Prov. x. 23.

§ Prov. xiv. 33.

† Prov. x. 18.

|| Prov. xiv. 7.

‡ Prov. xii. 23.

¶ Prov. xvii. 16.

** Prov. xxi. 20.

thought is sin.* For reason is God's gift, and to slight it is to slight Him. He requires of us a readiness to be taught, and an openness to the lessons which are forced upon us by Nature, by experience, by our own human hearts. This flighty, feather-brained, inconsequential mode of thinking and living, the wilful neglect of all the means by which we might grow wiser, and the confident assurance that, whatever happens, we are not accountable for it, are all an offence against God, a failure to be what we ought to be, a missing of the mark, a neglect of the law, which is, in a word, sin.

But now let us look at the fool in the *second* signification, which occurs in this twenty-sixth chapter so frequently,—the man who has become spiritually gross and insensible, unaware of Divine truths and consequently obtuse to human duties. We may take the proverbs in the order in which they occur. "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool." It is a melancholy fact that the kind of person here referred to is too often found in positions of honour among men. Men rise to distinction in an artificial order of society, not by wisdom, but by the accident of birth and opportunity; and not unfrequently the ill-placed honour itself leads to that insensibility which is so severely censured. The crass dullness, the perversity of judgment, the unfeeling severity, often displayed by prominent and distinguished persons, are no matter of surprise, and will not be, until human society learns to bring its honours only to the wise and the good. "Delicate living is not seemly for such persons."† It is precisely the comfort, the dignity, the exaltation, which prove their ruin. Now it is true that we cannot always trace the effects of this misplaced honour, but we are reminded that it is out of the course of Nature's eternal laws, incongruous as snow in summer, hurtful as rain in harvest. Consequently the due penalty must inevitably come. According to one reading of ver. 2, this penalty which overtakes the exalted fool is thus described:‡ "As the sparrow in her wandering, and the swallow in her flying, so a gratuitous curse shall come upon him." In any case ver. 3 states clearly enough what will eventually happen: "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools." It is not, of course, that this penalty can be remedial, but Nature herself prepares a "rod for the back of him that is void of understanding;"§ "As judgments are prepared for scorers, so are stripes for the back of fools."|| Nor must we only understand this of fools that attain to unnatural honour: there are many dullards and insensates who are not made such by the stupidity of misdirected admiration, but by their own moral delinquencies; and as surely as the sparrow after flitting about all day returns to her nest in the dusk, or as the swallow in the long summer flight arrives at her appointed place, the punishment of folly will find out the delinquent. It may be long delayed, but an awakening comes at last; the man who hardened his heart, who turned away from the pleadings of God and mocked at His judgments, who chose the vanishing things of time and scorned the large

fruition of eternity, discovers his incredible stupidity, and the lash of remorse falls all the more heavily because it is left in the hand of conscience alone.* We must never lose sight of the fact that by the fool is not meant the simple or the short-witted; there is in this folly of the Proverbs a moral cause and a moral responsibility which involve a moral censure; the senseless of whom we are speaking are they whose "heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart."†

We are in the main obliged to leave the insensate to God and their conscience, because it is well-nigh impossible for us to deal with them. They are intractable and even savage as wild animals. "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his infatuation."‡ They are irritated with any suggestion of spiritual things, indignant with any hint of their own case and its responsibilities. If, on the one hand, you try to approach them on their own ground, to realise their motives and work upon the base ideas which alone influence such minds, you seem to lose all power over them by coming down to their level. "Answer not a fool according to his infatuation, lest thou also be like him."§ If, on the other hand, you feel bound to convict him of his folly, and to humble him to a sense of his position, you are obliged to use the language which will be intelligible to him. "Answer a fool according to his infatuation, lest he be wise in his own eyes."|| I recollect one Sunday afternoon passing by a large village public-house, and it chanced that a little group of street preachers were doing their best to make known the Gospel to the idlers who were sitting on the benches outside. Going up to interest the men in what was being said, I was confronted by the landlord, who was in a state of almost frenzied indignation. He denounced the preachers as hypocrites and scoundrels, who lived on the honest earnings of those whom he saw around him. Every attempt to bring him to reason, to show that the men in question spent their money on drink and not on the preachers, to secure a patient hearing for the gracious message, was met only with violent abuse directed against myself. The man was precisely what is meant in these verses by a fool, one in whom all spiritual vision was blinded by greed and sensuality, in whom the plainest dictates of common sense and human courtesy were silenced; to answer him in his own vein was the only way of exposing his folly, and yet to answer him in such a way was to come down to his own level. What could be done except to leave him to the judgments which are prepared for scorers and to the stripes which await the back of fools? A fool uttereth all his anger, and facing the torrent of angry words it is impossible to effectually carry home to him any wholesome truth.¶

We have seen how the kind of man that we are describing is in an utterly false position when any dignity or honour is attributed to him; in-

* Prov. xxiv. 9.

† Prov. xix. 10.

‡ This is reading *ל* for *ל*, a constant source of confusion and interchange in Hebrew MSS.

§ Prov. x. 13.

|| Prov. xix. 29.

* "Quos divi conscia facti
Mens habet attonitos et surdo verbere cædit,
Occultum quatiente animo tortore flagellum."

—JUV., "Sat.," xiii., 193.

† Matt. xiii. 15.

‡ Prov. xvii. 12.

§ Prov. xxvi. 4.

|| Prov. xxvi. 5.

¶ Prov. xxix. 11.

deed, to give such honour is much the same as binding a stone in a sling to be immediately slung out again, probably to some one's injury; * but he is almost equally useless in a subordinate position. If, for instance, he is employed as a messenger, he is too dull to rightly conceive or correctly report the message. He will almost certainly colour it with his own fancies, if he does not pervert it to his own ends. To receive and to deliver any message accurately requires a certain truthfulness in perception and in speech of which this unfortunate creature is entirely devoid. Thus any one who employs him in this capacity might as well cut off his own feet, as he drinks damage to himself.†

It is the awful punishment which comes to us all, when we allow our heart to wax gross, that wisdom itself becomes folly in our lips, and truth herself becomes error. Thus if we know a proverb, or a text, or a doctrine, we are sure to give it a lame application, so that, instead of supporting what we wish to enforce, it hangs down helpless like a cripple's legs.‡ In this way the insensate corruptness of the Mediæval Church tried to justify the abuse of giving great ecclesiastical preferments to young children by quoting the text, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." Sometimes the result of this culpable stupidity is far more disastrous; it is like "a thorn which runs up into a drunkard's hand," visiting with terrible condemnation those who have misused and perverted the truth,§ as when Torquemada and the administrators of the Inquisition based their diabolical conduct on the gracious words of the Lord, "Compel them to come in." No, the fool's heart can give no wholesome message; it will turn the very message of the Gospel into a curse and a blight, and by its dull and revolting insensibility it will libel God to man, suggesting that the Infinite Father, the Eternal God, is altogether such an one as these who profess to speak in His name.

The offence of the fool then cannot be condoned on the ground that he is only an enemy to himself. It is his master that he wrongs. As the proverb says, "A master produces all things, but a fool's wages and hirer too pass away." || The fool loses what he earns himself: that is true, but he undoes his employer also. One is our Master, even Christ; He hires us for service in His vineyard; when we suffer our heart to wax dull, when we grow unspiritual, unresponsive, and insensate, it is not only that we lose our reward, but we crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.

And the worst, the most mournful, feature about this fool's condition is that it tends to a perpetual self-repetition: "As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so a fool is always repeating his folly." ¶ Every hardening of the heart prepares for a fresh hardening, every refusal of truth will lead to another refusal. Last Sunday you managed to evade the message which God sent you:

* Prov. xxvi. 8.

† Prov. xxvi. 7.

‡ Prov. xxvi. 6.

§ Prov. xxvi. 9.

|| Prov. xxvi. 10. This rendering Delitzsch obtained by altering the vowel points in the first שִׁבְרִי into שִׁבְרִי, and the sense is good, if a little far-fetched. On the other hand, the received reading gives a plain though a somewhat insipid meaning: "Much produces all,"—whoever has a little and uses it well quickly gets more,—"but he that hires a fool is as he who hires passers by," i. e., the employment of a fool is a barren undertaking which practically leads to nothing.

¶ Prov. xxvi. 11.

that makes it much easier to evade the message He sends you to-day. Next Sunday you will be almost totally indifferent. Soon you will get out of reach altogether of His word, saying it does you no good. Then you will deny that it is His word or His message. You pass from folly to folly, from infatuation to infatuation, until at last you can with a grave face accept the monstrous self-contradiction of materialism, or wallow unresisting in the slime of a tormenting sensuality. "As the dog returns to his vomit"!

It must be owned that the condition of the fool seems sufficiently sad, and the gloom is deepened by the fact that our book knows nothing of a way by which the fool may become wise. The Proverbs uniformly regard the foolish and the wise as generically distinct; between the two classes there is a great gulf fixed. There is the fool, trusting in his own heart, incurring stripes, not profiting by them, always the same incorrigible and hopeless creature; and there is the wise man, always delivered, learning from experience, becoming better and better.* The only suggestion of hope is a comparative one: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him." † But there is no tone of confidence about this assurance, because, as we have repeatedly seen, the case of the proud or conceited man is regarded as practically desperate.

No, for comfort and hope in this matter we have to turn away from the Ancient Wisdom to the revealed Wisdom, Christ Jesus. It is He and He alone who practically forbids us to be hopeless about any one. A noble Roman in the time of the Punic Wars received an honourable recognition from the Senate because he had not in the darkest times despaired of the Republic. That is the kind of debt that we owe to the Saviour. He has not despaired of any human being; He will not let us despair. It is His peculiar power, tried and proved again and again, to turn the fool into the wise man. Observing the threefold distinction which is hidden under the word we have been examining, Christ is able to arouse the weak, fond, infatuated soul to a sense of its need. Could there be a better instance than that of the woman at the well,—a foolish creature living in conscious sin, yet full of specious religious talk? Did He not awake in her the thirst for the living water, and satisfy the craving which He had excited? Christ is able to transform the dull and heavy soul, that has suffered itself to be mastered by greed and petrified by selfishness. Was not this what He did to Zaccheus the publican? And even with that worst kind of fool, whose heart is withered up within him by reason of sin, and who has learnt to say in his heart that there is no God,‡ the Lord is not helpless. We do not see such an one in the pages of the New Testament, because the folly of Atheism was not among the follies of those times. But in our own day it is an experience by no means uncommon; when an avowed infidel comes under the power of the Gospel, Christ enters into him with the overwhelming conviction that there is a God; Christ shows him how it is sin which has thus obscured the elementary conviction of the human spirit; and, by the direct power of Christ, his

* Prov. xxviii. 26; cf. ix. 8 and xxiii. 9.

† Prov. xxvi. 12.

‡ נִבֵּל, Psalm xiv. 1.

heart comes to him again as that of a little child, while in the rapturous joy of believing he lays aside the folly which made him doubt along with the sin which made him unwilling to believe.

CHAPTER XXVII. LIVING DAY BY DAY.

"Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day will bring forth."—PROV. xxvii. 1.

"The grave and destruction are never satisfied; and the eyes of men are never satisfied;" and LXX. adds, "An abomination to the Lord is he who sets his eye, and undisciplined men uncontrolled in tongue."—PROV. xxvii. 20.

"Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waits on his Lord eats of the honour."—PROV. xxvii. 18.

HERE is a wholesome lesson for us. We are to trust no future, however pleasant; we are to dwell in no past, however honourable. Life consists of a present, given to us day by day; this is our whole wealth; squandered, it cannot be recovered; neglected, it withers as a leaf. Titus, the Roman Emperor, would say in the evening, when he had omitted his duties or failed in his purposes, *Perdidi diem*, "I have lost a day;"—yes, that lost day is lost for ever; other days may come, but not that one; the duties of that day may be performed afterwards or by other hands, but still the day is lost, because it passed away empty. The thief which cheats us of our days, and beggars us of our wealth, is the specious thought that to-morrow belongs to us. The illusion is as old as the world, but is to-day as fresh and powerful as ever. We have to shake ourselves free of a spell, and awake out of a dream, to see that when to-morrow comes it is already to-day.

We only begin to live in any true and satisfactory sense when we have learnt to take each day by itself, and to use it as if it were our last, and indeed as if it were our all; dismissing the thought of to-morrow as a mere phantom which for ever evades our grasp. Life is a mosaic, a large work shaping on the wall or in the dome of some vast cathedral which eye hath not yet seen; and it can only be effectually wrought if, with minute and concentrated care, the little piece of coloured glass which we call To-day is duly fixed into its bedding and fitted exactly to its immediate neighbours. "Why do you work with such intensity?" the great artist was once asked; "Because I work for eternity," was the answer. And that is why each day is of such importance; that is why each day demands all our thought and care: eternity is made up of days, and the present day is all of eternity that we can ever possess.

It is well for us then each morning to take the day fresh from God's hands, and at once to throw our whole soul into it, and to live it with a pure intensity, a sense of solemn and joyful responsibility.

"Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,

A mite of my twelve-hours' treasure,

The least of thy gazes or glances

(Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above measure),

One of thy choices or one of thy chances

(Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks of thy pleasure),—

My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,

Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me."*

* Browning, "Pippa Passes."

But it may be said, Is not this the life of a mere butterfly? Is it not the mark of a prudent man to work with his eye on the future,—“Prepare thy work without, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thine house”* Is it not just what we have to complain of in the foolish man that he ignores to-morrow,—“A prudent man seeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and suffer for it”?†

Here is an apparent contradiction which requires reflection. And the difficulty increases when we remember that most worthy works are the labour of years: an architect lays his plans for a great building which he can hardly hope to see finished in his own lifetime; an author spends days and months and years in the preparation of materials, and must depend on the uncertain future for a time to shape them into a book; a statesman, in proportion as he is wise, avoids what is called a hand-to-mouth policy, and lays his plans with his eye on distant possibilities, well knowing that his immediate actions are liable to misunderstanding, and may prove to be a complete failure unless the opportunity is accorded him of realising his far-reaching schemes. And, in the same way, youth is spent in education which derives all its value from the expected years of manhood, and all the days of a good life are necessarily a preparation for that which is to come after: we must study in order that we may teach; we must train ourselves for duties which will come upon us, as we may reasonably suppose, in some distant future. Yet our to-morrow is unknown; we are not to boast ourselves of it; we cannot tell what a day may bring forth, and must therefore live only in to-day, and must therefore live only in to-day.

Now the solution of this difficulty leads us to one of the profoundest of all spiritual truths. It is this: No life can be worth anything at all apart from the Eternal God, and faith in Him. Life cannot be really lived if it is merely “a measure of sliding sand” taken “from under the feet of the years.” Our swift days cannot be effectually and wisely used unless we are linked with Him who embraces in Himself the past, the present, and the future. Our work, whatever it may be, cannot be rightly done unless we are, and know ourselves to be, in the great Taskmaster's sight. The proper use of each day can only be made if we are confident that our times are in His hands; only in this quiet assurance can we have composure and detachment of spirit enough to give our whole strength to the duty in hand. We must be sure that the Master-Artist knows the whole mosaic, and is ordering all the parts, before we can surrender ourselves to the task of putting to-day's piece into its place; we must have complete faith in the Architect who is designing the whole structure, before we can have our mind at leisure from itself to chip our block of stone or to carve our tiny gargoyles. We can only live in the present, making the most of that which is really ours, on condition that we have God as our Future, relieving us of all anxious care, and assuring to us just strength for to-day.

Thus our text has an implied contrast, which we may draw out in this way: “Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth;” but boast thyself in God all the day long,‡ for thou knowest that

* Prov. xxiv. 27. † Prov. xxii. 3; xxvii. 12. ‡ Psalm xlv. 8.

He will bring forth righteousness, wisdom, and love continually.

Now let us follow out some of the consequences of this spiritual attitude. Examine the condition of these restless human hearts all around us without God. They are all toiling for to-morrow. Here is one making money, as it is called; he is looking forward to laying aside so many thousands this year; in a few more years he hopes to realise a round sum, which will relieve him from the necessity of toil and of further money-making. His eye is set upon that goal. At last he reaches it. Now his desire should be satisfied, but no, "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied." * He does not stay a night at the desired goal; he is off before sunset; all the strain and the fret must be faced over again. Or look at the boundless ambition which possesses godless men; honours achieved only whet their appetite for more. We need not assume that the ambition is unworthy; all we have to notice is its insatiability; in politics, in literature, in art, in social distinction, it is like Sheol and Abaddon,—a maw that ever opens; a gulf that can swallow anything and everything, yet never be filled. The LXX. addition † seems to regard this uncontrolled desire as the mark of deficient culture; and, spiritually speaking, no doubt it is. Men without God are always uncultured; they have not found the centre of their being, they have not procured the key-stone to their accumulated knowledge, and it is, in consequence, not an arch through which they can travel to any goal, but a confused pile which blocks the way. These desperate strivings and loud-tongued, undisciplined desires are an abomination to the Lord, because they mar His mighty plan and introduce disorder where He intended order, discord where He intended harmony, deformity where He intended beauty. They are the work of egoism instead of theism.

It is needless to dwell upon the heart-sores and the disappointments which fall to the lot of the people whom we are thinking of. What ghastly mockery the morrows on which they counted prove to be! In some lonely and rocky island, girdled by the moaning of the dreary seas, and cut off from all the interests which gave to life its excitement, egotism ends its days. Or it is on some restless couch, surrounded by all the outward trappings of wealth and power, that the dying spirit cries, "My kingdom for an inch of time!" The man who by his brilliant genius has drawn all his generation after him passes, bearing "through Europe the pageant of his bleeding heart," to a hopeless grave. The woman who has achieved the end of her ambition, ruling the courts of fashion, the acknowledged queen of salons, ends her days with a sense of frustration, cynical in her contempt for the world which was foolish enough to follow and admire her.

But, on the other hand, here is one who boasts himself in God.

"Lord, it belongs not to my care,"

is the language of his spirit,

"Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And that Thy grace must give."

The first thing that strikes you in him is his perfect peace. His mind is stayed on God. The

future has no terrors for him, nor has it any joys. God is all in all to him, and God is his now. His treasure is in possession, and moth and rust do not corrupt it, nor can thieves break through or steal. To say that he is contented seems too mild a term for so positive and joyous a calm. But in contrast with the discontent which prevails everywhere outside of God, it is worth while to dilate on this passive virtue of contentment. That endless worry about little things has ceased; he is not annoyed because some one fails to recognise him; he is not affected by the malicious or scandalous things which are said about him; he is not anxious for human recognition, and is therefore never distressed because others are more courted than he is; he knows nothing of that malignant passion of jealousy which is worse than the cruelty of wrath and the flooding of anger; * he does not want wealth and he does not dread poverty. He says:—

"Some have too much, yet still do crave;
I little have, and seek no more:
They are but poor though much they have,
And I am rich with little store:
They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
They lack, I leave; they pine, I live." †

When we have entered into this Divine content and are made by our absolute trust in God free from care for the future, it is wonderful how quick we become to see good in apparent evils. To the world this is so incredible that it suspects insincerity, but there is nothing more sincere and more real. A poor child who was blind found the greatest blessing in the affliction, saying, "You see, I can give more to the Missionary Society than the other children, because I can knit in the dark, and have not to spend money on candles." You go to one of God's children expecting to find him broken down and rebellious under some great and undeserved calamity, but you find that he has discovered a blessing in the loss before you get there, and is actually rejoicing, or at any rate he is replying to all provocations, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away: blessed be the name of the Lord." He is afflicted, but you cannot think of him as afflicted, for "all the days of the afflicted are evil, but he that is of a cheerful spirit hath a continual feast." ‡

Yes, it is that illusive and imaginary morrow that robs us of our peace; it is the misgiving, the anxious care, the dark foreboding. But when we put God our Father in place of the morrow, and know that He comprehends and sees all that we have need of, the peace which passes all understanding settles down upon our spirit, and steals into our eyes, and breathes on our lips, and men perceive even in us why our Father is called "the God of Peace."

The second thing which strikes us in those who have learnt to make their boast in God rather than in the morrow is the service which they render to their fellows. This is not only because they are able to turn their undivided attention to the duty which lies nearest, and to do with all their heart what their hand finds to do, but the very spirit of serenity in which they live is a constant help and blessing to all who are around them. It may have been given to you to come into contact with such a soul; in

* Prov. xxvii. 4.

† Sir Edward Dyer (*b.* 1540).

‡ Prov. xv. 15.

* Prov. xxvii. 20.

† See heading of chapter.

his presence your restlessness dies away, it seems as if your burning brow had been touched with a soothing hand; perhaps "with half-open eyes you were treading the borderland dim 'twixt vice and virtue," and that quiet spirit seemed like a clear shaft of the dawn revealing where you trod; perhaps you were heart-broken with a great sorrow, and the restfulness and confidence of that strong soul gave you an indefinable consolation, hope broke into your heart, and even joy. In receiving that help from what the man *was* rather than from what he gave, you became aware that this was the highest service that any human being can render to another. It is a great thing to succour the physical and material sufferings of men; it is a greater to bring them clear truths and to give them some stimulus and guidance in the intellectual life; but it is greatest of all to communicate spiritual sustenance and power, for that means to bring souls into actual and conscious contact with God.

One of the noblest examples of this service to humanity is furnished in the life and the writings of St. Paul. His personal presence became the new creation of that ancient heathen civilisation, and countless individual souls were, through the inner life which he presented, brought to a complete change and made new creatures in Christ. His writings have been, ever since he died, a constant source of life and strength to many generations of men. He has been misunderstood, "the ignorant and unstedfast have wrested" what he wrote, but none the less he has been to the Church a perpetual regenerator, and, as a great writer* of our own day has declared, "The doctrine of Paul will arise out of the tomb where for centuries it has lain covered; it will edify the Church of the future; it will have the consent of happier generations, the applause of less superstitious ages." Now what is the secret of this power? It is given in his own words, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."† He was able to fling himself with that passionate temerity into the present duty, he was able to preach the word with that victorious vigour in season and out of season, just because the whole burden of the unknown future was rolled away from him, and he, more than any man that ever lived, understood what it is to live just for to-day.

Every Christian may possess the same secret; it is the open secret of the Sermon on the Mount; as our gracious Lord told us, we may be as the lilies of the field and as the birds of the air, without anxiety or misgiving, knowing that our Heavenly Father cares for us. It is not given to us all to be great philanthropists, great reformers, great preachers, but it is put within the reach of all to render to others the sweet service of abiding always in trustful and loving submission to God's will, and of shedding upon all the light of our peace.

And this leads us to notice one *last feature* of this true spiritual life. It has an honour of its own, though it is not an earthly honour; it has a reward, though it is not a material reward. "Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, and he that waiteth on his master eats of the honour."‡ That is a saying which can only apply in a very modified degree to earthly service and human masters. How many loyal

servants of kings have been deserted by their lords at the critical moment, and left to eat the fruit of disgrace and ignominy! But the saying applies in its fulness to our Master Christ and His service. Think of the Christian life under this simple figure; it is like the careful cultivation of the fruit tree. He is the Vine. Our sole concern is to keep in touch with Him, to sit at His feet, to watch for His fruit, to see that no other concern disturbs the quiet relation of perfect loyalty and devotion to Him. Our aim is not to do our own business or seek our own ends, but to be sure that we are always awake to His purposes and obedient to the demands which He makes upon us. It is not ours to reason why, but it is ours to do at all costs whatsoever He bids us do to-day. We have nothing to do with to-morrow; we have no responsibility for the fruit, for no fruit-bearing power lies in us. All we have to do is to keep the fig tree. Now when we abide in this concentrated and whole-hearted devotion to our Master,—when for us to live is Christ,—then honour comes to us unsought, but not unwelcome. The fruit of service is to the taste of the true servant the highest honour that he can imagine. We need no apocalyptic vision to assure us. His word is enough, confirmed as it is by a constant and growing experience. The servants of our Lord already stand before Him, holding in their hands the talents which they have gained for Him; already they hear His gracious "Well done," and the sound of it is more musical in their ears than all the acclamations of their fellow-creatures. This is their honour; what could they have more? they are counted one with Christ; they shared His travail, and now they share His satisfaction and his joy.

And thus those who make their boast in God, and do not boast of the morrow, find that the morrow itself becomes clear to them in the light of His countenance; they do in a sense know what it will bring forth: it will bring forth what they desire, for it will bring forth their Father's will; it will bring forth the victory and the glory of Christ. "Henceforth ye shall see Him coming in the clouds of heaven." Is not that enough? When our hearts have learnt to hanker only after God's will, to desire only Christ's victory, they may boast themselves even of to-morrow; for to-morrow holds in its bosom an assurance of blessing and joy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN ASPECT OF ATONEMENT.

"He that hideth (מִכְפֶּה) his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."—PROV. xxviii. 13.

"Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief."—PROV. xxviii. 14.

"The fear of the Lord tendeth to life, and he that hath it shall abide satisfied. He shall not be visited with evil."—PROV. xix. 23.

"By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."—PROV. xvi. 6.

THE Hebrew word (כָּפַר) which is used for the idea of atonement is one which originally signifies to cover. Sin is a hideous sore, a shocking deformity, which must be hidden from the eyes of men, and much more from the holy

* Matthew Arnold.

† Phil. i. 21.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 18.

eyes of God. Thus the Old Testament speaks about a Robe of Righteousness which is to be thrown over the ulcerated and leprous body of sin. Apart from this covering, the disease is seen working out its sure and terrible results. "A man that is laden with the blood of any person shall flee unto the pit: let no man stay him,"* and though blood-guiltiness appears to us the worst of sins, all sin is alike in its issue; every sinner may be seen by seeing eyes "fleeing unto the pit," and no man can stay him or deliver him. Or, to vary the image, the sinful man is exposed to the violence of justice, which beats like a storm upon all unprotected heads; he needs to be covered; he needs some shelter, some hiding-place, or he must be swept away.

But the objection which immediately occurs to us is this: what is the use of covering sin if the sin itself remains? The disease is not cured because a decent garment is drawn over the suffering part; indeed, it is not hard to conceive a case in which the covering might aggravate the mischief. If the idea of covering is to be of any service, it must be cleared from all misconception; there is a kind of hiding which may be ruinous, a garment which may drive the disease inward and hasten its deadly operation, a covert from the storm which may crush and stifle the person whom it professes to protect. "He that *covereth* his transgressions," in that way, "shall not prosper." Every attempt to conceal from God or from man or from oneself that one is diseased with sin is ineffectual: every lame excuse which seeks to palliate the guilt; every hypocritical pretence that the thing done has not been done, or that it is not what men usually suppose it to be; every ingenious argumentation which seeks to represent sin as something other than sin, as a mere defect or taint in the blood, as a hereditary and unavoidable weakness, as an aberration of the mind for which one is not responsible, or as a merely conventional and artificial offence,—all such attempts at hiding must be failures, "covering" of that kind can be no atonement. Quite the reverse; this trifling with conscience, this deluded self-righteousness, is the worst possible aggravation of the sin. Hidden in that way, though it be, as it were, in the bowels of the earth, sin becomes a poisonous gas, more noxious for confinement, and liable to break out in awful and devastating explosions.

The covering of sin† which is spoken of in xvi. 6 is of a very different and of a quite particular kind. Combining this verse with the others at the head of the chapter, we may observe that every effectual "covering" of sin in God's sight involves three elements,—confession, forsaking, and a changed practice.

First, there is confession. This appears on the face of it to be a paradox: the only way of covering sin is to uncover it. But it is strictly true. We must make a clean breast of it; we must acknowledge its full extent and enormity; we must

spare the patient ear of God no detail of our guilt. The foul, explosive gases must be let out into the open, since every attempt to confine them increases their destructive power. The running sore must be exposed to the Physician's eye, since every rag put over it to hide it becomes steeped in its defiling tides. It is true, confession is a painful and a weary task: it is like removing a heap of dust and refuse by spadefuls, —each bit as it is disturbed fills the atmosphere with choking particles and noisome smells; worse and worse is revealed the farther we go. We came to confess a single fault, and we found that it was but a broken sherd lying on the foul and pestilential heap. Confession leads to confession, discovery to discovery. It is terribly humiliating. "Am I then so bad as this?" is the horrified cry as each candid admission shows only more and worse that must be admitted. True confession can never be made into a priest's ear,—to men we can only confess the wrongs which we have done to men; but true confession is the awful tale of what we have done to God, against whom only we have sinned and done evil in His sight. It is sometimes urged that confession to a priest gives the penitent relief: possibly, but it is a false relief; since the eye of the priest is not omniscient, the sinner confesses only what he chooses, brings the broken sherd, and receives absolution for that in lieu of removing the whole heap of abominations that underlie. When we have gone as far as we can in laying ourselves bare to man, there remain vast untraversed tracts of our life and our mind which are reserved; "Private road" is written on all the approaches, and trespassers are invariably prosecuted. It is only to God that a real confession can be made, because we know that to Him all is necessarily evident; with Him no subterfuges avail; he traverses those untraversed tracts; there are no private roads from which He is excluded; He knoweth our thoughts afar off.

The first step in the "covering" of sin is to realise this. If our sins are to be really covered they must first be laid bare; we must frankly own that all things are open to Him with whom we have to do; we must get away from the priests and into the hands of the High Priest; we must abjure the confessional and bring God Himself into the secret places of our hearts to search us and try us and see if there be any evil way in us. The reserve, and the veils, which every individual cannot but maintain between himself and all other individuals, must be torn away, in full and absolute confession to God Himself.

Secondly. There is a confession, especially that fostered by the habit of confessing to priests, which is unaccompanied by any forsaking of the evil, or any departing from iniquity in general. Many times have men gone to their priests to receive absolution beforehand for the sin which they intended to commit; or they have postponed their confession to their deathbeds, when there will be, as they suppose, no further sins to turn from. Confession of that kind is devoid of all significance; it covers no sins, it really only aggravates them. No confession is of the least avail—and indeed no real confession can be made to God at all—unless the heart turns away from the evil which is confessed, and actually departs at once, so far as it knows and is able, from all iniquity.

* Prov. xxviii. 17.

† It may be necessary to point out to the reader that in approaching the subject of atonement from the standpoint of the book of Proverbs, and merely in the expository treatment of the passages before us, the so-called objective ground of atonement in the sacrifice of Christ does not come into view, but its necessity becomes manifest as each step in the exposition reveals how impossible it would be for us, apart from the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, to realise those conditions which are here laid down as indispensable to pardon and acceptance with God.

The glib language of confession has been and is a deadly snare to multitudes. How easy it is to say, or even to musically chant, "We have done that we ought not to have done; we have left undone that which we ought to have done." There is no pain in such a confession if we once distinctly admit that it is a normal and natural state of mind for us to be in, and that as we say it to-day, so we shall say it to-morrow, and again the next day to the end. But real confession is so painful, and even heart-rending, because it is only of value when we begin from that moment onwards "to do what we ought to do, and to leave undone what we ought not to do." It is well for us, perhaps, to confess not so much sin in the abstract as our own particular transgressions. Sin is too shadowy a monster for us to definitely avoid and forsake; like death, its kinsman,—Death of whom Milton says:—

"What *seemed* his head
The *likeness* of a kingly crown had on,"—

Sin is formless, vague, impalpable. But our own individual transgressions can be fixed and defined; bringing ourselves to the test of the Law, we can say particularly, "This practice of mine is condemned, this habit of mine is sinful, this point of my character is evil, this reticence, this indolence, this reluctance, in confessing Christ and in serving His cause, is all wrong;" and then we can definitely turn our back on the practice or the habit, we can distinctly get rid of the blot in our character, we can fly this guilty silence, rouse ourselves from our selfish indolence. "We live to grow less like what we have been;" and it is this act of the will, this resolute purpose, this loathing what once you loved, and turning towards that which once you ignored,—it is, in a word, the twin process of repentance and conversion, that constitutes the second act in this "covering" of sin. Not, of course, that in a moment the tyranny of old habits can be broken, or the virtue of new activities acquired; but "the forsaking" and "the departing from" are instantaneous exertions of the will. Zaccheus, directly the Lord speaks to him, stands forth, and breaks with his sins, renounces his extortions, resolving to make amends for the past, and enters on a new line of conduct, promising to give the half of his goods to the poor. That is the essential seal of every true confession: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh" his transgressions.

Thirdly. This has led us to see that the confession of sins and the conversion from them must issue in a positive practice of mercy and truth, in order to make the process of which we are speaking complete: "By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for."

It is this part of the "covering" which is so easily, so frequently, and so fatally overlooked. It is supposed that sins can be hidden without being removed, and that the covering of what is called imputed righteousness will serve instead of the covering of actual righteousness. To argue against this view theoretically is at the present day happily quite superfluous; but it is still necessary to contend against its subtle practical effects. There is no verity more wholesome and more needed than the one contained in this proverb. Sin may be summed up in two clauses: it is the Want of Mercy and it is the Want of Truth. All our ill-conduct to our fellow-men

comes from the cruelty and hardness of our selfish nature. Lust and greed and ambition are the outcome of pitilessness; we injure the weak and ruin the helpless, and trample on our competitors, and stamp out the poor; our eye does not pity. Again, all our offence against God is insincerity or wilful lying. We are false to ourselves, we are false to one another, and so we become false to the unseen verities, and false to God. When a human spirit denies the spiritual world and the spiritual Cause which can alone account for it, is it not what Plato used to call "a lie in the soul"? It is the deep inward and vital contradiction of consciousness; it is equivalent to saying, "I am not I," or, "That which is, is not."

Now, when we have lived in sin, without mercy or without truth, or without both; when our life up to a certain point has been a flagrant selfishness of absolute indifference to our fellows, or a flagrant lie denying Him in whom we live and move and have our being; or when as is so often the fact, the selfishness and the falseness have gone together, an inextricable and mutually dependent pair of evils, there can be no real covering of the sin, unless selfishness gives place to mercy and falsehood to truth. No verbal confession can possibly avail, no turning from the past iniquities, however genuine for the time, can have any permanent significance, unless the change is a reality, an obvious, living, and working fact. If a man supposes that he has become religious, but remains cruel and selfish, pitiless, unmerciful to his fellow-men, depend upon it that man's religion is vain; the atonement in which he trusts is a fiction, and avails no more than the hecatombs which Carthage offered to Melcarth availed to gain a victory over Rome. If a man counts himself saved, but remains radically untrue, false in his speech, insincere in his professions, careless in his thought about God, unjust in his opinions about men and the world, he is certainly under a lamentable delusion. Though he has, as he thinks, believed, he has not believed to the saving of his soul; though he has undergone a change, he has changed from one lie to another, and is in no way better off. It is by mercy and truth that iniquity can be covered.

Now it will be generally admitted that we do not take the course which has just been described unless we have the fear of God before our eyes. Nothing but the thought of His holiness and the awe which it inspires, and in some cases even, nothing but the absolute terror of Him who can by no means clear the guilty, moves the heart of man to confession, turns him away from his sins, or inclines him to mercy and truth. When the fear of God is removed from men's eyes they not only continue in sin, but they quickly come to believe that they have no sins to confess; for indeed when God is put out of the question that is in a certain sense true. It is a mere fact of observation, confirmed now by many changing experiences of humanity, that it is "by the fear of the Lord men depart from iniquity;" and it is very significant to notice how many of those who have entirely put away the fear of the Lord from their own eyes have strongly advocated keeping it before the eyes of others as the most convenient and economical police resource.* Many fervent free-

* Voltaire rose once from the table at Ferney, where some atheists were discussing their views. He said he

thinkers are thankful that their opinions are only held by a minority, and have no wish to see the whole of society committed to the cult which they would have us believe in all that their own religious nature requires.

But supposing that any one of us is led into the position of confession and conversion and amendment which is described in these Proverbs: what follows? That person, says the text, "shall obtain mercy." The gracious Father immediately, unconditionally, and absolutely pardons. This is the burden of the Old Testament, and it is certainly not repealed by the New. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." "Repent, and be converted," said St. Peter to the crowd at Pentecost, "that your sins may be blotted out." The New Testament is indeed on this point the louder and the clearer echo of the Old. The New Testament explains that saying which sounds so strange in the mouth of a perfectly just and Holy God, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake."* Human theologies have imagined obstacles in the way, but God never admitted them for a moment. Clear as the truth that the soul which sins should die was the promise that the soul which turned from its sin, and did that which is righteous in the eyes of the Lord, should live. No earthly father, frankly and unconditionally forgiving his penitent, sobbing child, could be so prompt, so eager as God. While the prodigal is yet a great way off the Father runs to meet him, and hides all his broken confessions in the rush of His embrace.

But we hesitate to admit and rejoice in this grand truth because of an uneasy fear that it is ignoring what is called the Atonement of Christ. It is a very proper hesitation, so long as we settle it within ourselves that these sweet and beautiful utterances of the Old Testament cannot possibly be limited or reversed by that Gospel which came to give effect and fulfilment to them. Is not the solution of any difficulty that has occurred to us to be found here? The sacrifice and the work of Christ create in the human soul those conditions which we have been considering. He came to give repentance unto Israel. It is His patient love in bearing all our infirmities and sins, His mysterious self-offering on the Cross, that can effectually bring us to confession, conversion, and amendment. Our hearts may have been as hard as the nether millstone, but at the Cross they are broken and melted. No stern denunciation of sin has ever moved our stubbornness; but as we realise what sin did to Him, when He became sin for us, the fear of the Lord falls upon us, we tremble, and cry, What shall we do to be saved? Then again, it is His perfect holiness, the beauty of those "stainless years He passed beneath the Syrian blue," which wakes in us the hankering desire for purity and goodness, and makes us turn with a genuine disgust from the sins which must seem so loathsome in His sight. His "neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more," gives us a more burning hatred of sin than all the self-righteous censures and condemnation of the Pharisees. It is in the pages of the Gospels that we have first understood what concrete goodness is; it has risen upon our night could not let his servants hear this talk, for they would rob and murder him if that was true.

* Isa. xliii. 25.

like a clear, liquid star, and the passion of it has entered into our souls. And then, finally, it is the Risen Lord, unto whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, that can really transform our nature, flood our heart with love, and fill our mind with truth, so that, in the language of the proverb, mercy and truth may atone for iniquity.

Is it not because Christ by His coming, by His living, by His dying, by His risen power, produces in the believer repentance and confession of sins, conversion and departing from sin, regeneration and actual holiness, that we say He has covered our sins? What meaning can be attached to Atonement apart from its effects? And in what other way, we may ask, could He really give us such a covering or atonement, than by creating in us a clean heart and renewing a right spirit within us? Sometimes, by a not unnatural confusion of language, we speak of the sacrificial death of our Lord as if it, apart from the effects produced in the believing heart, were in itself the Atonement. But that is not the language of the New Testament, which employs the idea of reconciliation* where the Old Testament would employ the idea of atoning; and clearly there can be no reconciliation accomplished between man and God until, not only God is reconciled to man, but man also is reconciled to God. And it is when we come to observe more accurately the language of the New Testament that this statement of the Proverbs is seen to be no contradiction, but an anticipation, of it. Only the regenerate soul, that in which the graces of the Christ-life, mercy and truth, have been implanted by Christ, is really reconciled with God, *i. e.*, effectually atoned. And though the framer of the proverb had but a dim conception of the way in which the Son of God would come to regenerate human hearts and make them in harmony with the Father, yet he saw clearly what Christians have too often overlooked, and expressed tersely what theology has too often obscured, that every effectual Atonement must include in itself the actual, moral regeneration of the sinner. And further, whoever wrote the verse which stands at the head of our chapter understood what many preachers of the Gospel have left in perplexing obscurity, that God would necessarily, from His very nature, provide the offering and the sacrifice on the ground of which every repentant soul that turns to Him could be immediately and freely forgiven.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NEED OF REVELATION.

"Where no vision is, a people casts off restraint, but he that keepeth the law is happy."—PROV. xxix. 18.

THE form of the proverb shows that we are not to treat the vision and the law as opposite, but rather as complementary terms. Visions are it is true, especially the mark of the prophets, and the law is often confined in a special sense to the Pentateuch; but there is a much wider

* See Rom. v. 11. This is the only place in the New Testament where even in the Authorised Version the word "atonement" occurs. But the contention of the text is not one of words, but of facts. Whatever terms are used, the Gospels and the Epistles all agree in identifying the salvation of God with an actual and practical righteousness wrought out by the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who believe in Christ as their Saviour.

usage of the words, according to which the two together express, with tolerable completeness, what we mean by *Revelation*. The vision means a perception of God and His ways, and is quite as applicable to Moses as to Isaiah; and, on the other hand, the law covers all the distinct and articulate instruction which God gives to His people in any of His ways of self-communication. "Come ye," says Isaiah,* "and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth *the law*, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" where the whole context shows that, not the Mosaic Law, but rather a new and particular declaration of the Lord's will, is referred to.

But while the vision and the law are not to be treated as opposites, it is possible to distinguish between them. The vision is the actual contact between God and the human spirit, which is the necessary condition of any direct revelation; the law is the recorded result of such a revelation, either passed from mouth to mouth by tradition, or written permanently in a book.

We may then a little amplify the proverb for the sake of exposition: "Where there is no living revelation, no perceived contact between man and God, there the bonds which hold society together are relaxed or broken; but he that holds by the revelation that has been given, obeying the law, so far as it has been presented to him, happy is he."

Man has need of a revelation; that is the assertion. Society, as an ordered and happy body of men in which each person is rightly subordinated to the whole, and in which law, as distinct from individual caprice, prevails, requires a revealed law. The light of nature is good, but it is not sufficient. The common sense of mankind is powerful, but not powerful enough. In the absence of a real and valid declaration of God's will times must come when the elemental passions of human nature will break out with unrestrained violence, the teachings of morality will be disputed, their authority will be denied, and their yoke will be broken; the links which hold the state and the community together will snap, and the slow growths of ages may disappear in a moment. It is not difficult to show the truth of this assertion from experience. Every people that emerges from barbarism has a vision and a law; a certain revelation which forms the foundation, the sanction, the bond of its corporate existence. When you can point to a tribe or a group of tribes that know nothing of God, and therefore have no idea of revelation, you at once assure us that the people are sunk in a hopeless savagery. We are, it is true, inclined to deny the term revelation to those systems of religion which lie outside of the Bible, but it is difficult to justify such a contraction of view. God has not left Himself anywhere without a witness. The more closely we examine the multitudinous religions of the earth, the more clearly does it appear that each of them had at its origin a definite, however limited, revelation. The idea of One all-powerful, good, and wise, God is found at the beginning of each faith that can be traced back far enough, and the actual condition of heathen systems always suggests a decline from a higher and a purer religion. We may say, then, with much plausibility, that no last-

ing and beneficial form of human society has ever existed apart from a vision and a law.

But leaving the wide field of comparative religions, do we not see an illustration of the truth of the text in the European countries which are more subject to our observation? In proportion as a people loses its faith in revelation it falls into decay. This was made manifest in the experience of the French Revolution. When the Jacobins had emancipated themselves from the idea of God, and had come out into the clear light of reason, so terribly did they "cast off restraint" that their own leader, Robespierre, endeavoured with a feverish haste to restore the recognition of God, assuming himself the position of high pontiff to the Supreme Being. The nearest approach that the world has probably ever seen to a government founded on Atheism was this government of the French Revolution, and a more striking commentary on this text could hardly be desired.

But the need of a revelation can be apprehended, apart from all appeals to history, by simply studying the nature of the spirit of man. Man must have an object of worship, and that object must be such as to command his worship. Auguste Comte thought to satisfy this need of the heart by suggesting Humanity as the *Grand Être*, but humanity was and is nothing but an abstraction. Feeling this himself, he recommended the worship of woman, and he prostrated his heart before Clotilde de Vaux; but sacred and beautiful as a man's love of a woman may be, it is no substitute for worship. We must have quite another than ourselves and our own kind, if our hearts are to find their rest. We must have an Almighty, an Infinite; we must have one who is Love. Until His spirit is worshipping, man cannot realise himself, or attain the height of his intended stature.

Again, man must have an assurance of his own immortality. While he believes himself to be mortal, a creature of a day, and that an uncertain day, it is impossible for him to rise much above the level of other ephemeral things. His pursuits must be limited, and his aims must be confined. His affections must be chilled by the shadow of death, and in proportion as he has nobly striven and tenderly loved, his later years must be plunged in hopeless gloom, because his efforts have been ineffectual and his beloved have gone from him. No juggling with terms; no half-poetic raptures about "the choir invisible," can meet the mighty craving of the human heart. Man must be immortal, or he is not man. "He thinks he was not made to die."

But to meet these demands of the spirit what, apart from revelation, can avail? That metaphysics is futile practically all men are agreed. Only the philosopher can follow the dialectics which are to prove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. And even the philosopher seems to grow pale and wizened in the process of his demonstration, and wins at last a vantage-ground of cold conviction, to find that there is no comfort there. But can science offer the assurance which philosophy was unable to give? Let us listen to the conclusion of a scientific writer on this subject, one who has lost his hold on revelation and can realise a little of what he has lost.

"The highest and most consoling beliefs of the human mind," he says, "are to a great extent

* Isa. ii. 3.

bound up with the Christian religion. If we ask ourselves frankly how much, apart from this religion, would remain of faith in a God, and in a future state of existence, the answer must be, very little. Science traces everything back to primeval atoms and germs, and there it leaves us. How came these atoms and energies there, from which this wonderful universe of worlds has been evolved by inevitable laws? What are they in their essence, and what do they mean? The only answer is, It is unknowable. It is 'behind the veil,' and may be anything. Spirit may be matter, matter may be spirit. We have no faculties by which we can even form a conception, from any discoveries of the telescope or microscope, from any experiments in the laboratory, or from any facts susceptible of real human knowledge, of what may be the first cause underlying all these phenomena.

"In like manner we can already, to a great extent, and probably in a short time shall be able to the fullest extent to trace the whole development of life from the lowest to the highest; from protoplasm, through monera, infusoria, mollusca, vertebrata, fish, reptile and mammal, up to man; and the individual man from the microscopic egg, through the various stages of its evolution up to birth, childhood, maturity, decline, and death. We can trace also the development of the human race through enormous periods of time, from the modest beginnings up to its present level of civilisation, and show how arts, languages, morals, and religions have been evolved gradually by human laws from primitive elements, many of which are common in their ultimate form to man and the animal creation.

"But here also science stops. Science can give no account of how these germs and nucleated cells, endowed with these marvellous capacities for evolution, came into existence, or got their intrinsic powers. Nor can science enable us to form the remotest conception of what will become of life, consciousness, and conscience, when the material conditions with which they are always associated, while within human experience, have been dissolved by death, and no longer exist. We know as little, in the way of accurate and demonstrable knowledge, of our condition after death as we do of our existence—if we had an existence—before birth."*

Science frankly confesses that she can tell us nothing of the things which it most concerns us to know. On those things she is no farther advanced than she was in the days of Aristotle. Never do we feel how much men need a revelation so vividly as when we have grasped the first principles of such a great scientific thinker as Mr. Herbert Spencer, and realise how far he is able to take us and how soon he has to leave us. How does it meet the craving of the soul for God to show us the slow stages by which man became a living soul? As well might you try to satisfy the musician's ear by telling him how his art had grown from the primitive tomtom of the savage. How can it help the life to be lived wisely, lovingly, and well, in the midst of the uncertainty of the world, and confronted by the certainty of death, to be told that our physical structure is united by a thousand immediate links with that of other mammals. Such a fact is insignificant; the supreme fact is that we

are not like other mammals in the most important respects; we have hearts that long and yearn, minds which enquire and question—they have not; we want God, our heart and our flesh crieth out for the living God, and we demand an eternal life—they do not.

How can science pretend that what she does not know is not knowledge, while she has to confess that she does not know precisely the things which it most concerns us as men to know? How can the spirit of man be content with the husks which she gives him to eat, when his whole nature craves the kernel? What probability is there that a man will close his eyes to the sun because another person, very clever and industrious, has shut himself up in a dark cellar, and tries to persuade him that his candle is all the light he may legitimately use, and what cannot be seen by his candle is not real?

No, science may not prove revelation, but she proves our need of it. She does her utmost, she widens her borders, she is more earnest, more accurate, more informed, more efficacious than ever; but she shows that what man most wants she cannot give,—she bids him go elsewhere.

But now it may be said: It is one thing to prove that man needs a revelation, and another to show that a revelation has been given. That is perfectly true, and this is not the place to adduce all the evidence which might prove that revelation is a reality; but what an advance we have made on the cold, self-satisfied deism of the eighteenth century, which maintained that the light of nature was enough, and revelation was quite superfluous, when the truest and most candid voices of science are declaring with such growing clearness that for the knowledge which revelation professes to give, revelation, and revelation alone, will suffice!

We Christians believe that we have a revelation, and we find that it suffices. It gives us precisely those assurances about God and about the soul without which we falter, grow bewildered, and begin to despond. We have a vision and a law. Our Bible is the record of the ever-widening, ever-clearing vision of God. The power and authority of the vision seem to be the more convincing, just because we are permitted to see the process of its development. Here we are able to stand with the seer and see, not the long æonian stages of creation which science has been painfully tracking out in these later days, but the supreme fact, which science professes herself unable to see, that God was the Author of it all. Here we are able to see the first imperfect conception of God which came in vision and in thought to the patriarch or sheikh in the earliest dawn of civilisation. Here we can observe the conceptions clearing, through Moses, through the Psalmists, through the Prophets, until at last we have a vision of God in the person of His Son, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His countenance. We see that He, the unseen Creator, is Love.

Our Bible, too, is the record of a law,—a law of human conduct, the will of God as applied to earthly life. At first the law is confined to a few primitive practices and outward observances; then it grows in complexity and multiplication of details; and only after a long course of discipline, of effort and apparent failure, of teaching and deliberate disobedience, is the law laid bare to its very roots, and presented in the simplified

* "Modern Science and Modern Thought" (pp. 289, 290), by S. Laing. Chapman & Hall: 1890.

and self-evidencing form of the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic precepts.

It is not necessary to start with any particular theory about the Bible, any more than it is necessary to know the substance of the sun before we can warm ourselves in his beams. It is not necessary to look for scientific accuracy in the histories and treatises through which the vision and the law are communicated to us. We know that the vessels are earthen, and the presupposition all through is that the light was only growing from the glimmer of the dawn up to the perfect day. But we know, we are persuaded, that here, to seeing eyes and humble hearts, is the revelation of God and of His will.

Nor is it only in the Bible that God speaks to us. There have been times in the history of Christendom—such times as the middle of the eighteenth century—when though the Bible was in men's hands, it seemed to be almost a dead letter. "There was no vision, and the people cast off restraint." It is by living men and women to whom He grants visions and reveals truths, that God maintains the purity and power of His revelation to us. He came in vision to Fox and the early Friends, to Zinzendorf and the early Moravians, to Wesley and the early Methodists. Seldom does a generation pass but some seers are sent to make the Word of God a living influence to their age. The vision is not always unmingled with human error, and when it ceases to be living it may become obstructive, a cause of paralysis rather than of progress. But Augustine and Jerome, Benedict and Leo, Francis and Dominic, Luther and Calvin, Ignatius Loyola, and Xavier, Fénelon and Madame Guyon, Jonathan Edwards and Channing, Robertson and Maurice, Erskine and MacLeod Campbell, are but examples of God's method all down the Christian ages. The vision comes pure and fresh as if straight from the presence of God. Traditionalism crumbles away. Doubt retreats like a phantom of the night. Mighty moral revolutions and spiritual awakenings are accomplished by the means of His chosen ones. And it should be our desire and our joy to recognise and welcome these seers of God.

"He that keepeth the law, happy is he." It is a mournful thing to be without a revelation, and to grope in darkness at midday; to hold one's mind in melancholy suspense, uncertain about God, about His will, about the life eternal. But it is better to have no revelation than to have it and disregard it. Honest doubt is full of necessary sorrow, but to believe and not to obey is the road to inevitable ruin.* "He that keepeth"—yea, he that looks into revelation, not for curiosity, but for a law by which to live; who listens to the wise precepts, not in order to exclaim, "How wise they are!" but in order to act on them.

There are many professing Christians who are constantly plunged in gloom. Unbelievers may point the finger at them, and say, "They believe in God, in salvation, and in heaven, but see what an effect it has on them. Do they really believe?" Oh, yes, they really believe, but they do not obey; and no amount of faith brings any

lasting happiness apart from obedience. The law requires us to love God, to love men; it requires us to abstain from all appearance of evil, to touch not the unclean thing; it bids us love not the world, it tells us how impossible the double service of God and Mammon is. Now, though we believe it all, it can give us nothing but pain unless we live up to it. If there is a vision and we shut our eyes to it, if there is a law and we turn away from it, woe unto us! But if we receive the vision, if we loyally and earnestly keep the law, the world cannot fathom the depth of our peace, nor rise to the height of our joy.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WORDS OF AGUR.

THE rendering of the first verse of this chapter is very uncertain. Without attempting to discuss the many conjectural emendations, we must briefly indicate the view which is here taken. A slight alteration in the pointing (לְאִיתִיאל instead of the Masoretic reading לְאִיתִיאל)

changes the proper name Ithiel into a significant verb;

and another slight change (וְאָכַל for וְאָכַל) gives us another verb in the place of Ucal. To remove the difficulty of the word "oracle," a difficulty which arises from the fact that the chapter which follows is not a prophetic utterance of the kind to which that word might be applied, it is necessary, with Grätz, to make a more serious change, and to read הַמִּשְׁלָּה for הַמִּשְׁלָּה. And to

explain the word הַנֶּבֶךְ, which occurs in a similar connection in Numb. xxiv. 3, 15, and 2 Sam. xxiii. 1, we must suppose that some relative clause defining the nature of "the man" has been dropped. The great uncertainty of the text is witnessed by the LXX., who place this passage after xxiv. 23, and give a rendering which has very little resemblance to our present Hebrew text. It is highly probable, both from the subject matter and from the numerical arrangements, which are thoroughly Rabbinical, that this chapter and chap. xxxi. are of late origin, and represent the last phase of the proverbial literature of Israel in the days after the return from the Exile. If this be so, the obscurity and uncertainty are characteristic of an artificial period of literature, and of a decay in literary taste. Adopting, then, the alterations which have been mentioned, we obtain the following result:—

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the proverb-writer:

"The utterance of the man [who has questioned and thought]: I have wearied after God, I have wearied after God, and am faint, for I am too stupid for a man, and am without reason, and I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the All Holy," etc.

THIS chapter is full of curious interest. It is a collection of sayings which are apparently connected only by the circumstance that they were attributed to one person, Agur, the son of Jakeh. Whoever Agur was, he had a certain marked individuality; he combined meditation on lofty questions of theology with a sound theory of practical life. He was able to give valuable admonitions about conduct. But his characteristic delight was to group together in quatrains visible illustrations of selected qualities or ideas.

It may be well for us to glance at these picturesque groups, and then to return to the more philosophical and religious sentiments with which the chapter opens.

"Slander not a servant to his master," says Agur, "lest the servant curse thee, and thou be held guilty." Even underlings have their rights; the Lord makes their cause His own, and a curse from them falls with as much weight on a slanderer as the words of more influential people. It is one of the surest tests of a man's character

* Cf. Prov. xxviii. 4, 9:—

"They forsake the law praise the wicked:
But such as keep the law contend with them.
He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law
Even his prayer is an abomination."

to see how he treats servants; if he is uniformly courteous, considerate, just, and generous in his treatment of them, we may safely infer that he is a noble character; if he is haughty, domineering, revengeful, and malicious to them, we need not attach much importance to his pleasing manners and plausible services to those whom he considers his equals.

Now follow two of these singular quatrains. There are four kinds of men pointed out, and held up, not to our abhorrence, that is unnecessary, but simply to our observation: the unfilial, the self-righteous, the haughty, and the rapacious who devour the poor and the needy. It is not necessary to say anything about these persons. Their doom is stamped on their brows; to name them is to condemn them; to describe them is to write out their sentence.

Again, there are four things which like the blood-sucking horse-leech are always insatiable. The vampire has her daughters in the earth; it is, as Professor Cheyne says, "a quasi-mythical expression." These daughters are two, nay, they are three, nay, they are four; and they are, as it were, the representatives of all creation: * Sheol, the invisible world, which draws into itself the countless generations of the dead; the generative principle, which never wearies of producing new generations of the living; the earth, which is for ever absorbing the cadent waters of heaven; and the fire, which will consume all the fuel that is given to it.

Now follows a further comment upon unfilial conduct: the eye is regarded as the instrument by which a son shows his feelings to his parents; he has not perhaps gone the length of uttering a curse against them, still less of raising his hand to ill-treat them, but his eye flashes derision upon his father, and by its haughty obstinacy declares that it will not obey his mother. The offending member shall be picked out by the clamorous ravens, and eaten by the young of the soaring eagle.

Next we have four more quatrains. First, there are the four wonders which baffle Agur's understanding; wonders which are comprehensible only to God, as the Vedic hymn says,—

"The path of ships across the sea,
The soaring eagle's flight he knows."

The wonder seems to be in the reality and power of impalpable things. How little of all that passes in the universe is open to observation, or leaves a track behind. The eagle mounts through the air as if he marched on a solid beaten road; the serpent, without limbs, glides over the smooth rock where feet would slip, and leaves no trace behind; the ship ploughs the deep, and over trackless waters follows her track which is invisible; a man and a maid meet, swift glances pass, hearts blend, and that is done which can never be undone; or on the evil side, the bad woman follows her illicit and hidden courses, while to all appearance she is a faithful wife and mother.

Secondly, there are four human conditions which are intolerable to society, viz., an essentially servile spirit put into the place of authority; a fool who, instead of being corrected, is confirmed in his folly by prosperity; a marriage

* Cf. the Sanscrit Hitopadesa, "Fire is never satisfied with fuel, nor the ocean with rivers, nor death with all creatures, nor bright-eyed women with men;" also the Arabic proverb, "Three things are of three never full, women's womb of man, wood of fire, and earth of rain."

where the wife is hated; and a slave girl in the position which Hagar occupied with relation to Sarah her mistress.

Thirdly, there are four kinds of animals which illustrate that size is not necessarily greatness, and that it is possible to be insignificant and yet wise. The tiny ants are a model of intelligent mutual co-operation and prudent thrift. The little jerboas seem helpless enough, but they are sensible in the choice of their homes, for they dwell securely in rocky fastnesses. The locusts seem as weak and inoffensive as insects can be, yet they form a mighty army, ordered in battle array; "they run like mighty men; they climb the wall like men of war; and they march every one in his ways, and they break not their ranks." * The lizard seems but a plebeian creature; you can seize it with your hands; it is defenceless and devoid of natural capabilities; and yet with its swift crawlings and tireless dartings it will find its way into kings' palaces, where greater and stronger creatures cannot enter.

Lastly, there are four things which impress one with their stateliness of motion; the lion, the creature that is girt in the loins, whether a war-horse or a greyhound, the he-goat, and—surely with a little touch of satire—the king when his army is with him.

Then the collection of Agur's sayings ends with a wise and picturesque word of counsel to exercise a strong restraint over our rising passions.

But now we may turn back to the passage with which the chapter opens. Here is the cry of one who has sought to find out God. It is an old and a mournful cry. Many have emitted it from the beginning; many utter it now. But few have spoken with more pathetic humility, few have made us feel with so much force the solemnity and the difficulty of the question as this unknown Agur. We see a brow wrinkled with thought, eyes dimmed with long and close observation; it is not the boor or the sot that makes this humiliating confession; it is the earnest thinker, the eager enquirer. He has meditated on the wonderful facts of the physical world; he has watched the great trees sway under the touch of the invisible wind, and the waves rise up in their might, lashing the shores, but vainly essaying to pass their appointed boundaries; he has considered the vast expanse of the earth, and enquired, on what foundations does it rest, and where are its limits? He cannot question the "eternal power and divinity" which can alone account for this ordered universe. He has not, like many thinkers ancient and modern, "dropped a plummet down the broad deep universe, and cried, No God." He knows that there is a God; there must be an Intelligence able to conceive, coupled with a power able to realise, this mighty mechanism. But who is it? What is His name or His Son's name? Here are the footsteps of the Creator, but where is the Creator Himself? Here are the signs of His working on every hand. There is an invisible power that ascends and descends on the earth by stair-cases unseen. Who is He? These careering winds, before which we are powerless, obey some control; sometimes they are "up-gathered like sleeping flowers;" who is it that holds them then? These great waters sway to and fro, or they pour in ceaseless currents from their fountains, or they gather in the quiet hol-

* Joel ii. 7.

lows of the hills; but who is it that appoints the ocean, and the river, and the lake? Who feeds them all, and restrains them all? Whose is the garment which holds them as a woman carries a pitcher lashed to her back in the fold of her dress? The earth is no phantom, no mirage, it is solid and established; but who gave to matter its reality, and in the ceaseless flux of the atoms fixed the abiding forms, and ordered the appropriate relations? Ah! what is His name? Has He a son? Is man, for instance, His son? Or does the idea of the Eternal and Invisible God imply also an Eternal Son, a Being one with Him, yet separable, the object of His love, the instrument of His working, the beginning of His creation? Who is He? That He is holy seems an inevitable conclusion from the fact that we know what holiness is, and recognise its sovereignty. For how, in thinking of the mighty Being who made all things, dare I give Him a lower attribute than that which I can give to my fellow-men? How dare I withhold from Him that which I know of the Highest and the Best? But though I know that He is holy, the All Holy One I do not know. My weak and sinful nature has glimpses of Him, but no steady visions. I lose Him in the confused welter of things. I catch the gleam of His face in the hues of the rainbow and in the glow of the eternal hills; but I lose it when I strive to follow among the angry gatherings of the stormclouds, in the threatening crash of the thunder, the roar of the avalanche, and the rent ruins of the earthquake.

And the man, considering all things, questioning, seeking, exclaims, "I am weary and faint." The splendours of God haunt his imagination, the sanctities of God fill his conscience with awe, the thoughts of God lie as presuppositions behind all his thinking. But he has not understanding; baffled and foiled and helpless, he says that he is too brutish to be a man. Surely a *man* would know God; surely he must be but one of the soulless creatures, dust of the dust, for he has not the knowledge of the Holy One.

To this impetuous hail of questions an answer comes. For indeed in the fact that the questions are put already the answer lies. In the humble cry that he is too stupid to be a man is already the clearest proof that he is raised incalculably above the brute.

But who is it that offers the answer in vv. 5-9? It would seem as if Agur himself has suggested the question—a question borrowed probably from some noble heathen thinker; and now he proceeds to meet the wild and despairing outcry with the results of his own reflection. He does not attempt the answer on the lines of natural religion. His answer in effect is this: You cannot know God, you cannot by searching find Him unless he reveals Himself; His revelation must come as an articulate and intelligible word. As the Psalm says—for it seems to be a quotation from Psalm xviii. 30—"Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that trust in Him." Agur appeals to a written revelation, a revelation which is complete and rounded, and to which no further addition may be made (ver. 6). It was probably the time when Ezra the scribe had gathered together the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets, and had formed the first scriptural canon. Since then a great deal has been added to the canon, these words of Agur among the rest, but the assertion remains

essentially true. Our knowledge of God depends on His self-revelation, and the method of that revelation is to speak, through the lips of God-possessed men, words which are tried by experience and proved by the living faith of those who trust in God. "I am that I am" has spoken to men, and to Him, the Eternally-existent, have they ascribed the visible universe. "The God of Israel" has spoken to men, and they have learnt therefore to trace His hand in history and in the development of human affairs. The Holy One has in prophets and poets spoken to men, and they have become aware that all goodness comes from Him, and all evil is hateful to Him. And lastly, His Son has spoken to men, and has declared Him in a way that never could have been dreamed, has shown them the Father, has revealed that new unutterable Name.

The answer to the great cry of the human heart, the wearied, fainting human heart, is given only in revelation, in the tried word of God, and completely only in the Word of God that was made flesh. The proof of that revelation is furnished to all those who trust in the God so revealed, for He becomes a shield to them; they abide under the shadow of His realised presence. It is not possible to add unto the words of God; our speculations lead us farther, but they only lead us into error; and by them we incur His reproof, and our fictions become disastrously exposed. The answer to philosophy is in revelation, and they who do not accept the revealed answer are left asking eternally the same weary and hopeless question, "What is his name, and what is his son's name?"

And now, with a quaint and practical homeliness which is very suggestive, Agur notices two conditions, which he has evidently observed to be necessary if we are to find the answer which revelation gives to the enquiry of the human heart after God. First of all we must be rid of vanity and lies. How true this is! We may hold the Bible in our hands, but while our hearts are void of seriousness and sincerity we can find nothing in it, certainly no word of God. A vain person and an untruthful person can receive no genuine revelation; they may believe, or think that they believe, the current religious dogmas, and they may be able to give a verbal answer to the question which we have been considering, but they cannot have the knowledge of the Holy One. More than half the godlessness of men is due simply to want of earnestness; they are triflers on the earth, they are painted bubbles, which burst if any solid thing touches them; they are drifting vapours and exhalations, which pass away and leave not a wrack behind. But there are many men who are serious enough in their search for knowledge, and yet are vitiated through and through by a radical want of truthfulness. They are prepared for facts, but only facts of a certain sort. They want to know God, but only on condition that He shall not be supernatural. They want to study the truths of the spiritual world, but only on condition that the spiritual shall be material. O remove far from me vanities and lies!

Then there is a second condition desirable for the due appreciation of religious truth, a social and economical condition. Agur might have known our modern world with its terrible extremes of wealth and poverty. He perceived how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom

of heaven; and, on the other hand, how probable it is that hungry men will be seduced into stealing and betrayed into blasphemy. That there is much truth in this view we may easily satisfy ourselves by considering the wealthy classes in England, whose question, urged through all their pomp and ceremonial of heartless worship, is practically, "Who is the Lord?" and by then looking at the eight hundred thousand paupers of England, amongst whom religion is practically unknown except as a device for securing food.

And when we have duly weighed this saying of Agur's, we may come to see that among all the pressing religious and spiritual problems of our day, this also must be entertained and solved, How to secure a more equable distribution of wealth, so that the extremes of wealth and poverty should disappear, and all should be fed with the food that is needful for them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GOOD WOMAN.

"O woman-hearts, that keep the days of old
In living memory, can *you* stand back
When Christ calls? Shall the heavenly Master lack
The serving love, which is your life's fine gold?

"Do you forget the hand which placed the crown
Of happy freedom on the woman's head,
And took her from the dying and the dead,
Lifting the wounded soul long trodden down?

"Do you forget who bade the morning break,
And snapped the fetters of the iron years?
The Saviour calls for service: from your fears
Rise girt with faith, and work for His dear sake!

"And He will touch the trembling lips with fire,—
O let us hasten, lest we come too late!
And all shall work; if some must 'stand and wait,'
Be theirs that wrestling prayer that will not tire."
R. O.

THE last chapter of the book of Proverbs consists of two distinct compositions, and the only connection between them is to be found in their date. The words of King Lemuel, "a saying which his mother taught him,"* and the description of a good woman,† must both be referred to a very late epoch of Hebrew literature. The former contains several Aramaic words‡ and expressions which connect it with the period of the exile; and the latter is an alphabetical acrostic, *i. e.*, the verses begin with the successive letters of the alphabet; and this artificial mode of composition, which appears also in some of the Psalms, is sufficient of itself to indicate the last period of the literature, when the Rabbinical methods were coming into use.

About the words of Lemuel, of whom it may be observed we know nothing at all, enough has been said in previous lectures. We need here only notice that the mother's influence in the education of her son, even though that son is to be a king, comes very suitably as the introduction to the beautiful description of the good woman with which the chapter closes. It is said that the mother of George III. brought him up with the constantly-repeated admonition, "George, be a king," and that to this early training was due that exalted notion of the pre-

* Prov. xxxi. 1-9.

† Prov. xxxi. 10-31.

‡ *E. g.*, מַלְכִּי ver. 2 and מְלִכִּי ver. 3: cf the strange

expressions כָּל-בְּנֵי חַלּוּף and כָּל-בְּנֵי עֵינִי in vv. 5, 8.

rogative and that obstinate assertion of his will which occasioned the calamities of his reign. Kings have usually been more ready to imbibe such lessons than moral teaching from their mothers; but whatever may be the actual result, we all feel that a woman is never more nobly occupied than in warning her son against the seductions of pleasure, and in giving to him a high sense of duty. It is from a mother's lips we should all learn to espouse the cause of the helpless and the miserable, and to bear an open heart for the poor and needy.*

But now before coming to examine in detail the poem of the virtuous woman, let us briefly recall what the book hitherto has taught us on the subject of womanhood. It began with solemn and oft-repeated warnings against the "strange woman," and echoes of that mournful theme have accompanied us throughout: the strange woman is a deep ditch, a narrow pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.† And even where the woman's nature is not corrupted by impurity we are several times reminded how she may destroy the peace of man's life by certain faults of temper. If she is contentious and fretful she can make the house utterly unbearable; it will be better to live in a corner of the housetop or in a desert land, exposed to the continual downpour of the autumn rains, than to be assailed by her tongue.‡ The attempt to restrain her is like trying to grasp the wind, or to seize an object which is smeared with oil.§ We are reminded too how incongruously sometimes great beauty of person is combined with inward faults. "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion."||

But we must distinctly understand that these severe strictures on woman corrupted and woman imperfect are only so many witnesses to her value and importance. The place she fills in life is so supreme that if she fails in her duty human life as a whole is a failure. In her hands lie the issues of life for mankind. "The wisdom of woman builds her house, and the folly of woman plucks it down with her hands."¶ What the homes of a nation are, the nation is; and it is woman's high and beautiful function to make the homes, and within her power lies the terrible capacity for marring them. She, much more than the king, is the fountain of honour.** The honour she gives and the honour she commands will decide the whole tone of society. Pure, true, and strong, she makes men worship purity, truth, and strength. Corrupt, false, and vain, she blights and blasts the ideal of man, lowers all his aspirations, excites his evil passions to a frenzy of iniquity, degrades his soul to a level below the brutes.

The condition of woman is the touchstone of a civilised society.

Again, there is a sense in which woman is an interpreter and revealer of God to the human race. She has religious intuitions and spiritual susceptibilities in which the other sex is usually deficient. Most religious systems in the world's history have overlooked her, and have suffered accordingly. The religion of Jesus Christ recognised her, claimed for her her rightful place, and to this day does much of its best work in

* Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

† Prov. xxii. 14, xxiii. 27.

‡ Prov. xix. 13, xxi. 9, xxv. 24, xxi. 19, xxvii. 15.

§ Prov. xxvii. 16.

|| Prov. xi. 22.

¶ Prov. xiv. 1.

** Prov. xi. 16.

the world through her gracious ministrations, through her unquestioning faith, through her unquenchable love. It is as a foreshadowing of this religious significance which Christ was to give to womanhood that the Proverbs recognise the beautiful direct relation between God and the possession of a good wife. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord."* Wealth, as it is ordinarily understood, is of the earth,—it can be derived from ancestors by inheritance, or it can be earned by toil of hand and brain,—but every wife worthy of the name is far above all wealth: she cannot be earned or inherited; she comes, as the mother of mankind came, direct from the hand of the Lord.† The marriage tie is a thought of God's heart. He Himself has arranged the exquisite blending of life with life and spirit with spirit; He has fitted man to woman and woman to man, so that the perfect man is not the man alone, the perfect woman is not the woman alone, but the man and woman one flesh, mystically united, the completeness each of the other; not two, but a single whole.

We may now examine in detail this connected description of the virtuous woman, whose value is not to be measured by material wealth, and who yet, from a merely material point of view, is a source of wealth to those who are fortunate enough to call her theirs.

She is a wife. The modern conception of a woman as an independent person, standing alone, engaged in her own business or profession, and complete in her isolated life, is not to be looked for in the book of Proverbs. It is the creation of accidental circumstances. However necessary it may be in a country where the women are largely in excess of the men, it cannot be regarded as final or satisfactory. In the beginning it was not so, neither will it be so in the end. If men and women are to abide in strength and to develop the many sides of their nature, they must be united. It is not good for man to be alone; nor is it good for woman to be alone. There are some passages in the New Testament which seem to invalidate this truth. The advocates of celibacy appeal to the example of Christ and to the express words of St. Paul. But the New Testament, as our Lord Himself expressly declares, does not abrogate the eternal law which was from the beginning. And if He Himself abstained from marriage, and if St. Paul seems to approve of such an abstention, we must seek for the explanation in certain exceptional and temporary circumstances; for it is precisely to Christ Himself in the first instance, and to His great Apostle in the second, that we owe our loftiest and grandest conceptions of marriage. There was no room for a personal marriage in the life of Him who was to be the Bridegroom of His Church; and St. Paul distinctly implies that the pressing troubles and anxieties of his own life, and the constant wearing labours which were required of the Gentile

Apostle, formed the reason why it was better for him, and for such as he, to remain single.

At any rate the virtuous woman of the Proverbs is a wife: and the first thing to observe is the part she plays in relation to her husband. She is his stay and confidence: "The heart of her husband trusteth in her." She is his natural confidante and counsellor; her advice is more valuable than that of much cleverer people, because it is so absolutely disinterested; the hearts are in such vital contact that the merely intellectual communications have a quality all their own. One may often observe in an ideal marriage, though the husband seems to be the stronger and the more self-reliant, the wife is really the pillar of strength; if death removes her, he is forlorn and bereft and helpless; the gradual work of the years has led him to depend on her more and more, to draw from her his best inspirations, and to turn instinctively to her for advice and direction.

"She doeth him good, and not evil, all the days of her life."* It is not only when she comes as a young bride into his house, bright with youth, encircled with the glamour of early love,—then, it is true, the thought of her nerves his endeavours and quickens his eager steps as he turns homeward in the evening,—it is not only while her fresh charms last, and her womanly beauty acts as a spell on him, while the desire to retain her love disciplines and strengthens whatever is good in his character; but right through to the end of her life, when she has grown old, when the golden hair is grey, and the blooming cheeks are wrinkled, and the upright form is bent,—when other people see nothing beautiful about her except the beauty of old age and decay, he sees in her the sweet bride of earlier years, to him the eyes appear unchanged and the voice thrills him with happy memories; she ministers to him still and does him good; not now with the swift alacrity of foot and the deft movement of the hand, but with the dear, loyal heart, with the love which the years have mellowed and the trust which the changing circumstances of life have tested and confirmed.

It is this strong, sweet core of life in the home which gives the man dignity and honour in public. She is a crown to her husband.† His influence in the life of his town or of his country is not always directly traced to its true source. But it is that woman's noble sway over him, it is the constant spur and clastening of her love, which gives him the weighty voice and the grave authority in the counsels of the nation. "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land."‡ He can make but a poor return to her for all her quiet unobtrusive and self-sacrificing help year after year and on to the end, but he can at least repay her with growing reverence and loyalty; he can tell her, as it were with the impassioned lips of a lover, what he owes to her; when her children rise up and call her blessed, he can praise her, saying, "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."§ Indeed it will be his growing conviction that of all the daughters of woman there is none equal to his wife. Her charms have grown upon him, her character has ripened before his eyes, her love has become at once stronger and more precious every year. It is no flattery, no idle compliment of courting-

* Prov. xviii. 22.

† Prov. xix. 14. In the LXX. this clause is beautifully rendered *παρά δὲ κυρίου ἀρμόζεται γυνὴ ἀνδρί*. By the Lord's ordinance woman and man are dovetailed together in a complete harmony. The thought is well expanded in Ecclesiasticus (xxvi. 1-3): "Blessed is the man that has a virtuous wife, for thereby his life is doubled. A woman made for a man rejoices her husband, and he shall fulfil the years of his life in peace. A virtuous wife is a good portion, in the portion of them that fear the Lord shall she be given."

* Prov. xxxi. 12.

† Prov. xii. 4.

‡ Prov. xxxi. 23.

§ Prov. xxxi. 29.

days, no soft word to win the coy heart of the maiden, but it is his own deep and sincere feeling; it is said to her who is his and has been his for years, and in whose assured possession he finds his greatest peace: "I do not question that other women are good and true, but I am sure that you are better than all." And so she is. Every true wife is the best wife.

The next point in the virtuous woman to which our attention is drawn is her, unflagging industry. Her husband "shall have no lack of gain."* In addition to all those treasures of mutual love and spiritual converse, all those invaluable services of counsel and guidance, of criticism and encouragement, she is a positive source of wealth to him. She is the house-manager. If he earns the bread in the first instance, it is in her hands that it seems to be miraculously multiplied. If he brings home the money which is enough for their wants, it is she who turns the silver into gold and makes the modest means appear great wealth. The fact is her hands are always busy. The spindle, the distaff, the loom, are within her reach and are constantly plied. While she unravels the knotted cares of her husband in the evening with her bright and cheery talk, while she encourages him in all his plans and heartens him for all his duties, her busy fingers are making clothes for the children, repairing, adapting, improving, or else are skilfully constructing ornaments and decorations for the household, turning the poor room into a palace, making the walls beam with beauty and the hearts of all within laugh for joy.

There is something quite magical and impressive in woman's economy: "She is like the merchant ships; she bringeth her food from afar."† No one knows how it is done. The table is well spread, the food is daintily served, on infinitesimal means. She finds out by the quick intuitions of love how to get the things which the loved ones like, and by many a little sacrifice unperceived she produces effects which startle them all. She has a secret of doing and getting which no one knows but she. Early passers-by have seen a light in the house long before the day dawns; she has been up preparing the breakfast for the household, and mapping out the work for all, so that no hours may be wasted and no one in the family may be idle.‡ Her boundless economies produce astonishing results. One morning she has to announce to the husband and the children that she has managed to put together a little sum which will purchase the freehold of their house and garden.§ Her husband exclaims, Why, how has it been done? Where has the money come from out of our little income? She smiles significantly and will not tell; but the tears moisten his eyes as he looks into her face and reads the story of self-denials, and managings, and toils, which have issued in this surprise. And the children look up with a sense of awe and wonder. They feel that there is something of the supernatural about mother; and perhaps they are right.

She has all the delicacy and even weakness of a woman, but the life of constant activity and cheerful toil preserves her health and increases her strength. Idle women, who lounge their days away in constant murmurings over their ailments, speak contemptuously about her,— "She has the strength of a horse," they say,

"and can bear anything." They do not know, they do not wish to know, that she is the author of her own strength. It is her own indomitable will, her own loving heart, which girds her loins with strength and makes strong her arms.* There are others who carp at her on different grounds; they do not understand how one with her husband's income can keep so comfortable a household or dress her children as she does. Those cushions of tapestry, that clothing of fine linen and purple, are an offence to her critics. "How she does it I am sure I don't know," says one, implying that there is something quite uncanny and disreputable about it. "She works like a slave," says another, with the tone of scorn that one would employ for a slave. But that is the truth: "She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable: her lamp goeth not out by night."† She is indeed indefatigable. She actually makes garments which she can sell, girdles for the merchants‡ in addition to looking well to the ways of her household. Certainly she does not eat the bread of idleness.§

She can, however, very easily bear the contemptuous criticisms of others. The practical results of her life are sufficiently satisfying to make her a little independent. She has secured herself and her household against the contingencies which harass other house-wives. The approach of winter has no alarms for her: all the children and servants are warmly and sufficiently clad.|| The uncertain future has no terrors for her: she has made ample provision for it, and can regard the unknown chances with a smile of confidence.¶ And indeed, whatever detractors may say behind her back, it is not easy for any one to say anything severe in her presence. For the same loving, earnest, diligent ways which have made her household comfortable and secure have clothed her with garments better than scarlet and linen. "Strength and dignity are her clothing,"—robes so gracious and beautiful that criticism is silenced in her presence, while the hearts of all good and honest people are drawn out to her.

But here is another characteristic of the virtuous woman. Economy and generosity go hand in hand. Frugal livers and hard workers are always the largest givers. This woman, whose toil late at night and early in the morning has enriched and blessed her own, is ready to help those who are less fortunate. "She spreadeth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."** Most women are naturally pitiful and shrink from the sight of suffering; but while idle and self-indulgent women try to avoid the painful sight, and turn their flow of pity into the channels of vapid sentimentality, the good woman trains her sense of pity by coming into contact with those who deserve it, and only seeks to avoid the sight of suffering by trying everywhere and always to relieve it.

Among all the noble and Christlike offices of woman this is the one which most strikingly connects her with the human life of our Lord. It is her function to excite and to cherish the quality of compassion in the human heart, and by her trained skill and intuitive tact to make the ministrations of the community to the poor

* Prov. xxxi. 11.
† Prov. xxxi. 14.

‡ Prov. xxxi. 15.
§ Prov. xxxi. 16.

* Prov. xxxi. 17.
† Prov. xxxi. 18.
‡ Prov. xxxi. 24.

§ Prov. xxxi. 27.
|| Prov. xxxi. 21.
¶ Prov. xxxi. 25.

** Prov. xxxi. 20.

truly charitable instead of dangerously demoralising. Man is apt to relieve the poor by the laws of political economy, without emotion and by measure: he makes a Poor Law which produces the evil it pretends to relieve; he degrades the lovely word Charity into a badge of shame and a wanton insult to humanity. It is woman that "spreads out her palm and reacheth forth her hand" to the poor, bringing her heart into the work, giving, not doles of money, but the helpfulness of a sister's love, the tenderness of a mother's solicitude, the awakening touch of a daughter's care. And the hand which is thus held out to the poor is precisely the hand which has been laid on the distaff and the spindle; not the lazy hand or the useless hand, but the hand which is supple with toil, dexterous with acquired skill.

There are two reflections which must have occurred to us in following this description of the good woman. Her portrait has risen before our eyes, and we ask, Is she beautiful? We have watched her activities, their mode and their result, and we wonder whether she is religious. "Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised."* That this woman has a beauty of her own seems clear, and that she fears the Lord is a fair inference to make. It is idle to declaim against the charms of personal beauty; we may call it deceitful and vain, but it will not cease to be attractive. Men will not be reasoned or ridiculed out of that instinctive homage which they pay to a lovely face; the witchery of bright eyes and arch looks, the winsomeness of sweet contours and delicate hues, will last, we may surmise, as long as the sun and moon endure; and why should we dishonour God by supposing that He did not make the beauty which attracts and the attraction which the beauty excites? But it is not impossible to open men's eyes to the beauty of a less transient and more satisfying kind which lies in the character and conduct of women. If mothers accustom their sons to see those sterling attractions which permanently secure the affection and the devotion of a husband, the young men will not be content with superficial beauties and vanishing charms in the women whom they choose.

And is not the beauty of woman such beauty as we have been contemplating—the result of fearing the Lord? Is it possible, apart from a living faith in a living God, to maintain that

lovely wifeliness, that self-sacrificing, diligent love, that overflow of pity to the poor and needy, which constitute grace and loveliness of character? Has any one succeeded in even depicting an imaginary woman devoid of religion and yet complete and beautiful? We have already noticed how suited the woman's nature is to receive religious impressions and to communicate religious influences; we may now notice, in concluding, that this very characteristic renders a woman without God even more imperfect and unsatisfying than a man without God. She is naturally inclined to cling to a person rather than to an idea, to follow a person rather than a theory. The only Person to whom she can cling with absolute good and hallowing results is God; the only Person whom she can follow and minister to without detriment to her womanhood and with gain to her spirit is Christ. A godless woman makes a sore shipwreck of life, whether she becomes sensual and depraved, or ambitious and domineering, or bitter and cynical, or vain and conventional. In her ruin there is always a power as of a fallen angel, and she can drag others with her in her fall.

If a man is wise then in choosing for himself a wife, the first thing he will demand is that she shall be one that fears the Lord, one who shall be able to lead him and help him in that which is his truest life, and to maintain for him a saving intercourse with the world of spiritual realities. He may be assured that in her love to God he has the best guarantee of her love to him, and that if she does not fear and love God the main sanction for their wedded happiness will be wanting.

Finally, where the woman who has been described is actually found in real life it is for us to recognise her and to reward her. Let society take note of her: "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." The great Greek historian said that woman's highest praise consisted in not being mentioned at all. That is not the teaching of Revelation. Woman's best work is often done in silence and without observation, but her highest praise is when the seeds sown in silence have grown into flowers of loveliness and fruit that is sweet to the taste, and the whole community is forced to yield her the honour which is her due, exalting, with heartfelt admiration and with deep gratitude to God, the Wife, the Mother, the Ministrant to the Poor.

* Prov. xxxi. 30.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

PREFACE.

THE Lectures on which this book is founded were delivered five-and-twenty years ago, and were published in A. D. 1867.* For more than twenty years the book has been out of print, a large first edition having been speedily sold out. No other edition was issued owing to the fact that my publisher soon passed into another profession. I have often been asked to reprint it, but have always felt that, before reprinting, I must rewrite it. Till of late, however, I could not command leisure for the task. But when, at the commencement of this year, the Editor of *THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE* did me the honor to ask permission to reprint it, that he might include it in this excellent series, I had leisure at command, and cheerfully devoted it to the revision of my work. Among the more recent commentaries I have read with this purpose in view, those which I have found most helpful and suggestive were that of Delitzsch, that by Dr. Wright, that of Dean Plumptre, and the fine fragment contributed to *THE EXPOSITOR* by Dr. Perowne, the Dean of Peterborough. In the preface to the former edition I dwelt on my indebtedness to the commentary of Dr. Ginsburg, published in A. D. 1861. In my judgment it still remains by far the best, the most thorough, and the most sound. It has but one serious defect; it is addressed to scholars, and so abounds in learning and erudition that it can never come into popular use. Indeed even now, although during the last twenty years there has been an immense advance in the study and exposition of Holy Writ, and many able and learned men have devoted themselves to the service of the general public, I know of no commentary on this Scripture which really meets the wants of the unlettered. I cannot but hope, therefore, that "The Quest of the Chief Good" may still serve a useful purpose, and that, in its revised form, it may be found helpful to those who most need help.

In rewriting the book I have retained as much as I could of its earlier form, lest the vivacity of a first exposition of the Scripture should be lost. And, indeed, the alterations I have had to make are but slight for the most part, though I have in many places altered, and, I hope, amended both the translation and the commentary: but there are one or two additions—they will be found on pages 458–459, and, again, in certain modifications of the exposition of Chapter XII., verses 9–12, on pages 510–515, dealing mainly with the structure of Ecclesiastes—which may, I trust, be found useful not to the general reader alone. Since the original edition appeared I have had to study the Book of Job, most of the Psalms, many of the Prophetical writings, and some of the Proverbs; and it was inevitable that in the course of these pleasant studies I should arrive at clearer and more definite conceptions on the structure of Hebrew poetry. These I now place at the service of my readers, and submit to the judgment of scholars and critics.

Another and much more important result of these subsequent studies has been that I can now speak with a more assured confidence of the theme of this Scripture,

* "The Quest of the Chief Good." A Popular Commentary on the book Ecclesiastes, with a New Translation. By Samuel Cox.

and of its handling by the Author. None of the scholars who have recently commented on the Book doubt that it is the quest of the chief good which it sets forth; and though some of them arrange and divide it differently, yet, on the whole and in the main, they are agreed that this quest is urged in Wisdom, in Pleasure, in Devotion to Public Affairs, in Wealth, and in the Golden Mean; and that it ends and rests in the large noble conclusion, that only as men reverence God, and keep his commandments, and trust in his love, do they touch their true ideal, and find a good that will satisfy and sustain them under all changes, even to the last. The assent to this view of the Book was by no means general a quarter of a century ago; but it is so wide now, and is sanctioned by the authority of so many schools of learning, that I think no reader of the following pages need be disturbed by misgivings as to the accuracy of the main lines of thought here set forth.

Few Scriptures of the Old Testament are so familiar to the general reader as Ecclesiastes; and that mainly, I think, because it addresses itself to a problem which is "yours, mine, every man's." Many more quotations from it have entered into our current speech than have been taken from Job, for example, although Job is both a much larger and a much finer poem than this—"the finest poem," as a great living poet has said, "whether of the modern or of the antique world." It is a Book which can never lose its interest for men until the last conflict in the long strife of doubt has led in the final victory of faith; and seems, in especial, to adapt itself to the conditions and wants of the present age. It deals with the very questions which are in all our minds, and offers a solution of them, and, so far as I know, the only solution, in which those who have "eternity in their hearts" can rest. May all who study it, with such help as the following pages afford, find rest to their souls, and be drawn from the heat and strife of thought into the calm and hallowed sanctuary which it throws open to our erring feet.

THE HOLME, HASTINGS.

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THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

WITH A NEW TRANSLATION BY THE REV. SAMUEL COX, D. D.

INTRODUCTION.

ON THE AUTHORSHIP, FORM, DESIGN, AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.

THOSE who raise the question, "Is life worth living?" answer it by—living on; for no man lives simply to proclaim what a worthless and wretched creature he is. But for the most part the question is mooted in a merely academical and not very sincere spirit. And to the dainty and fastidious pessimist who goes about to imply his own superiority by declaring that the world which contents his fellows is not good enough for him, there still seems no better reply than the rough but rousing and wholesome rebuke which Epictetus gave to such as he some nineteen centuries ago, reminding them that there were many exits from the theatre of life, and advising them, if they disliked the "show," to retire from it by the nearest door of escape, and to make room for spectators of a more modest and grateful spirit.

Of the pessimists of his time he demands, "Was it not God who brought you here? And as what did He bring you? Was it not as a mortal? Was it not as one who was to live with a little portion of flesh upon the earth, and to witness His administration—to behold the great spectacle around you for a little while. After you have beheld the solemn and august spectacle as long as is permitted you, will you not depart when He leads you out, adoring and thankful for what you have heard and seen? For you the solemnity is over. Go away, then, like a modest and grateful person. Make room for others."

"But why," urges the pessimist, "did He bring me into the world on these hard terms?"

"Oh!" replies Epictetus, "if you don't like the terms, it is always in your power to leave them. *He* has no need of a discontented spectator. He will not miss you much, nor we either."

But if any man lift the question into a more sincere and noble form by asking, "*How* may life be made worth living, or *best* worth living?"—in other words, "What is the true ideal, and what the chief good, of man?"—he will find no nobler answer to it, and none more convincingly and persuasively put, than that contained in this Scripture, which modern pessimists are apt to quote whenever they want to "approve" their melancholy hypothesis "with a text." From Schopenhauer downward, this Book is constantly cited by them as if it confirmed the conclusion for which they contend, Taubert even going so far as to find "a catechism of pessimism in it." Their assumption, however, is based on a total misapprehension of the design and drift of Ecclesiastes of which no scholar should have been guilty and of which it is hard to see how any scholar could have been guilty had he studied it as a whole, instead of carrying away from it only what he wanted. So far from lending any countenance to their conclusion of despair, it frankly traverses it—as I hope to

show, and as many have shown before me—and lands us in its very opposite; the conclusion of the whole matter with the Hebrew preacher being, that whoso cultivates the virtues of charity, diligence, and cheerfulness, because God is in Heaven and rules over all, *he* will not only find life well worth living, but will pursue its loftiest ideal and touch its true blessedness.

When scholars and "philosophers" have fallen into a mistake so radical and profound, it is not surprising that the unlettered should have followed their leaders into the ditch, and taken this Scripture to be the most melancholy in the Sacred Canon, instead of one of the most consolatory and inspiring, for want of apprehending its true aim. Beyond all doubt, there is a prevailing ground-tone of sadness in the Book; for through by far the larger part of its course it has to deal with some of the saddest facts of human life—with the errors which divert men from their true aim, and plunge them into a various and growing misery. But the voice which sinks so often into this tone of sadness is the voice of a most brave and cheerful spirit, a spirit whose counsels can only depress us if we are seeking our chief good where it cannot be found. For the Preacher, as we shall see, does not condemn the wisdom or the mirth, the devotion to business, or the acquisition of wealth, in which most men find the "chief good and market of their time," as in themselves vanities. He approves of them; he shows us how we may so pursue and so use them as to find them very pleasant and wholesome; how we may so dispense with them, if they prove beyond our reach, as none the less to enjoy a very true and abiding content. His constant and recurring moral is that we *are* to enjoy our brief day on earth; that God *meant* us to enjoy it; that we are to be up and doing, with a heart for any strife, or toil, or pleasure; not to sit still and weep over broken illusions and defeated hopes. Our lower aims and possessions become vanities to us only when we seek in them that supreme satisfaction which He who has "put eternity into our hearts" designed us to find only in Him and in serving Him. If we love and serve Him, if we gratefully acknowledge Him to be the Author of "every good gift and every perfect boon," if we seek first His kingdom and righteousness; in fine, if we are Christian in more than name, the study of this Book should not make us sad. We should find in it a confirmation of our most intimate convictions, and incentives to act upon them. But if we do not hold our wisdom, our mirth, our labour, our wealth as the gifts and ordinances of God for our good, if we permit them to usurp his seat and become as gods to us, then indeed this Book will be sad enough for us, but no whit sadder than our lives. It will be sad, and will make us sad, yet only that it may lead us to repentance, and through repentance to a true and lasting joy.

It is to be feared that the popular misconception of this singular and most instructive Scripture goes much farther than this, and extends

to questions much more superficial than that of the temper or spirit it breathes. If, for example, the average reader of the Bible were asked, Who wrote this Scripture? when was it written? to whom was it addressed? what is its general scope and design? his answer, I suppose, would be: "Solomon wrote this Book; of course, therefore, it was written in his lifetime, and addressed to the men over whom he ruled; and his design in writing it was to reveal his own experience in life for their instruction." And yet in all probability no one of these answers is true, or anywhere near the truth. According to the most competent judges, the Book Ecclesiastes was not written by Solomon, nor for centuries after his death; it was addressed to a generation of feeble and oppressed captives, who had been carried away into exile, or had lately returned from it, and not to the free prosperous nation which rose to its highest pitch in the reign of the Wise King. It is a dramatic representation of the experience of a Jewish sage, who deliberately set himself to discover and pursue the chief good of man in all the provinces and along all the avenues in which it is commonly sought, eked out by what he supposed or tradition reported Solomon's experience to have been; and its design was to comfort men who were groaning under the heaviest wrongs of Time with the bright hope of Immortality.

To scholars versed in the niceties of the Oriental languages, the most convincing proof of the comparatively modern date and authorship of the Book is to be found in its words, and idioms, and style. The base forms of Hebrew and the large intermixture of foreign terms, phrases, and turns of speech which characterise it—these, with the absence of the nobler rhythmic form of Hebrew poetry, are held to be a conclusive demonstration that it was written during the Rabbinical period, at a time long subsequent to the Augustan age in which Solomon lived and wrote. The critics and commentators whose names stand highest* tell us that it would be just as easy for them to believe that Hooker wrote Blair's Sermons, or that Shakespeare wrote the plays of Sheridan Knowles, as to believe that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes. And of course on such questions as these we can only defer to the verdict of men who have made them the study of their lives.

But with all our deference for learning, we have so often seen the conclusions of the ripest scholars modified or reversed by their successors, and we all know "questions of words" to be capable of so many different interpretations, that probably we should still hold our judgment in suspense, were there no argument against the traditional hypothesis such as plain men use and can understand. There are many such arguments, however, and arguments that seem to be of a conclusive force.

As, for instance, this: The whole social state described in this Book is utterly unlike what we know to have been the condition of the Hebrews during the reign of Solomon, but exactly accords with the condition of the captive Israelites, who, at the disruption of the Hebrew monarchies,

were carried away into Babylonia. Under Solomon the Hebrew state touched its highest point. His throne was surrounded by statesmen of tried sagacity; his judges were incorrupt. Commerce grew and prospered, till gold became as common as silver had been, and silver as common as brass. Literature flourished, and produced its most perfect fruits. And the people, though heavily taxed during the later years of his reign, enjoyed a security, a freedom, an abundance unknown whether to their fathers or to their children. "Judah and Israel were many in number as the sands by the sea, eating, drinking, and making merry. . . . And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings iv. 20, 25). But as we read this Book we gather from it the picture of a social state in which kings were childish, and princes addicted to revelry and drunkenness (x. 16); great fools were lifted to high places and rode on stately horses, while nobles were degraded and had to tramp through the mire (x. 6, 7); the race was not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the learned (ix. 11). The most eminent public services were suffered to pass unrewarded,* and were forgotten the moment the need for them was past (ix. 14, 15). Property was so insecure that to amass wealth was only to multiply extortions, and to fall a prey to the cupidity of princes and judges, insomuch that the sluggard who folded his hands, so long as he had bread to eat, was esteemed wiser than the diligent merchant who applied himself to the labours and anxieties of traffic (iv. 5, 6). Life was as insecure as property, and stood at the caprice of men who were slaves to their own lusts; a hasty word spoken in the divan of any one of the satraps, or even a resentful gesture, might provoke the most terrible outrages (viii. 3, 4; x. 4). The true relation between the sexes was violated; the ruling classes crowded their harems with concubines, and even the wiser sort of men took to themselves any woman they desired; while, with cynical injustice, they first degraded women, and then condemned them as alike and altogether bad, their hands chains, their love a snare (vii. 26, 28; ix. 9). The oppressions of the time were so constant, so cruel, and life grew so dark beneath them, that those who died long ago were counted happier than those who were still alive; while happier than either were those who had not been born to see the intolerable evils on which the sun looked calmly down day by day (iv. 1-3). In fine, the whole fabric of the State was fast falling into ruin and decay, through the greed and sloth of rulers who taxed the people to the uttermost in order to supply their wasteful luxury (x. 18, 19); while yet, so dreadful was their tyranny and their spies so ubiquitous, that no man dared to breathe a word against them even to the wife of his bosom and in the secrecy of the bed-chamber (x. 20): the only consolation of the oppressed was the grim hope that a time of retribution would overtake their tyrants, from which neither their power nor their craft should be able to save them (viii. 5-8).

Nothing would be more difficult than to accept this as a picture of the social and political features of the Hebrew commonwealth during the reign of Solomon, or even during those later years of his reign in which his rule grew hard

* Rosenmüller, Ewald, Knobel, De Wette, Delitzsch, Ginsburg, with many other competent judges, are agreed on this point; and even those who in part differ from them differ only in assigning the Book to a date still farther removed from the time of Solomon. There are but few scholars who now contend for the Solomonic authorship, and hardly any of these are, I think, in the first rank.

and despotic. Nothing can well be more incredible than that this should be intended as a picture of his reign, save that it should be a picture *drawn by his own hand!* To suppose Solomon the author of this Scripture is to suppose that the wisest of kings and of men was base enough to pen a deliberate and malignant libel on himself, his time, and his realm! On the other hand, the description, dark and lurid as it is, exactly accords with all we know of the terrible condition of the Jews who wept in captivity by the waters of Babylon under the later Persian rule, or were ground under the heels of the Persian satraps after their return to the land of their fathers. In all probability, therefore, as our most competent authorities are agreed, the Book is a poem rather than a chronicle, written by an unknown Hebrew author, during the Captivity or shortly after the Return, certainly not before B. C. 500, and probably somewhat later.*

Nor is this inference, drawn from the style and general contents of the Book, unsupported by verses in it which at first sight seem altogether opposed to such an inference. All the special and direct indications of authorship are to be found either in the first or in the last chapter.

The very first verse runs, "The words of the Preacher, son of David, King of Jerusalem." Now, David had only one son who was King in Jerusalem, viz., Solomon; the verse, therefore, seems to fix the authorship on Solomon beyond dispute. Nevertheless, the conclusion is untenable. For (1) in his known and admitted works the Wise King distinctly claims to be their author. The Book of Proverbs commences with "The Proverbs of *Solomon*," and the Canticles with "The Song of Songs, which is *Solomon's*." But the book Ecclesiastes does not once mention his name, though it speaks of a "son of David," *i. e.*, one of David's descendants. Instead of calling this son of David Solomon, it calls him "Cohemoth," or, as we translate the word, "The Preacher." Now, the word Cohemoth† is not a masculine noun, as the name of a man should be, but a feminine participle of an unused conjugation of a Hebrew verb which means "to collect," or "to call together." It denotes, not an actual man, but an abstraction, a personification, and is probably intended to denote one who calls a congregation round him, *i. e.*, a preacher, *any* preacher, preacher *in the abstract*. (2) This "son of David," we are told, was "King in Jerusalem;" and the phrase implies that the Book was written at a time when there either were or had been kings *out of* Jerusalem,

when Jerusalem was not the only site of a Hebrew throne, and therefore after the disruption of Solomon's realm into the rival kingdoms of Israel and Judah. (3) Again, we find Cohemoth affirming (i. 12), "I *was* King over Israel in Jerusalem," and (i. 16), "I acquired greater wisdom than *all* (all kings, *i. e.*, say the critics) who were before me in Jerusalem." But to say nothing of the questionable modesty of the latter sentence if it fell from the pen of Solomon, he was only the second occupant of the throne in Jerusalem; for Jebus, or Jerusalem, was only conquered from a Philistine clan by his father David. And if there had been only one, how could he speak of "all" who preceded him? (4) And still further, the tense of the verb in "I *was* King over Israel" can only carry the sense "I *was* King, but am King no more." Yet we know that Solomon reigned over Israel to the day of his death, that there never was a day on which he could have strictly used such a tense as this. So clear and undisputed is the force of this tense that the rabbis, who held Solomon to be the author of Ecclesiastes, were obliged to invent a fable or tradition to account for it. They said, "When King Solomon was sitting on the throne of his kingdom, his heart was greatly lifted up within him by his prosperity, and he transgressed the commandments of God, gathering to him many horses, and chariots, and riders, amassing much gold and silver, and marrying many wives of foreign extraction. Wherefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and He sent against him Ashmodai, the ruler of the demons; and he drove him from the throne of his kingdom, and took away the ring from his hand (Solomon's ring is famous for its marvellous powers in all Oriental fable), and sent him forth to wander about the world. And he went through the villages and the cities, with a staff in his hand, weeping and lamenting, and saying, 'I am Cohemoth; I was beforetime Solomon, and reigned over Israel in Jerusalem; but now I rule over only this staff.'" It is a pretty and pathetic fable, but it is a fable; and though it proves nothing else, we may fairly infer from it that, even in the judgment of the rabbis, the book Ecclesiastes must, on its own showing, have been written after Solomon had ceased to be King *i. e.*, after he had ceased to live.

In the Epilogue (xii. 9-12) the Author of the Book lifts the dramatic mask from his face, and permits us to see who he really is; a mask, let me add, somewhat carelessly worn, since we see nothing of it in the last ten chapters of the Book. Although he has written in a feigned name, and, without asserting it, has so moulded his phrases, at least in the earlier chapters of his work, as to suggest to his readers that he is, if not Solomon himself, at least Solomon's mouthpiece, attributing the garnered results of his experience to one greater than himself, that they may carry the more weight—just as Browning speaks in the name of Rabbi Ben Ezra, for instance, or Fra Lippo Lippi, or Abt Vogler, borrowing what he can of outward circumstance from the age and class to which they belong, and yet really uttering his own thought and emotion through their lips—he now confesses that he is no king of an age long past, but a rabbi, a sage, a teacher, a master, who has both made some proverbs of his own and collected the wise sayings of others who had gone before

* The *fourth* century B. C. is, I think, its most probable date. In his recent exposition of Ecclesiastes, the Dean of Wells attempts to bring the date down to about B. C. 240. But his arguments are so curious and fanciful, and his conclusion is based so largely on conjecture, and on dubious similarities of phrase in the language of the Hebrew Preacher, and of some of the later philosophers of Greece, that I suspect very little weight will be attached to his gallant attempt to breathe new life into the moribund hypothesis of the ingenious Mr. Tyler. Delitzsch, for example, a high and recognised authority, declares that there is "not a trace of Greek influence" in this Scripture, though Dr. Plumptre finds so many. But though neither his hypothesis nor his confessedly conjectural biography of the unknown author carries the force of "sober criticism," there is much in his Commentary which will be found very helpful.

† Plumptre writes the word Kohemoth, and Perowne Quoemoth. Which of the three initial letters should be used is of little consequence, and hence I retain the form in most common use. *Ecclesiastes* is simply its Greek equivalent.

him, in order that he might carry some little light and comfort to the sorely bested men of his own generation and blood.* In short, he has exercised his right as a poet, or "maker," to embody the results of his wide and varied experience of life in a dramatic form, but is careful to let us know, before he takes leave of us, that it is a fictitious or dramatic Solomon, and not Solomon himself, to whom we have been listening throughout.

So that all the phrases in the Book which are indicative of its authorship confirm the inference drawn from its style and its historical contents; viz., that it was not written by Solomon, nor in his reign, but by an unknown sage of a long-subsequent period, who, by a dramatic impersonation of the characteristic experiences of the son of David, or rather of his own experiences blended with the Solomonic traditions and poured into their moulds, sought to console and instruct his oppressed fellow-countrymen.

But perhaps the most convincing argument in favour of this conclusion is that, when once we think of it, we cannot possibly accept the Solomon set before us in Ecclesiastes as the Solomon depicted in the historical books of Scripture. Solomon the son of David, with all his wisdom, played the fool. The foremost man and Hebrew of his time, he gave his heart to "strange women," and to gods whose ritual was not only idolatrous, but cruel, dark, impure. In his pursuit of science, unless the whole East belie him, he ran into secret magical arts, incantations, divinations, an occult intercourse with the powers of ill. In all ways he departed from the God who had enriched him with the choicest gifts, and sank, through luxury, extravagance, and excess, first into a premature old age,† and then into a death so unrelieved by any sign of penitence, or any promise of amendment, that from that day to this rabbis and divines have discussed his final doom, many of them leaning to the darker alternative. This

"uxorious king, whose heart, though large,
Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell
To idols foul,"

is the Solomon of history. But the Solomon of Ecclesiastes is a sage who represents himself as conducting a series of moral experiments for the good of mankind, in order that, with all the weight of manifold experience, he may teach men what is that good and right way which alone leads to peace. However hardly we may think of the Wise King who was guilty of so many follies, we can scarcely think of him as such a fool that he did not know his sins to be sins, or as such a knave that he deliberately endeavoured to palm them off on other ages, not as transgressions of the Divine Law, but as a series of delicate philosophic experiments which he was good enough to conduct for the benefit of the race.

On the whole, then, we conclude that in this Book Solomon is taken as the Hebrew type of wisdom, the wisdom which is based on large and varied experience; and that this experience is here dramatised, in so far as the writer could conceive it, for the instruction of a race which

* See the commentary on these verses for a fuller exposition of his real claims and position.

† Solomon could not have been more than sixty years of age when he died, yet it was not till he was "old" that his wives "turned away his heart from the Lord his God" (1 Kings xi. 4).

from first to last, from the fable of Jotham to the parables of our Lord, were accustomed to receive instruction in fictitious and dramatic forms. Its author was not Solomon, but one of "the wise" whose name can no longer be recovered; it was written, not in the time of Solomon, *i. e.*, about 1000 B. C., but some five or six centuries later: and it was addressed not to the wealthy and peaceful citizens whose king held his court in Jerusalem, but to their degenerate and enfeebled descendants during the period of the Persian supremacy.*

Doubtless many of the prevailing misapprehensions of the meaning, authorship, and animating spirit of the Book are due, in some measure, to the singular form into which it is thrown. It belongs to what is known as the Chokma, *i. e.*, the Gnostic school, as opposed to the Lyrical school of Hebrew poetry. The Jewish, like Oriental literature in general, early assumed this form, which seems to have a natural affinity with the Eastern mind. Grave men, who made a study of life or who devoted themselves to a life of study, were likely to be sententious, to compress much thought into few words, especially in the ages in which writing was a somewhat rare accomplishment, or in which, as in the Hebrew schools, instruction was given by a living voice. No doubt they began with coining sage or witty aphorisms, generally lit up with a happy metaphor, each of which was complete in itself. Such sayings, as memorable and portable, no less than as striking for beauty and "matterful" for meditation, would commend themselves to an age in which books were few and scarce. They are to be found in abundance in the proverbs of all ancient races, and in the Book of Proverbs which bears the name of Solomon, and many of the more didactic and elaborate Psalms; while the Book of Job preserves many of the sayings current among the Arabs and the Egyptians. But with the Hebrews this literary mode took what is, so far as I am aware, a singular and unparalleled development, from the time of Solomon onwards, rising to its highest pitch in the Book of Job, and sinking to its lowest—within the limits of the Canon at least—in the cramping over-ingenuities of the acrostic Psalms, and in such proverbs as those attributed to Agur the son of Jakeh.

This development has not as yet, I think, attracted the attention it deserves; at least I have nowhere met with any formal recognition of it. Yet, undoubtedly, while at first the Hebrew sages were content to compress much wit or wisdom into the small compass of a *gnome*, which they polished like a gem, leaving each to shine by its own lustre and to make its own unaided impression, there rose in process of time men who saw new and great capacities in this ancient literary form, and set themselves to string their gems together, to arrange their own or other men's proverbs so aptly and artistically that they enhanced each other's beauty, while at the same time they compelled them to carry a logical and continuous stream of thought, to paint an elaborate picture, to build up a lofty, yet breathing personification (that of Wisdom, for example, in Proverbs viii.), to describe a lengthened and varied ethical experience (as in Ecclesiastes), and even to weave them into a large

* "It may be regarded as beyond doubt that it was written under the Persian domination" (Delitzsch).

and sublime poem, like that of Job, which has never been excelled. The reluctance with which this form lends itself to the nobler functions of literature, the immense difficulty of the instrument which many of the Hebrew poets wielded, will become apparent to any one who should try the experiment. We have a goodly collection of proverbs, drawn from many sources, foreign as well as native, in the English tongue. Let any man endeavour so to set or arrange them, or a selection from them, as to produce a fine poem on a lofty theme, and he at least will not under-rate the difficulty of the task, even though we should concede to him the right to *make* proverbs where he could not find them to his mind. Yet to many of the finest Hebrew poets the very restrictions of this form seem to have possessed a charm such as the far less rigid and encumbering laws of the sonnet, or even the triolet and other fanciful poetic wares of modern times, have exerted on the minds of many of our own poets.* A careful student of the Chokma school might even, I believe, trace the growth of this art, from its small beginnings in the earlier gnomic sayings of the Wise, to its culmination in the Book of Job; and, in so doing, would confer a boon on all students of Holy Writ.†

It is to this school that the Preacher belongs, as he himself informs us in the Epilogue to his fine Poem. He set himself, he says, "*to compose, to collect, and to arrange many proverbs*" (xii. 9), rejecting any that were not "*words of truth*," preferring, as was natural in a time so dark, such as were "*words of comfort*" (xii. 10), and seeking his sayings both from the sages who stood by the old ways and those who looked for the new (xii. 11). And, of course, the arranging of his awkward and inelastic material was far more difficult than collecting it—arranging it so as to compel it to tell his story, and carry his argument to its lofty close. It is Story, the sculptor and poet, I believe, who says that "*the best part of every work of art is unseen*," unexpressed, inexpressible in tones, or verse, or colours: it is that invisible something which lends it dignity, spirit, life, that "*style*" which,

*The nearest analogy in English literature to this triumphant use of the proverb of which I can think is Pope's use of the couplet—in every way a much lesser feat, however; while its burlesque or caricature may be found in Tupper's "*Proverbial Philosophy*."

†In the Book of Proverbs, for instance, he would find, in addition to the incomparable personification of Wisdom to which I have already referred, many examples of the proverb proper, many detached sayings whose underlying thought is illustrated by a stroke of imagination; such as that (chap. xxv. 11) in which the enhanced beauty of an appropriate word when spoken at the opportune moment is compared with the golden fruit of the orange when set in its frame of silver blooms ("*Expositions*," vol. iv.). He would also find some of those small picturesque descriptions produced by an artistic sequence of proverbs—the same theme being sometimes worked over by different artists, in different ages, one and the same moral being enforced by wholly different designs; as, for instance, where Solomon (chap. vi. 6-11) enforces the duty of a forethoughtful industry by a picture of the ant and her prudent ways; while an unknown sage of a later date (chap. xxiv. 30-34) appends precisely the same moral, expressed in the same words, to his graphic picture of the Sluggard's garden (*The Expositor*, Second Series, vol. vi.). Moreover, if he turn to chapter xxx. he will see how this form of art, which once soared so high, was capable of sinking into a kind of puerile conundrum—with its three too wonderful things, and its four little things which yet are wise—while its moral tone remained pure and high. And, finally, in the exposition of the Epilogue to Ecclesiastes he will find how, after sinking so low, it rose once more, in the hands of the later rabbis, into many beautiful forms of fable, and exhortation, and parable.

in this case, is in very deed the man. And the best part of Coheleth's noble work is this art of arranging his gnomic sayings in the best order, the order in which they illuminate each other most brightly and contribute most effectively to the total impression. Hence, both in translating and in endeavouring to interpret him, whenever I have had to choose between rival renderings or meanings, I have made it a rule to prefer that which most conduced to the logical sequence of his work or carried the finer sense, deeming that at least so much as this was due to so great a master, and entertaining no fear that I could invent any meaning which would outrun his intention.

In fine, if I were to gather up into a few sentences the impression which "*much study*" of this Scripture has left on my mind as to the manner in which the author worked upon it, I should say: that Coheleth, a man of much of Solomon's original largeness of heart, and a great lover of wisdom, set himself to collect the scattered sayings of the sages who were before him. He took the traditional story of Solomon as the ground and framework of his poem, at least at the outset, though he seems to have soon laid it aside, and endeavoured so to assort and arrange the proverbs he had collected that each would lead up to the next; while each group of them would describe some of the ways in which men commonly pursued the chief good, ways in most of which Solomon was at least reputed to have travelled far. Finding gaps which could not be well filled up from his large and various collection, he bridged them over with proverbs of his own composing, till he had got a sufficient account of each of the main adventures of that Quest. And, then, he put adventure after adventure together in the order in which they best led up to his great conclusion.

In all this I have said nothing, it is true, of that "*inspiration of the Almighty*" which alone gives man understanding of spiritual things. But why should not "*He who worketh all*," and has deigned to use every form of literary art by which men teach their fellows, move and inspire a lover of wisdom to collect and arrange the sayings of the Wise, if by these he could carry truth and comfort to those who were in sore need of both? And where, save from heaven and from Him who rules in heaven, could Coheleth have learned the great secret—the secret of a retributive life beyond the grave? Even the best and wisest of the Hebrews saw that life only "*as through a glass, darkly*;" and even their fitful and imperfect conception of it seems always to have been—as in the case of David, Job, Isaiah—an immediate gift from God, and a gift so large that even their hands of faith could hardly grasp it. No one need doubt the inspiration of a Scripture which affirms, not only that God is always with us, passing a present and effective judgment on all we do, but also that, when this life is over, He will bring every deed and every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or whether it be bad. That was not an everyday thought with the Jewish mind. We find it only in men who were moved by the Holy Ghost to accept the teaching of his providence or the revelation of his grace.

As for the design of the Book, no one now doubts that it sets before us the search for the *summum bonum*, the quest of the Chief Good.

Its main immediate intention was to deliver the exiled Jews from the misleading ethical theories and habits into which they had fallen, from the sensualism and the scepticism occasioned by their imperfect conception of the Divine ways, by showing them that the true good of life is not to be secured by philosophy, by the pursuit of pleasure, by devotion to traffic or public affairs, by amassing wealth; but that it results from a temperate and thankful enjoyment of the gifts of the Divine bounty, and a cheerful endurance of toil and calamity, combined with a sincere service of God and a steadfast faith in that future life in which all wrongs will be righted and all the problems which now task and afflict us will receive a triumphant solution. Availing himself of the historical and traditional records of Solomon's life, he depicts, under that guise, the moral experiments which he has conducted; depicts himself as having put the claims of wisdom, mirth, business, wealth, to a searching test, and found them incompetent to satisfy the cravings of the soul; as attaining no rest nor peace until he had learned a simple enjoyment of simple pleasures, a patient constancy under heavy trials, heartfelt devotion to the service of God, and an unwavering faith in the life to come.

The contents of the Poem are, or may be, distributed into a Prologue, Four Acts or Sections, and an Epilogue.

In the Prologue (chap. i., vv. 1-11), Coheleth states the Problem to be solved.

In the First Section (chap. i., ver. 12—chap. ii., ver. 26), he depicts the endeavour to solve it by seeking the Chief Good in Wisdom and in Pleasure.

In the Second Section (chap. iii., ver. 1—chap. v., ver. 20), the Quest is pursued in Traffic and Political Life.

In the Third Section (chap. vi., ver. 1—chap. viii., ver. 15), the Quest is carried into Wealth and the Golden Mean.

In the Fourth Section (chap. viii., ver. 16—chap. xii., ver. 7), the Quest is achieved, and the Chief Good found to consist in a tranquil and cheerful enjoyment of the present, combined with a cordial faith in the future, life.

And in the Epilogue (chap. xii., vv. 8-14) he summarises and emphatically repeats this solution of the Problem.

It was very natural that the Problem here discussed should fill a large space in Hebrew thought and literature; that it should be the theme of many of the Psalms and of many of the prophetic "burdens," as well as of the Books Ecclesiastes and Job. For the Mosaic revelation did teach that virtue and vice would meet suitable rewards now, in this present time. At the giving of the Law Jehovah announced that He would show mercy to the thousands of those who kept His commandments, and that He would visit the iniquities of the disobedient upon them. The Law that came by Moses is crowded with promises of temporal good to the righteous, and with threatenings of temporal evil to the unrighteous. The fulfilment of these threatenings and promises is carefully marked in the Hebrew chronicles; it is the supplication which breathes through the recorded prayers of the Hebrew race, and the theme of their noblest songs; it is their hope and consolation under the heaviest calamities. What, then, could be more

bewildering to a godly and reflective Jew than to discover that this fundamental article of his faith was questionable, nay, that it was contradicted by the commonest facts of human life as life grew more complex and involved? When he saw the righteous driven before the blasts of adversity like a withered leaf, while the wicked lived out all their days in mirth and affluence; when he saw the only nation that attempted obedience to the Law groaning under the miseries of a captivity embittered by the cruel caprices of rulers who could not even rule themselves, and unrelieved by any hope of deliverance, while heathen races revelled in the lusts of sense and power unrebuked: when *this* seemed to be the rule of providence, the *law* of the Divine administration, and not that better rule revealed in his Scriptures, is it any wonder that forgetting all corrective and balancing facts, he was racked with torments of perplexity; that, while some of his fellows plunged into the base relief of sensualism, he should be plagued with doubts and fears, and search eagerly through all avenues of thought for some solution of the mystery?

Nor, indeed, is this problem without interest for us; for we as persistently misinterpret the New Testament as the Hebrews did the Old. We read that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" we read that "the meek shall inherit the earth;" we read that for every act of service done to Christ we shall receive "a hundredfold now, in this present time;" and we are very prompt with the gross, careless interpretation which makes such passages mean that if we are good we shall have the good things of this life, while its evil things shall be reserved for the evil. Indeed, we are trained—or, perhaps I should say, until recently we *were* trained—in this interpretation from our earliest years. Our very spelling-books are full of it, and are framed on the model of "Johnny was a good boy, and he got plum-cake; but Tommy was a bad boy, and he got the stick." Nearly all our story-books have a similar moral: it is always, or almost always, the good young man who gets the beautiful wife and large estate, while the bad young man comes to a bad end. Our proverbs are full of it, and axioms such as "Honesty is the best policy," a pernicious half-truth, are forever on our lips. Our art, in so far as it is *ours*, is in the same conspiracy. In Hogarth, for instance, as Thackeray has pointed out, it is always Francis Goodchild who comes to be Lord Mayor and poor Jem Scapegrace who comes to the gallows. And when, as life passes on, we discover that it is the bad boy who often gets the plum-cake, and the good boy who goes to the rod; that bad men often have beautiful wives and large estates, while good men fail of both; when we find the knave rising to place and authority, and honest Goodchild in the workhouse or the *Gazette*, then there rise up in our hearts the very doubts and perplexities and eager painful questions which of old time troubled the Psalmist and the Prophet. We cry out with Job—

"It is all one—therefore will I say it,
The guilty and the guiltless He treateth alike;
The deceiver and the deceived both are his;"

or we say with the Preacher,—

"This is the greatest evil of all that is done under the
sun
That there is one fate for all;

The same fate befallerh to the righteous and to the wicked,
 To the good and pure and to the impure,
 To him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not :
 As is the good so is the sinner,
 And he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath."

And it is well for us if, like the Hebrew poet, we can resist this cruel temptation, and hold fast the integrity of our faith; if we can rest in the assurance that, after all and when all is done, "the little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked;" that God has something better than wealth and lucky haps for the good, and merciful correctives of a more sovereign potency than penury and mishaps for the wicked. If we have this faith, our study of Ecclesiastes can hardly fail to deepen and confirm it; if we are not so happy as to have it, Coheleth will give us sound reasons for embracing it.

ON THE HISTORY OF THE CAPTIVITY.

If we may now assume the Book Ecclesiastes to have been written, not in the time of Solomon, but during, or soon after, the Babylonian Captivity, our next duty is to learn what we can of the social, political, and religious conditions of the two races among whom the Jews were thrown when they were carried away from the land of their fathers. That they learned much, as well as suffered much, while they sat by the waters of Babylon; that they emerged from their long exile with a profound attachment to the Word of God, such as their fathers had never known, and with many precious additions to that Word, is beyond a doubt. As plants grow fastest by night, so men make their most rapid growth in knowledge and in faith when times are dark and troubled. And all students of this period are at one in affirming that during the Captivity a radical and most happy change passed upon the Hebrew mind. They came out of it with a hatred of idolatry, a faith in the life beyond the grave, a pride in their national law, a hope in the advent of the great Deliverer and Redeemer, with which the elder Psalmists and Prophets had failed to inspire them, but which henceforth they never wholly relinquished. With the religious there was blended an intellectual advance. Books and teachers were sought and honoured as never heretofore. Schools and synagogues grew up in every town and village in which they dwelt. "Of making of many books there was no end." Education was compulsory. Study was regarded as more meritorious than sacrifice, a scholar as greater than a prophet, a teacher as greater than a king, if at least we may trust proverbs which were current among them. Before the Captivity one of the least literate of nations—noble as their national literature was—at its close the Jews were distinguished by their zeal for culture and education.

To trace the progress of this marvellous revival of letters and religion—a renaissance and a reformation in one—would be a most welcome task, had we the materials for it and the skill to use them. But even the scanty materials that exist lie scattered through the historical and literary remains of many different races—in the cylinders, sculptures, paintings, inscriptions, tombs, shrines of Nineveh, Babylon, Behistun, and Persepolis, in the Zendavesta, in the pages of Herodotus and the earlier Greek historians,

in Josephus, in the Apocrypha, in the Talmud, and in at least a dozen of the Old Testament books; and some of these "sources" are very far as yet from having been explored and mastered. Hence the history of this period still remains to be written, and will probably be largely conjectural whenever, if ever, it is written. Yet what period is of graver interest to the student of the Bible? If we could recover its history, it would throw a new and most welcome light on well-nigh one-half of the Old Testament Scriptures, if not on all.

Happily, a brief sketch of it, such as is well within any man's reach, will suffice to show how, from their contact with the Babylonian and Persian races, the Jews received literary and religious impulses which go far to account for the marvellous changes which swept over them, and enable us to read the Preacher intelligently, and see how his social and political allusions exactly correspond with what we know of the time.*

About a hundred and twenty years after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria (B. C. 719), the kingdom of Judah fell before Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (B. C. 598-596). The city, palace, and temple of Jerusalem were levelled in a common ruin; the nobles, priests, merchants, and skilled artisans, all the pith and manhood of Judah, were carried away captive; only a few of the most abject of the people were left to mourn and starve amid the ravaged fields. Nothing could present a more striking contrast to their native land than the region to which the Jews were deported. Instead of a small picturesque mountain-country, with its little cities set on hills or on the brink of precipitous ravines, they entered on a vast plain, fertile beyond all precedent indeed, and abounding in streams, but with nothing to break the monotony of level flats save the high walls and lofty towers of one enormous city. For Babylonia proper was simply an immense plain, lying between the Arabian Desert and the Tigris, and of an extent somewhat under that of Ireland. But though of a limited area as compared with the vast empire of which it was the centre, by its amazing fertility it was capable of sustaining a crowded population. It was watered not only by the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates, but by their numerous affluents, many of which were themselves considerable streams; it was "a land of brooks and fountains." On this rich alluvial plain, amply supplied with water, and under the fierce heat of the sun, wheat and barley, with all kinds of grain, yielded a return far beyond all modern parallel. The capital city of this fertile province was the largest and the most magnificent of the ancient world, standing on both sides of the Euphrates, as London stands on both sides of the Thames, and covering at least a hundred square miles.

In this country and city (for "Babylon" stands for both in the Bible), so unlike the sunny cliffs and scattered villages of their native home, the Jews, who, like all hill-races, cherished a passionate affection for the land of their fathers, spent many bitter years. On the broad featureless plain they pined for "the mountains" of Judea (Ezekiel xxxvi.; Psalm cxxxvii.); they sat

* For this sketch I am largely indebted to Rawlinson's "Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World," and his commentary on "Herodotus."

down by the waters and wept as they remembered "the hill of the Lord." They do not seem, however, to have been handled with exceptional harshness by their captors. They were treated as colonists rather than as slaves. They were allowed to live together in considerable numbers, and to observe their own religious rites. They took the advice of the prophet Jeremiah (xxix. 4-7), who had warned them that their exile would extend over many years, and built houses, planted gardens, married wives, and brought up children; they "sought the peace of the city" in which they were captives, "and prayed for it," knowing that in its peace they would have peace. If many of them had to labour gratuitously on the great public works—and this labour was exacted of most of the conquered races—many rose, by fidelity, thrift, diligence, to places of trust, and amassed considerable wealth. Among those who filled high posts in the household or administration of the successive monarchs of Babylon were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Mordecai; Tobit—if indeed Tobit be a real and not a fictitious person—and his nephew Achiacharus.

But who were the people, and what were the social and political conditions of the people, among whom the Hebrew captives lived? The two leading races with whom they were brought in contact were the Babylonians—an offshoot from the ancient Chaldean stock—and the Persians. The history of the Captivity divides itself into two main periods, therefore, the Persian and the Babylonian, at each of which we must glance.

1. *The Babylonian Period.*—For more than fifty years after they were carried away captive, the Jews served a Chaldean race, and were governed by Assyrian despots, of whom Nebuchadnezzar* was by far the greatest, whether in peace or war. It is hardly too much to say that but for him the Babylonians would have had no place in history. A great soldier, a great statesman, a great builder and engineer, he knew how to consolidate and adorn his vast empire, an empire which is said to have "extended from the Atlantic to the Caspian, and from Caucasus to the Great Sahara." We owe our best conception of the personal character and public life of this great despot to the Book of Daniel. Daniel, although a Jew and a captive, was the vizier of the Babylonian monarch, and retained his post until the Persian conquest, when he became the first of "the three presidents" of the new empire. He therefore paints Nebuchadnezzar from the life. And in his Book we see the great King at the head of a magnificent court, surrounded by "princes, governors, and captains, judges, treasurers, councillors, and sheriffs," waited on by "well-favoured" eunuchs, attended by a crowd of astrologers and "wise men" who interpret to him the will of Heaven. He wields an absolute power, and disposes with a word of the lives and fortunes of his subjects, even the highest and most princely. All offices are in his gift. He can raise a slave to the second place in his kingdom (Daniel, to wit), and impose a foreigner (again, Daniel) on the priestly college as its head. Of so enormous a wealth that he

makes an image of pure gold ninety feet high and nine feet broad, he lavishes it on public works—on temples, gardens, canals, fortifications—rather than on personal indulgence. Religious after a fashion, he wavers between "the God of the Jews" and the deity after whom he was named and whom he calls *his* god. In temper he is hasty and violent, but not obstinate; he suddenly repents of his sudden resolves; he is capable of bursts of gratitude and devotion no less than of fierce access of fury, and displays at times a piety and self-abasement astonishing in an Oriental despot. His successors—Evil-Merodach, Neriglissar, Laborosoarchod, Nabonadius, and Belshazzar—need not detain us. Little is known of them, and, with one exception, their reigns were very short; and their main task seems to have been the erection of vast and sumptuous structures such as Nebuchadnezzar had been wont to rear. Probably none of the Babylonian monarchs save Nebuchadnezzar made any deep impression on the Hebrew mind.

And, indeed, the people of Babylon were much more likely than their despots to influence the Hebrew captives; for with them they would be brought into daily contact. Now the Babylonians were marked by a singular intellectual ability. Keen to know, patient to observe, exact and laborious in their researches, they could hardly fail to teach much to subject races, and to inspire them with some desire for knowledge. They had carried the sciences of mathematics and astronomy to a high pitch of perfection. They are said to have determined, within two seconds, the exact length of the solar year, and not to have been far wrong in the distances at which they computed the sun, moon, and planets from the earth; and they compiled a serviceable catalogue of the fixed stars. The Hebrew prophets often refer to their "wisdom and learning." They excelled in architecture. Two of their vast works, the walls of Babylon, and the hanging gardens, were reckoned among "the seven wonders" of the ancient world. Their skill in manufacturing and arranging enamelled bricks has never yet been equalled.* In all mechanical arts, indeed, such as cutting stones and gems, casting gold and silver, blowing glass, modelling vases and ware, weaving carpets and muslins and linen, they take a very high place among the nations of antiquity. With manufacturing and artistic skill they combined the spirit of enterprise and adventure which leads to commerce. They were addicted to maritime pursuits; the "cry," or joy, "of the Chaldeans is in their ships," says Isaiah (xliii. 14); and Ezekiel (xvii. 4) calls Babylonia "a land of traffic," and its chief city "a city of merchants."

But a larger, and probably the largest, class of the people must have busied themselves with the toils of agriculture; the broad Chaldean plain being famous, from the time of the Patriarchs to the present day, for an amazing and almost incredible fertility. Wheat, barley, millet, and sesame, all flourished with astonishing luxuriance, the ground commonly yielding a hundredfold, two hundredfold, and even ampler rewards for the toil of the husbandman.

With these abundant sources of wealth at their command, the people naturally grew luxurious and dissolute. "The daughter of the Chalde-

* Instead of *Nebuchadnezzar* Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the form *Nebuchadrezzar*, which is nearer to the original *Nabu-Kuāuri-utzur*, i. e., "Nebo is the protector against misfortune."

* There is a curious allusion to these enamelled bricks, and the admiration the Jews conceived for them, in Ezekiel xxiii. 14-16.

ans," says Isaiah (xlvi. 1-8), "is tender and delicate," given to pleasures, apt to live carelessly; her young men, says Ezekiel (xxiii. 15), are dandies, "exceeding in dyed attire," painting their faces, and wearing earrings. Chastity, in our modern sense of the term, was unknown.* The pleasures of the table and of the couch were carried to excess. Yet, like many other Eastern races, the Babylonians hid under their soft luxurious exterior a fierceness very formidable to their foes. The Hebrew prophets (Hab. i. 6-8; Isaiah xiv. 16) describes them as "a bitter and hasty," a "terrible and dreadful" people, "fiercer than the evening wolves," a people whose tramp "made the earth tremble, and did shake kingdoms;" and all the historians of the time charge them with a thirst for blood which often took the most savage and inhuman forms.

Of the horrible license and cruelty of the worship of Bel, Merodach, and Nebo, which did much to foster the fierce and cruel temper of the people, it is not necessary, it is hardly possible, to speak. Roughly taken, it was the service of the great forces of Nature by a wanton indulgence of the worst passions of man. It is enough to know that in Babylon idolatry took forms which made all forms of idolatry henceforth intolerable to the Jews; that now, once for all, they renounced that worship of strange gods to which they and their fathers had always hitherto been prone. This of itself was an immense advance, a great gain. Nor was it their only gain; for if by contact with the idolatrous Babylonians the Jews were driven back on their own Law and Scripture, their intercourse with a people of so active an intellect and a learning so deep and wide led them to study the Word of Jehovah in a new and more intelligent spirit.

Nor is it less obvious that in the social and political conditions of the Babylonians we have a key to many of the allusions to public life contained in Ecclesiastes. The great empire, indeed, presents precisely those elements which, in degenerate times and under feeble despots, must inevitably develop into the disorder, and misery, and crime which Coheleth depicts.

2. *The Persian Period.*—The conquest of Babylon by the Persians, led by the heroic Cyrus, is, thanks to Daniel, one of the most familiar incidents of ancient history, so familiar that I need not recount it. By this conquest Cyrus—"the Shepherd, the Messiah, of the Lord," as Isaiah (xlv. 28; xlv. 1) terms him—became the undisputed master of well-nigh the whole known world of the time. Nor does he seem to have been unworthy of his extraordinary position. Of all ancient Oriental monarchs, out of the Hebrew pale, he bears the highest repute. Even the Greek authors, for the most part, represent him as energetic and patient, magnanimous and modest, and of a religious mind. Æschylus calls him "kindly" or "generous." Xenophon selected him as a model prince for all races. Plutarch says that "in wisdom, and virtue, and greatness of soul he appears to have been in advance of all kings." Diodorus makes one of his speakers say that Cyrus gained his ascendancy by his self-command and good-feeling and gentleness. Simple in his habits, brave, and of a most just, humane, and clement spirit, he hated the cruel and lascivious idols of the East, and

worshipped one only God, "the God of heaven." There is none like him in the antique world, none at least among the kings and princes of that world. And when, at the conquest of Babylon, he discovered in the captive Jews a race that also hated idols, and served one Lord, and knew a law of life as pure as his own, or even purer, we need feel no surprise either that he broke their bands in sunder and set them free to return to their native land, or that they saw in this pure and noble nature, this virtuous and religious prince, "a servant of Jehovah," and even a partial and shadowy resemblance to that Divine Deliverer and Redeemer for whose advent they had been taught to look.

Cyrus was sixty years of age when he took Babylon (B. C. 539), and died ten years after his conquest. He was succeeded by men utterly unlike himself, so unlike that the Persian nobles revolted from them, and placed Darius Hystaspes, the heir of an ancient dynasty, on the throne. As Cyrus was the soldier of the Persians, so Darius was their statesman. He it was who founded the "satrapial" form of administration; *i. e.*, instead of governing the various provinces of his empire through native princes, he placed Persian satraps over them, these satraps being charged with the collection of the public revenue, the maintenance of order, and the administration of justice; in fact, he governed the whole Eastern world very much as we govern India. The internal organisation of his vast unwieldy empire was the great work of Darius through his long reign of six-and-thirty years; but the event by which he is best remembered, and which proved to be fruitful in the most disastrous results to the State, was the opening of that fatal war with Greece, which at last, and under his feeble and degenerate successors, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and the rest, reached its close in the downfall of the Persian empire. We need not linger over the details of the story. It will be enough, for our purpose, to say that from the accession of Xerxes down to the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great—a stretch of a hundred and fifty years—that empire was declining to its fall. Its history towards the end was a mere succession of intrigues and insurrections, conspiracies and revolts. "Battle, murder, and sudden death" are its staple. The restraints of law and order grew ever weaker. The satraps were practically supreme in their several provinces, and used their power to extort enormous wealth from their miserable subjects. Eunuchs and concubines ruled in the palace. Manliness died out; the Persians were no longer taught "to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth;" cunning and treachery took its place. The scene grows more and more pitiful, till at last the welcome darkness rushes down, and hides the ignoble agony of perhaps the vastest and wealthiest empire the world has seen.

But we must turn from the despots and their adventures to form some slight acquaintance with the people, the Persian people who, by the conquest of Cyrus, became the ruling class in the empire, always remembering, however, that the Babylonians must have remained by myriads both in the capital and in the provinces, and would continue to exert their influence on Hebrew thought and activity.

In all moral and religious qualities the Per-

* See "Herodotus," book i., chap. 199; "Strabo," xvi., p. 1038; and the "Book of Baruch," vi. 43.

sians were far in advance of the Chaldeans, though they were probably behind them in many civilised arts and crafts. They were famous for their truthfulness and valour. The Greeks * confessed the Persians to be their equals in "boldness and warlike spirit"—Æschylus† calls them "a valiant-minded people"—while they are lavish in praise of the Persian veracity, a virtue in which they themselves were notably deficient. To the Persians God was "the Father of all truth;" to lie was shameful and irreligious. They disliked traffic because of its haggling, equivocation, and dishonest shifts. "Their chief faults," and even these were not developed till they became masters of the world, "were an addiction to self-indulgence and luxury, a passionate *abandon* to the feeling of the hour whatever it might be, and a tameness and subservience in all their relations toward their princes which seem to moderns incompatible with self-respect and manliness." Patriotism came to mean mere loyalty to the monarch; the habit of unquestioning submission to his will, and even to his caprice, became a second nature to them. The despotic humour natural in "a ruling person" was thus nourished till it ran to the wildest excess. "He was their lord and master, absolute disposer of their lives, liberties, and property, the sole fountain of law and right, incapable himself of doing wrong, irresponsible, irresistible—a sort of God upon earth; one whose favour was happiness, at whose frown men trembled, before whom all bowed themselves down with the lowest and humblest obeisance." No subject could enter his presence save by special permission, or without a prostration like that of worship. To come unbidden was to be cut down by the royal guards, unless, as a sign of grace, he extended his golden sceptre to the culprit. To tread on the king's carpet was a grave offence; to sit, even unwittingly, on his seat a capital crime. So lavish was the submission both of nobles and of people that we are required on good authority to accredit such stories as these: wretches bastinadoed by the king's order declared themselves delighted that his majesty had condescended to remember them; a father, whose innocent son was shot by the despot in pure wantonness, had to crush down his natural indignation and grief, and to compliment the royal archer on the accuracy of his aim.

Despising trade and commerce as menial and degrading, the ruling caste of a vast empire, with a monopoly of office and boundless means of wealth at their command, accustomed to lord it over subject races, of a high spirit and a faith comparatively pure, their very prosperity was their ruin, as it has been that of many a great nation. In their earlier times, they were noted for their sobriety and temperance. Content with simple diet, their only drink was water from the pure mountain streams; their garb was plain, their habits homely and hardy. But their temperance soon gave place to an immoderate luxury.‡ They acquired the Babylonian vices, and adopted at least the license of the Babylonian rites. They filled their harems with wives and concubines. From the time of Xerxes onwards

they grew nice and curious of appetite, eager for pleasure, effeminate, dissolute.

With the growth of luxury on the part of the nobles and the people, the fear of the despot, at whose mercy all their acquisitions stood, grew more intense, more harassing, more degrading. Xerxes and his successors were utterly reckless in their exercise of the absolute power conceded to them, and delegated it to favourites as reckless as themselves. No noble however eminent, no servant of the State however faithful or distinguished, could be sure that he might not at any moment incur a displeasure which would strip him of all he possessed, even if it did not also condemn him to a cruel and lingering death. Out of mere sport and wantonness, to relieve the tedium of a weary hour, the despot might slay him with his own hand. For the crime, or assumed crime, of one person a whole family, or class, or race might be cut off unheard. Of the lengths to which this cruelty and caprice might go we have a sufficient example in the Book of Esther. The Ahasuerus of that singular narrative was, there can hardly be any doubt, the Xerxes of secular history—the very names, unlike as they sound, are the same name differently pronounced by two different races.* And all that the Book of Esther relates of the despot, who repudiates a wife because she will not expose herself to the drunken admiration of a crowd of revellers, who raises a servant to the highest honours one day and hangs him the next, who commands the massacre of an entire race and then bids them inflict a horrible carnage on those who execute his decree, exactly accords with the Greek narratives which depict him as scourging the sea for having broken down his bridge over the Hellespont, beheading the engineers whose work was swept away by a storm, wantonly putting to death the sons of Pythias, his oldest friend, before their father's eyes; as first giving to his mistress the splendid robe presented to him by his queen, and then giving up to the queen's barbarous vengeance the mother of his mistress; as shamefully misusing the body of the heroic Leonidas, and, after his defeat by the Greeks, giving himself up to a criminal voluptuousness and offering a reward to the inventor of any new pleasure.

The Book Ecclesiastes was written certainly not before the reign of Xerxes (B. C. 486-465), and probably many years after it, a period in which, bad as were the conditions of his time, the times grew ever more lawless, the despotism more intolerable, the violence and licentiousness of the subordinate officials more unblushing. But at whatever period within these limits we may place it, all we have learned of the Babylonians and the Persians during the later years of the Captivity and the earlier years of the Return (during which the Jews were still under the Persian rule) is in entire correspondence with the social and political state depicted by the Preacher. The abler and more kindly despots—as Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes—showed a singular favour to the Jews. Cyrus published a decree authorising them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple, and enjoining the officials of the empire to further them in their enterprise; Darius con-

* "Herodotus," ix. 62.

† Æschyl., "Pers.," 94.

‡ "There is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. . . . As soon as they hear of any luxury they instantly make it their own. . . . Each of them has several wives, and a still larger number of concubines."—("Herodotus," book i., chap. 135).

* Their common root is the Sanscrit *Kshatra*, a king; in the Persepolitan inscriptions this word appears as *Ksérshé*, and from this both the Hebrew *Achashuerash* (Ahasuerus) and the Greek *Xerxes* would easily be formed.

firmed that decree, despite the malignant misrepresentations of the Samaritan colonists; Artaxerxes held Ezra and Nehemiah in high esteem, and sent them to restore order and prosperity to the city of their fathers and its inhabitants. But a large number, apparently even a large majority, of the Jews, unable or disinclined to return, remained in the various provinces of the great empire, and were of course subject to the violence and injustice from which the Persians themselves were not exempt. "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" cries the Preacher till we grow weary of the mournful refrain. Might he not well take that tone in a time so out of joint, so lowering, so dark?

The book is full of allusions to the Persian luxury, to the Persian forms of administration, above all, to the corruptions of the later years of the Persian empire, and the miseries they bred. Coheleth's elaborate description (ii. 4-8) of the infinite variety of means by which he sought to allure his heart unto mirth—his palaces, vineyards, paradises, with their reservoirs and fountains, crowds of attendants, treasures of gold and silver, the harem full of beauties of all races—seems taken direct from the ample state of some luxurious Persian grandee. His picture of the public administration (v. 8, 9), in which "superior watcheth over superior, and superiors again watch over them," is a graphic sketch of the satrapial system, with its official hierarchy rising grade above grade, which was the work of Darius.* When the animating and controlling spirit of that system was taken away, when weak foolish despots sat on the throne, and despots just as foolish and weak ruled in every provincial divan, there ensued precisely that political state to which Coheleth perpetually refers.† Iniquity sat in the place of judgment, and in the place of equity there was iniquity (iii. 16); kings grew childish, and princes spent their days in revelry (x. 16); fools were lifted to high place, while nobles were degraded; and slaves

* "The political condition of the people which this Book presupposes is that in which they are placed under satraps" (Delitzsch).

† It would be possible to collect from the Psalms of this date materials for a description of the wrongs and miseries inflicted on the Jews, and of their keen sense of them, quite as graphic and intense as that of the Preacher. Here are a few phrases hastily culled from them. The oppressors of Israel are described as being "clothed with cruelty as with a garment," as "returning evil for good, and hatred for good will."

"Lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth;
Render to the proud their desert.
They prate, they speak arrogantly;
All the workers of iniquity boast themselves.
They break in pieces Thy people, O Lord,
And afflict Thine heritage.
They slay the widow and the stranger,
And murder the fatherless.
And they say, The Lord shall not see,
Neither shall the God of Jacob consider" (xciv.).

"I am bowed down and brought very low;
I go mourning all the day long:
Truly I am high unto falling,
And my heaviness is ever before me" (xxxviii.).

"My days consume away like smoke,
And my bones are burned up like a firebrand;
My heart is smitten down and withered like grass
So that I forget to eat my bread" (cii.).

"I am helpless and poor,
And my heart is wounded within me" (cix.).

Most of the "imprecatory" Psalms belong to this period; and the terrible wrongs of the Captivity, though they may not justify, in large measure explain and excuse, that desire for vengeance which has given so much offence to some of our modern critics.

rode on horses, while their quondam masters tramped through the mire (x. 6, 7). There was no fair reward for faithful service (ix. 11). Death brooded in the air, and might fall suddenly and unforeseen on any head, however high (ix. 12). To correct a public abuse was like pulling down a wall: some of the stones were sure to fall on the reformer's feet, from some cranny a serpent was sure to start out and bite him (x. 8, 9). To breathe a word against a ruler, even in the strictest privacy, was to run the hazard of destruction (x. 20). A resentful gesture, much more a rebellious word, in the divan was enough to ensure outrage. In short, the whole political fabric was fast falling into disrepair and decay, the rain leaking through the rotting roof, while the miserable people were ground down with ruinous exactions, in order that their rulers might revel on undisturbed (x. 18, 19). It is under such a pernicious and ominous maladministration of public affairs, and the appalling miseries it breeds, that there springs up in the hearts of men that fatalistic and hopeless temper to which Coheleth gives frequent expression. Better never to have been born than to live a life so cramped and thwarted, so full of perils and fears! Better to snatch at every pleasure, however poor and brief, than seek, by self-denial, by virtue, by integrity, to accumulate a store which the first petty tyrant who gets wind of it will sweep off, or a reputation for wisdom and goodness which will be no protection from, which will be only too likely to provoke, the despotic humours of men "dressed in a little brief authority."

If even Shakespeare,* in an unrestful and despairing mood strangely foreign to his serene temperament, beheld

"desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly, doctor, like, controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill;"

if, "tired with all these," he cried for "restful death," we can hardly wonder that the Preacher, who had fallen on times so evil that, compared with his, Shakespeare's were good, should prefer death to life.

But there is another side to this sad story of the Captivity, another and nobler side. If the Jews suffered much from Persian misrule, they learned much and gained much from the Persian faith. In its earlier form the religious creed whose documents Zoroaster afterwards collected and enlarged in the Zendavesta was probably the purest of the ancient heathen world; and even when it was corrupted by the baser additions of later times, its purer form was still preserved in songs (Gâthâs) and traditions. There can be no reasonable doubt that it largely affected the subsequent faith of the Hebrews, not indeed teaching them any truth they had not been taught before, but constraining them to recognise truths in their Scriptures which hitherto they had passed over or neglected.

In its inception the Persian creed and practice were a revolt against the sensuous and sensual

worship of the great forces of Nature into which most Eastern religions, often pure enough in their primitive forms, had degenerated, and, in especial, from the base forms into which the Hindus had degraded that primitive faith which is still to be recovered from the Rig-Veda. It acknowledged persons, real spiritual intelligences, in place of mere natural powers; and it drew moral distinctions between them, dividing these ruling intelligences into good and bad, pure and impure, benignant and malevolent,—an immense advance on the mere admiration of whatever was strong. Nay, in some sense, the Persian faith affirmed monotheism against polytheism; for it asserted that one Great Intelligence ruled over all other intelligences, and through them over the universe. This Supreme Intelligence, which the Persians called Ahuramazda (Ormazd), is the true Creator, Preserver, Governor, of all spirits, all men, all worlds. He is "good," "holy," "pure," "true," "the Father of all truth," "the best Being of all," "the Master of Purity," "the Source and Fountain of all good." On the righteous he bestows "the good mind" and everlasting happiness; while he punishes and afflicts the evil. His worshippers were to the last degree intolerant of idolatry. They suffered no image to profane their temples; their earliest symbol of Deity is almost as pure and abstract as a mathematical sign, a circle with wings; the circle to denote the eternity of God, and the wings His omnipresence. Under this Supreme Lord, "the God of heaven," they admitted inferior beings, angels and archangels, whose names mark them out as personified Divine attributes, or as faithful servants who administer some province of the Divine empire.

To win the favour of the God of heaven it was requisite to cultivate the virtues of purity, truthfulness, industry, and a pious sense of the Divine presence; and these virtues must spring from the heart, and cover thought as well as word and deed. His worship consisted in the frequent offering of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving; in the reiteration of certain sacred hymns; in the occasional sacrifice of animals which, after being presented before Ormazd, furnished forth a feast for priest and worshipper; and in the performance of a mystic ceremony (the *Soma*), the gist of which seems to have lain in a grateful acknowledgment that the fruits of the earth, typified by the intoxicating juice of the Homa plant, were to be received as the gift of Heaven. A sentence or two from one of the hymns* of which there are many in the Zendavesta, will show better than many words to how high a pitch Divine worship was carried by the Persians: "We worship Thee, Ahuramazda, the pure, the master of purity. We praise all good thoughts, all good words, all good deeds which are or shall be; and we likewise keep clean and pure all that is good. O Ahuramazda, thou true happy Being! We strive to think, to speak, and to do only such things as may be best fitted to promote the two lives" (*i. e.*, the life of the body and the life of the soul).

In the course of well-doing the faithful were animated and confirmed by a devout belief in the immortality of the soul and a conscious future existence. They were taught that at death the souls of men, both good and bad, travelled

along an appointed path to a narrow bridge which led to Paradise: over this bridge only pious souls could pass, the wicked falling from it into an awful gulf in which they received the due reward of their deeds. The happy souls of the good were helped across the long narrow arch by an angel,* and as they entered Paradise a great archangel rose from his throne to greet each of them with the words, "How happy art thou, who hast come to us from mortality to immortality!"

This wonderfully pure creed was, however, in process of time, corrupted in many ways. First, of all, "the sad antithesis of human life," the conflict between light and darkness, good and evil—the standing puzzle of the world—led the votaries of Ormazd to *dualism*. Ormazd loved and created only the good. The evil in man, and in the world, must be the work of an enemy. This enemy, Ahriman (Augrô-manius), has been seeking from eternity to undo, to mar and blast, the fair work of the God of heaven. He is the baleful author of all evil, and under him are spirits as malignant as himself. Between these good and evil powers there is incessant conflict, which extends to every soul and every world. It will never cease until the great Deliverer arise—for even of *Him* the Persians had

*This helpful angel is by no means peculiar to the Persian faith. All the imaginative races of antiquity conceived of a being more divine than man, though originally not equal to the gods, who guided the departed soul on its lonely journey through the dark interspaces of death. Theut conducted the released spirit of the Egyptian to the judgment-seat. Hermes performed the same kind office for the Greeks, Mercury for the Romans. Yama was the *nekropompos* of the Hindus, and the Persians retained the legend. The Rig-Veda represents him as the first man who passed through death to immortality, and as therefore the best guide of other men. Nor is it doubted that the Persians derived their belief in a future life from the primitive Hindu creed. If their faith was, as I have said, a revolt from the degenerate forms of Hindu worship, it was also a return to its more ancient forms, as religious reformations are apt to be. The fathers of the Aryan stock had an unwavering assurance of a future life. In his Essay on the "Funeral Rites of the Brahmans," Max Müller cites a sort of liturgy with which the ancient Hindu used to bid farewell to his deceased friend while the body lay on the funeral pyre, which is, surely, very noble and pathetic: "Depart thou, depart thou by the ancient paths, to the place whither our fathers have departed. Meet with the ancient ones (the Pitrs); meet with the Lord of Death; obtain thy desires in heaven. Throw off thine imperfections; go to thy home. Become united with a body; clothe thyself in a shining form. Go ye; depart ye; hasten ye from hence" ("Rig-Veda" x. 14).

To which, as choral responses, might be added, "Let him depart to those for whom flow the rivers of nectar. Let him depart to those who through meditation have obtained the victory, who by fixing their thoughts on the unseen have gone to heaven. . . . Let him depart to the mighty in battle, to the heroes who have laid down their lives for others, to those who have bestowed their goods on the poor" ("Rig-Veda" x. 154).

As the body was consumed on the pyre the friends of the dead chanted a hymn in which, after having bidden his body return to the various elements from which it sprang, they prayed, "As for his unborn part, O Thou, Lord (Agni), quicken it with Thy heat; let Thy flame and Thy brightness kindle it: convey it to the world of the righteous."

It was from this pure and lofty source that the Persians drew their faith in the better life to be.

Max Müller also quotes as the prayer of a dying Hindu woman, "Place me, O Pure One, in that everlasting and unchanging world where light and glory are found. Make me immortal in the world in which joys, delights, and happiness abide, where the desires are obtained" ("Atharva Veda" xii. 3, 17).

Cremation itself bore witness to the Hindu faith in immortality, since they held that "the fire which set free the spiritual element from the superincumbent clay, completed the third or heavenly birth," the second birth having been achieved when men set themselves to a faithful discharge of their religious duties.

* Haug's "Essays," pp. 162-63, quoted by Rawlinson.

some dim prevision—who shall conquer and destroy evil at its source, all things then rounding to their final goal of good.

Another corrupting influence had its origin in a too literal interpretation of the names given to the Divine Being, or the qualities ascribed to Him, by the founders of the faith. Ormazd, for example, had been described as “true, *lucid, shining*, the originator of all the best things, of the spirit in nature and of the growth in nature, *of the luminaries and of the self-shining brightness which is in the luminaries.*” From these epithets and ascriptions there sprang in later days the worship of the sun, then of fire, as a type of God—a worship still maintained by the disciples of Zoroaster, the Ghebers and the Parsees. And from this point onward the old sad story repeats itself; once more we have to trace a pure and lofty primitive faith along the grades through which it declines to the low, base level of a sensuous idolatry. The Magians, always the bitter enemies of Zoroastrianism, held that the four elements—fire, air, earth, and water—were the only proper objects of human reverence. It was not difficult for them to persuade those who already worshipped fire, and were beginning to forget of Whom fire was the symbol, to include in their homage air, water, and earth. Divination, incantations, the interpretation of dreams and omens soon followed, with all the dark shadows which science and religion cast behind them. And then came the lowest deep of all, that worship of the gods by sensual indulgence to which idolatry gravitates, as by a law.

Nevertheless, we must remember that, even at their worst, the Persians preserved the sacred records of their earlier faith, and that their best men steadily refused to accept the base additions to it which the Magians proposed. Corrupt as in many respects many of them became, the conquest of Babylon was the death-blow to the sensual idol-worship which had reigned for twenty centuries on the Chaldean plain; it never wholly recovered from it, though it survived it for a time. From that date it declined to its fall: “Bel bowed down; Nebo stooped; Mero-dach was broken in pieces” (Isa. xlv. 1; Jer. l. 2). The nobler monarchs of Persia were true disciples of the primitive creed of their race. It was similarity of creed which won their favour for the Hebrew captives. In the decree which enfranchised them (Ezra i. 2, 3) Cyrus expressly identifies Ormazd, “the God of heaven,” with Jehovah, the God of Israel; he says, “*The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem.*” Nor was this belief in one God, whose temple was to be defiled by no image even of Himself, the only point in common between the better Persians, such as Cyrus and Darius, and the better Jews. There were many such points. Both believed in an evil spirit tempting and accusing men; in myriads of angels, all the host of heaven, who formed the armies of God and did His pleasure; in a tree of life and a tree of knowledge, and a serpent the enemy of man; both shared the hope of a coming Deliverer from evil, the belief in an immortal and retributive life beyond the grave, and a happy Paradise in which all righteous souls would find a home and see their Father’s face. These common faiths and hopes would all be points of sympathy and attachment between the

two races; and it is to this agreement in religious doctrine and practice that we must ascribe the striking facts that the Persians, ordinarily the most intolerant of men, never persecuted the Jews; and that the Jews, ordinarily so impatient of foreign domination, never made a single attempt to cast off the Persian yoke, but stood by the declining empire even when the Greeks were thundering at its gates.

On one question all competent historians and commentators are agreed; viz., that the Jews gained immensely in the clearness and compass of their religious faith during the Captivity. That, which was the punishment, was also the term, of their idolatry; into that sin they never afterwards fell. Now first, too, they began to understand that the bond of their unity was not local, not national even, but spiritual and religious; they were spread over every province of a foreign empire, yet they were one people, and a sacred people, in virtue of their common service of Jehovah and their common hope of Messiah’s advent. This hope had been vaguely felt before, and just previous to the Captivity Isaiah had arrayed it in an unrivalled splendour of imagery; now it sank into the popular mind, which needed it so sorely, and became a deep and ardent longing of the national heart. From this period, moreover, the immortality of the soul and the life beyond death entered distinctly and prominently into the Hebrew creed. Always latent in their Scriptures, these truths disclosed themselves to the Jews as they came into contact with the Persian doctrines of judgment and future rewards. Hitherto they had thought mainly, if not exclusively, of the temporal rewards and punishments by which the Mosaic law enforced its precepts. Henceforth they saw that, in time and on earth, human actions are not carried to their final and due results; they looked forward to a judgment in which all wrongs should be righted, all unpunished sins receive their recompense, and all the sufferings of the good be transmuted into joy and peace.

Now this, as we shall see, is the very moral of the Book Ecclesiastes, the triumphant climax to which it mounts. The endeavour of Coheleth is to show how evil and good were blended in the human lot, evil so largely preponderating in the lot of many of the good as to make life a curse unless it were sustained by hope; to give hope by assuring the Hebrew captives that “God takes cognisance of all things,” and “will bring every work to judgment,” good or bad; and to urge on them, as the conclusion of his Quest, and as the whole duty of man, to prepare for that supreme audit by fearing God and keeping His commandments. This was the light he was commissioned to carry into their great darkness; and if the lamp and the oil were of God, it is hardly too much to say that the spark which kindled the lamp was taken from the Persian fire, since that too was of God. Or, to vary the figure, and make it more accurate, we may say that the truths of the future life lay hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that it was by the light of the Persian doctrine of the future that the Jews, stimulated by the mental culture and activity acquired in Babylon, discovered them in the Word.

It is thus, indeed, that God has taught men in all the ages. The Word remains ever the same, but our conditions change, our mental posture varies, and with our posture the angle at which

the light of Heaven falls on the sacred page. We are brought into contact with new races, new ideas, new forms of culture, new discoveries of science, and the familiar Word forthwith teems with new meanings, with new adaptations to our needs; truths unseen before, though they were always there, come to view, deep truths rise to the surface, mysterious truths grow simple and plain, truths that jangled on the ear melt into harmony; our new needs stretch out lame hands of faith, and find an unexpected but ample supply; and we are rapt in wonder and admiration as we afresh discover the Bible to be the Book for all races and for all ages, an inexhaustible fountain of truth and comfort and grace.

TRANSLATION.

THE PROLOGUE.

IN WHICH THE PROBLEM OF THE BOOK
IS INDIRECTLY STATED.

ECCLESIASTES i. I-II.

- 1 THE words of the Preacher, son of David,
king in Jerusalem.
- 2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher;
Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,
- 3 Since man hath no profit from all his labour
Which he laboureth under the sun! *
- 4 One generation passeth, and another genera-
tion cometh;
While the earth abideth forever.
- 5 The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth
down;
And panteth toward the place at which it will
rise again.
- 6 The wind goeth toward the south, and veer-
eth to the north;
It whirleth round and round;
And the wind returneth on its course.
- 7 All the streams run into the sea, yet the sea
is not full;
To the place whence the streams came, thither
they return again.
- 8 All things are weary with toil. Man cannot
utter it.
The eye can never be satisfied with seeing,
Nor the ear with hearing.
- 9 What hath been will be,
And that which is done is that which will be
done;
And there is no new thing under the sun.
- 10 If there be anything of which it is said, "Be-
hold, this is new!"
It hath been long ago, in the ages that were
before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of those who have
been;
Nor will there be any remembrance of men
who are to come
Among those who will live after them.

FIRST SECTION.

THE QUEST OF THE CHIEF GOOD IN WIS-
DOM AND IN PLEASURE.

ECCLESIASTES i. 12-ii. 26.

- 12 I, THE Preacher, was King The Quest in
Wisdom.
i. 12-18.
over Israel, in Jerusalem:
- 13 And I applied my heart to
survey and search by wisdom
Into all that is done under heaven:
This sore task hath God given to the children
of men,
To exercise themselves therewith.
- 14 I have considered all the works that are done
under the sun,
And, behold, they are all vanity and vexation
of spirit.
- 15 That which is crooked cannot be set straight,
And that which is lacking cannot be made up.
- 16 Therefore I spake to my heart, saying,
Lo, I have acquired greater wisdom
Than all who were before me in Jerusalem,
My heart having seen much wisdom and
knowledge;
- 17 For I had given my heart to find knowledge
and wisdom.
I perceive that even this is vexation of spirit;
- 18 For in much wisdom is much sadness,
And to multiply knowledge is to multiply
sorrow.

- 1 Then I said to my heart, The Quest in
Pleasure.
ii. 1-11.
Go to, now, let me prove thee
with mirth,
And thou shalt see pleasure:
And, lo, this too is vanity!
- 2 To mirth I said, Thou art mad!
And to pleasure, What canst thou do?
- 3 I thought in my heart to cheer my body with
pleasure,
While my spirit guided it wisely,
And to lay hold on folly,
Till I should see what it is good for the sons
of men to do under heaven,
Through the brief day of their life.
- 4 I gave myself to great works;
I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards;
- 5 I made me gardens and parks,
And I planted in them all manner of fruit-
trees:
- 6 I made me tanks of water,
From which to water the groves:

VER. 13. *To survey and search into, etc.* The verbs indicate the broad extent which his researches covered, and the depth to which they penetrated.

VER. 14. *Vexation of spirit.* Literally, "striving after the wind." But the time-honoured phrase, "vexation of spirit," sufficiently expresses the writer's meaning; and it seems better to retain it than, with the Revised Version, to introduce the Hebrew metaphor, which has a somewhat novel and foreign sound.

VER. 17. *To find knowledge and wisdom.* Both the Authorized and Revised Versions render "to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly." The latter clause, however, violates both the sense and the grammatical construction. The word translated "to know" is not an infinitive, but a noun, and should be rendered "knowledge;" the word translated "folly" means "prudence," and the word translated "madness" hardly means more than "folly." The text, too, seems corrupt. The sense of the passage is against it, I think, as it now stands; for the design of the Preacher is simply to show the insufficiency of wisdom and knowledge, not to prove folly foolish. On the whole, therefore, it seems better to follow the high authority which arranges the text as it is here rendered. The Hebraist will find the question fully discussed in Ginsburg.

* Just as we speak of this "sublunary world," so "under the sun" is the characteristic designation of the earth throughout this Book.

- 7 I bought me men-servants and maid-servants,
And had servants born in my house.
I had also many herds of oxen and sheep,
More than all who were before me in Jerusalem:
- 8 I heaped up silver and gold,
And the treasures of kings and of kingdoms;
I got me men-singers and women-singers;
And took delight in many fair concubines:
- 9 So that I surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem,
My wisdom abiding with me;
- 10 And nothing that my eyes desired did I withhold from them,
I did not keep back my heart from any pleasure;
For my heart took joy in all my toil,
And this was my portion therefrom.
- 11 But when I turned to look on all the works which my hands had wrought,
And at the labour which it cost me to accomplish them,
Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit,
And there was no profit under the sun.
- 12 Then I turned to compare wisdom with madness and folly—
And what can he do that cometh after the king
Whom they made king long ago?—
- 13 And I saw that wisdom excelleth folly
As far as light excelleth darkness:
- 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head,
While the fool walketh blindly.
Nevertheless I knew that the same fate will befall both.
- 15 Therefore I spake with my heart:
"A fate like that of the fool will befall me, even me;
To what end, then, am I wiser?"
And I said to my heart:
"This too is vanity,
- 16 For there is no more remembrance of the wise man than of the fool;
For both will be forgotten,
As in time past so also in days to come:
And, alas, the wise man dieth even as the fool!"
- 17 So life became hateful to me, for a sore burden was upon me,
Even the labour which I wrought under the sun;
Since all is vanity and vexation of spirit;
- 18 Yea, I hated all the gain which I had gained under the sun,
Because I must leave it to the man who shall come after me,
- 19 And who can tell whether he will be a wise man or a fool?
Yet shall he have power over all my gain
Which I have wisely gained under the sun:
This too is vanity.
- 20 Then I turned and gave my heart up to despair
Concerning all the gain which I had gained under the sun;
- 21 For here is a man who hath laboured wisely, and prudently, and dexterously,
And he must leave it as a portion to one who hath not laboured therein:
This also is vanity and a great evil;
- 22 For man hath nothing of all his heavy labour,
And the vexation of his heart under the sun,
23 Since his task grieveth and vexeth him all his days,
And even at night his heart hath no rest:
This too is vanity.
- 24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink,
And to let his soul take pleasure in his labour.
But even this, I saw, cometh from God;
- 25 For who can eat,
And who enjoy himself, apart from Him?
- 26 For to the man who is good before Him,
He giveth wisdom and knowledge and joy;
But to the sinner He giveth the task to gather and to heap up,
That he may leave it to him who is good before God:
This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

SECOND SECTION.

THE QUEST OF THE CHIEF GOOD IN DEVOTION TO THE AFFAIRS OF BUSINESS.

ECCLESIASTES iii. i-v. 20.

- 1 THERE is a time for all things,
And a season for every undertaking under heaven:
- 2 A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up plants;
- 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
- 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- 5 A time to cast stones, and a time to gather up stones;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- 6 A time to get, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to throw away;
- 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew;
A time to be silent, and a time to speak;
- 8 A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time for war, and a time for peace:
- 9 He who laboureth hath therefore no profit from his labours.
- 10 I have considered the task which God hath given to the sons of men,
To exercise themselves withal:
- 11 He hath made everything beautiful in its season;
He hath also put eternity into their heart;
Only they understand not the work of God from beginning to end.
- 12 I found that there was no good for them but to rejoice,
And to do themselves good all their life;
- 13 But also that, if a man eat and drink,
And take pleasure in all his labour,
It is a gift of God.
- 14 I found too that whatever God hath ordained continueth forever;
Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it:
And God hath so ordered it that men may fear before Him.

- 15 That which is hath been,
And that which is to be was long ago;
For God recallesh the past.
- 16 Moreover, I saw under the sun And by Human
Injustice and
Perversity.
iii. 16-iv. 3.
That there was iniquity in the
place of justice,
And in the place of equity there was iniquity.
- 17 I said to mine heart:
"God will judge the righteous and the wicked,
For there is a time for everything and for
every deed with Him."
- 18 Yet I said to my heart of the children of
men:
"God hath sifted them,
To show that they, even they, are but as
beasts.
- 19 For a mere chance is man, and the beast a
mere chance;
And they are both subject to the same
chance;
As is the death of the one, so is the death
of the other;
And both have the same spirit:
And the man hath no advantage over the
beast,
For both are vanity:
- 20 Both go to the same place;
Both sprang from dust, and both turn into
dust:
- 21 And who knoweth whether the spirit of man
goeth upward,
Or the spirit of the beast goeth downward to
the earth?"
- 22 Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better
for man
Than to rejoice in his labours;
For this is his portion:
And who shall give him to see what will be
after him?
- 1 Then I turned to consider once more iv.
All the oppressions that are done under the
sun:
I beheld the tears of the oppressed,
And they had no comforter;
And their oppressors were violent,
Yet had they no comforter:
- 2 And I accounted the dead who died long
ago
Happier than the living who are still alive;
- 3 While happier than either is he who hath not
been born,
Who hath not seen the evil which is done
under the sun.
- 4 Then too I saw that all this It is rendered
hopeless by the
base Origin
of Human In-
dustries.
iv. 4-8.
toil,
And all this dexterity in toil,
Spring from man's rivalry
with his neighbour:
This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.
- 5 The sluggard foldeth his hands,
Yet he eateth his meat:
- 6 Better a handful of quiet
Than two handfuls of labour with vexation
of spirit.
- 7 And again I turned, and saw a vanity under
the sun:
- 8 Here is a man who hath no one with him,
Not even a son or a brother;
And yet there is no end of all his labour,
Neither are his eyes satisfied with riches:
For whom, then, doth he labour and deny
his soul any of his wealth?
This too is vanity and an evil work.
- 9 Two are better than one, Yet these are
capable of a
nobler Motive
and Mode.
iv. 9-16.
Because they have a good re-
ward for their labour:
- 10 For if one fall, the other will
lift up his fellow;
But woe to the lonely one who falleth
And hath no fellow to lift him up!
- 11 Moreover, if two sleep together they are
warm;
But he that is alone, how can he be warm?
- 12 And if an enemy assail the one, two will with-
stand him.
And a threefold cord is not easily broken.
- 13 Happier is a poor and wise youth
Than an old and foolish king
Who even yet has not learned to take warn-
ing;
- 14 For he goeth forth from the prison to the
throne,
Although he was born a poor man in the
kingdom.
- 15 I see all the living who walk under the sun
Flocking to the youth who stood up in his
stead;
- 16 There is no end to the multitude of the people
over whom he ruleth:
Nevertheless those who live after him will
not rejoice in him;
For even this is vanity and vexation of
spirit.
- 1 Keep thy foot when thou So also a nobler
and happier
Mode of Wor-
ship is open to
men:
v. 1-7.
goest to the House of
God;
For it is better to obey than to
offer the sacrifice of fools,
Who know not when they do
evil.
- 2 Do not hurry on thy mouth,
And do not force thy heart to utter words
before God;
For God is in heaven, and thou upon earth:
Therefore let thy words be few.
- 3 For as a dream cometh through much occu-
pation,
So foolish talk through many words.
- 4 When thou vowest a vow unto God,
Defer not to pay it;
For he is a fool whose will is not steadfast.
Pay that which thou hast vowed.
- 5 Better that thou shouldest not vow
Than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.
- 6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to
sin,
And say not before the Angel, "It was an
error:"
For why should God be angry at thine idle
talk
And destroy the work of thy hands?

VER. 21. The question is here, as so often in Hebrew, the strongest form of negative. As in ver. 19 the Preacher affirms of man and beast that "both have the same spirit," and, in ver. 20, that "both go to the same place," so, in this verse, he emphatically denies that there is any difference in their destination at death.

VER. 6. *Before the Angel.* That is, before the Angel who, as the Hebrews thought, presided over the altar of worship, and who was present even when only two or three met for the study of the Law: to study the Law being in itself an act of worship.

7 For in many words, as in many dreams, there
is vanity:
But fear thou God.

- 8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor,
And the perversion of justice in the State,
Be not dismayed thereat;
For superior watcheth superior,
And superiors again watch over them:
- 9 And the advantage for the people is, that it
extendeth to all,
For even the king is servant to the field.
- 10 He that loveth silver is never satisfied with
silver,
Nor he that clingeth to riches with what they
yield:
This too is vanity;
- 11 For when riches increase they increase that
consume them:
What advantage then hath the owner thereof,
Save the looking thereupon with his eyes?
- 12 Sweet is the sleep of the husbandman,
Whether he eat little or much;
While abundance suffereth not the rich to
sleep.
- 13 There is a great evil which I have seen under
the sun—
Riches hoarded up by the rich
To the hurt of the owner thereof:
- 14 For the riches perish in some unlucky ad-
venture,
And he begetteth a son when he hath nothing
in his hand:
- 15 As he cometh forth from the womb of his
mother,
Even as he cometh naked,
So also he returneth again,
And taketh nothing from his labour
Which he may carry away in his hand.
- 16 This also is a great evil,
That just as he came so he must go.
For what profit hath he who laboureth for
the wind?
- 17 Yet all his days he eateth in darkness,
And is much perturbed, and hath vexation and
grief.
- 18 Behold, that which I have said holds good,—
That it is well for man to eat
and to drink
And to enjoy the good of all his labour
wherein he laboureth under the sun,
Through the brief day of his life which God
hath given him:
For this is his portion.
- 19 And I have also said,
That a man to whom God hath given riches
and wealth,
If He hath also enabled him to eat thereof,
And to take his portion and to rejoice in his
labour;—
This is a gift of God:
- 20 He doth not fret because the days of his life
are not many,
For God hath sanctioned the joy of his heart.

VER. 9. Some commentators prefer another possible reading of this difficult verse: *But the profit of a land is every way a king devoted to the field, i. e., a lover and promoter of good husbandry.* This reading, however, does not, I think, harmonise so well with the context as that given above.

THIRD SECTION.

THE QUEST IN WEALTH AND IN THE GOLDEN MEAN.

ECCLESIASTES vi.-viii.

- 1 THERE is another evil which I have seen under the sun,
And it weigheth heavily upon men:
- 2 Here is a man to whom God hath given riches and
wealth and abundance,
So that his soul lacketh nothing of all that it desireth;
And God hath not given him the power to enjoy it,
But a stranger enjoyeth it:
This is vanity and a great evil.
- 3 Though one beget a hundred children,
And live many years,
Yea, however many the days of his years,
Yet if his soul be not satisfied with good,
Even though the grave did not wait for him,
Better is an abortion than he:
- 4 For this cometh in nothingness and goeth in
darkness,
And its memory is shrouded in darkness;
- 5 It doth not even see and know the sun:
It hath more rest than he.
- 6 And if he live twice a thousand years and see
no good:—
Do not both go to the same place?
- 7 All the labour of this man is for his mouth;
Therefore his soul cannot be satisfied:
- 8 For what advantage hath the wise man over
the fool,
Or what the poor man over the stately magnate?
- 9 It is better, indeed, to enjoy the good we
have
Than to crave a good beyond our reach:
Yet even this is vanity and vexation of spirit.
- 10 That which hath been was long since ordained;
And it is very certain that even the greatest
is but a man,
And cannot contend with Him who is
mightier than he.
- 11 Moreover there are many things which increase
vanity:
What advantage then hath man?
- 12 And who knoweth what is good for man in life,
The brief day of his vain life
which he spendeth as a shadow?
And who can tell what shall be after him
under the sun?

The Quest in Wealth.
He who makes Riches his Chief Good is haunted by Fears and Perplexities:
vi. 1-6.

For God has put Eternity into his Heart;
vi. 7-10.

And much that he gains only feeds Vanity;

Nor can he tell what will become of his Gains.

VER. 8. *The Magnate.* Literally, "he who knoweth to walk before the living;" some "great person," some man of eminent station, who is much in the eye of the public.

VER. 9. *To enjoy the good we have,* etc. Literally, "Better is that which is seen by the eyes (the present good) than that which is pursued by the soul (the distant and uncertain good)."

- 1 A good name is better than good nard,
And the day of death better than the day of one's birth:
- 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning
Than to the house of feasting,
Because this is the end of every man,
And the living should lay it to heart:
- 3 Better is serious thought than wanton mirth,
For by a sad countenance the heart is bettered:
- 4 The heart of the wise therefore is in the house of mourning,
But in the house of mirth is the heart of fools.
- 5 It is better for a man to listen to the reproof of the wise
Than to listen to the song of fools;
- 6 For the laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot:
This also is vanity.
- 7 Wrong-doing maketh the wise man mad,
As a bribe corrupteth the heart.
- 8 The end of a reproof is better than its beginning,
And patience is better than pride;
- 9 Therefore hurry not on thy spirit to be angry:
For anger is nursed in the bosom of fools.
- 10 Say not, "How is it that former days were better than these?"
For that is not the part of wisdom.
- 11 Wisdom is as good as wealth,
And hath an advantage over it for those who lead an active life:
- 12 For wisdom is a shelter,
And wealth is a shelter;
But the advantage of wisdom is
That it fortifieth the heart of them that have it.
- 13 Consider moreover the work of God,
Since no man can straighten that which He hath made crooked.
- 14 In the day of prosperity be thou content;
And in the day of adversity
Consider that God hath made this as well as that,
In order that man should not be able to foresee that which is to come.
- 15 In my fleeting days I have seen
Both the righteous die in his righteousness,
And the wicked live long in his wickedness:
- 16 Be not too righteous therefore,
Nor make thyself too wise lest thou be abandoned;
- 17 Be not very wicked, nor yet very foolish,
Lest thou die before thy time:
- 18 It is better that thou shouldst lay hold of this
And also not let go of that;
For whoso feareth God will take hold on both.
- 19 This wisdom alone is greater strength to the wise
Than an army to a beleaguered city;
- 20 For there is not a righteous man on earth
Who doeth good and sinneth not.
- 21 Moreover seek not to know all that is said of thee,
Lest thou hear thy servant speak evil of thee;
- 22 For thou knowest in thine heart
That thou also hast many times spoken evil of others.
- 23 All this wisdom have I tried;
I desired a higher wisdom, but it was far from me;
- 24 That which was far off remaineth far off,
And deep remaineth deep:
Who can find it out?
- 25 Then I and my heart turned to know this wisdom
'And diligently examine it—
To discover the cause of wickedness, vice,
And that folly which is madness:
- 26 And I found woman more bitter than death;
She is a net;
Her heart is a snare, and her hands are chains:
Whoso is good before God shall escape her,
But the sinner shall be taken by her.
- 27 Behold, what I have found, saith the Preacher—
Taking things one by one to reach the result—
- 28 I have found one man among a thousand.
But in all that number a woman have I not found:
- 29 Lo, this only have I found,
That God made man upright,
But that they seek out many devices.
- 1 Who is like the wise man?
And who like him that understandeth the interpretation of this saying?
The wisdom of this man maketh his face bright,
And his rude features are refined.
- 2 I say, then, Obey the king's commandment,
And the rather because of the oath of fealty:

The Quest in the Golden Mean.
The Method of the Man who pursues it
vii. 1-14.

(2) To be indifferent to Censure:
vii. 21, 22.

(3) To despise Women;
vii. 25-29.

(4) And to be indifferent to Public Wrongs.
viii. 1-13.

VER. 2. "Because *this* is the end;" i. e., the death bewailed in the house of mourning.

VER. 6. *The laughter of fools*, etc. There is a play on words in the original which cannot be reproduced in English. Dean Plumptre, following the lead of Delitzsch, proposes as the nearest equivalents, "As crackling nettles under kettles," or "As crackling stubble makes the pot bubble."

VER. 11. *Those who lead an active life*. Literally, "those who see the sun," i. e., those who are much in the sun, who lead a busy active life, are much occupied with traffic or public affairs.

VER. 12. *Fortifieth the heart*; i. e., quickens life, a new life, a life which keeps the heart tranquil and serene under all chances and changes.

VER. 14. *In the day of prosperity*, etc. Literally, "in the day of good be in good." It may be rendered "in the good day be of good cheer." *This as well as that*; i. e., adversity as well as prosperity. God sends both in order

that, not foreseeing what will come to pass, we may live in a constant and humble dependence on Him.

VER. 18. *This . . . and that*. *This* refers to the folly and wickedness of ver. 17, and *that* to the wisdom and righteousness of ver. 16. *Take hold on both*. Literally, "go along with both."

VER. 19. *This wisdom*: viz., the moderate common-sense view of life which has just been described. *Than an army*, etc. Literally, "Than ten (i. e., many) mighty men in a city."

VER. 21. *Seek not to know*, etc. Literally, "Give not thy heart (even if thy ears) to all words that are uttered."

VER. 1. *This saying*; i. e., that which follows. *And his rude features*, etc. Culture lends an air of refinement to the face, carriage, manners.

VER. 2. *The oath of fealty*. Literally, "the oath by God." The Babylonian and Persian despots exacted an oath of loyalty from conquered races. Each had to swear by the god he worshipped.

- 3 Do not throw off thine allegiance,
Nor resent an evil word,
For he can do whatsoever he please;
4 For the word of a king is mighty;
And who shall say to him, "What doest thou?"
- 5 Whoso keepeth his commandment will know
no evil.
Moreover the heart of the wise man foreseeeth
a time of retribution—
- 6 For there is a time of retribution for all
things—
When the tyranny of man is heavy upon him:
7 Because he knoweth not what will be,
And because no one can tell him when it will
be.
- 8 No man is ruler over his own spirit,
To retain the spirit,
Nor has he any power over the day of his
death;
And there is no furlough in this war,
And no craft will save the wicked.
- 9 All this have I seen,
Having applied my heart to all that is done
under the sun.
- 10 But there is a time when a man ruleth over
men to their hurt.
Thus I have seen wicked men buried,
And come again;
And those who did right depart from the
place of the holy,
And be forgotten in the city:
This also is vanity.
- 11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not
executed forthwith,
The heart of the sons of men is set in them
to do evil.
- 12 Though a sinner do evil a hundred years,
And groweth old therein,
Yet I know that it shall be well with those
who fear God,
Who truly fear before Him;
- 13 And it shall not be well with the wicked,
But, like a shadow, he shall not prolong his
days,
Because he doth not fear before God.
- 14 Nevertheless, this vanity doth
happen on the earth,
That there are righteous men
who have a wage like that
of the wicked,
And there are wicked men who have a wage
like that of the righteous:
This too, I said, is vanity.
- 15 And I commended mirth,
Because there is nothing better for man under
the sun

Therefore the
Preacher con-
demns this
View of
Human Life.

Than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry;
For this will go with him to his work
Through the days of his life,
Which God giveth him under the sun.

FOURTH SECTION.

THE QUEST OF THE CHIEF GOOD
ACHIEVED.

ECCLESIASTES viii. 16-xii. 7.

- 16 As then I applied my heart to
acquire wisdom,
And to see the work which is
done under the sun—
And such a one seeth no sleep
with his eyes by day or by night:
- 17 I saw that man cannot find out all the work
of God
Which is done under the sun;
Though man labour to discover it,
He cannot find it out;
And though the wise may say he understand-
eth it
Nevertheless he hath not found it out.
- 1 For all this have I taken to heart and ex-
plored,
That the righteous, and the wise, and their
labours are in the hand of God:
They know not whether they shall meet love
or hatred;
All lies before them.
All are treated alike;
- 2 The same fate befalleth to the righteous and
to the wicked,
To the good and pure and to the impure,
To him that sacrificeth and to him that sac-
rificeth not;
As with the good so is it with the sinner,
With him that sweareth as with him who
feareth an oath.
- 3 This is the greatest evil of all that is done
under the sun,
That there is one fate for all:
And that, although the heart of the sons of
men is full of evil,
And madness is in their hearts through life,
Yet, after it, they go to the dead;

The Chief Good
not to be found
in Wisdom:
viii. 16-ix. 6.

ix.

enjoying temper, than which, as yet, the Preacher has
found "nothing better."

VER. 17. To illustrate this verse Dean Plumptre happily
quotes Hooker's noble and familiar words: "Dangerous
it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the
doings of the Most High; whom although to know be life,
and joy to make mention of His name, yet our soundest
knowledge is to know that we know Him, not as indeed
He is, neither can know Him, and our safest eloquence
concerning Him is our silence, when we confess without
confession that His glory is inexplicable, his greatness
above our capacity and reach."

VER. 1. *They know not whether they shall meet love or
hatred* may mean that even the wisest cannot tell whether
they shall meet (1) the love or the enmity of God, as shown
in adverse or favourable providences; or (2) the things
which they love or hate; or (3) the love or the hatred of
their fellows. The last of the three seems the most
likely.

All lies before them; i. e., all possible chances, changes,
events. Only God can determine or foresee what is com-
ing to meet them.

VER. 3. The words of this verse do not, as they stand,
seem to carry on the logical sequence of thought. The
Preacher's complaint is that even the wise and the good
are not exempted from the common fate, not that the
foolish and reckless are exposed to it. The text may be
corrupt; but Ginsburg is content with it. A good read-
ing of it, however, is still wanting.

VER. 3. *Do not throw off, etc.* Literally, "Do not hurry
from his presence, or even stand up because of an evil
word." To stand up in the divan of an Eastern despot is
a sign of resentment: to rush from it a sign of disloyalty
and rebellion."

VER. 7. *Because he knoweth not; i. e.,* the tyrant does
not know. The sense seems to be: Retribution is all the
more certain because, in his infatuation, the despot does
not foresee the disastrous results of his tyranny, and
because no one can tell him when or how they will dis-
close themselves.

VER. 9. *All this have I seen; i. e.,* all this retribution on
tyrants and the consequent deliverance of the oppressed.

VER. 10. But the Preacher has also seen times when
retributive justice did *not* overtake the oppressors, when
they *came again* in the persons of children as wicked and
tyrannical as themselves.

VER. 11. *Because sentence, etc.* "God does not always
pay on Saturdays," says an old Italian proverb.

VER. 15. "And *this* will go with him:" viz., this clear

- 4 For who is exempted?
To all the living there is hope,
For a living dog is better than a dead lion;
- 5 For the living know that they shall die,
But the dead know not anything;
And there is no more any compensation to them,
For the very memory of them is gone:
- 6 Their love, too, no less than their hatred and rivalry, hath perished;
And there is no part for them in aught that is done under the sun.
- 7 Go, then, eat thy bread with gladness,
And drink thy wine with a merry heart,
Since God hath accepted thy works:
- 8 Let thy garments be always white;
Let no perfume be lacking to thy head;
- 9 And enjoy thyself with any woman whom thou lovest
All the days of thy life
Which He giveth thee under the sun,
All thy fleeting days:
For this is thy portion in life,
And in the labour which thou labourest under the sun.
- 10 Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do,
Do it whilst thou art able;
For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in Hades,
Whither thou goest.
- 11 Then I turned and saw under the sun,
That the race is not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong;
Nor yet bread to the wise,
Nor riches to the intelligent,
Nor favour to the learned;
- 12 But time and chance happen to all,
And that man doth not even know his time:
Like fish taken in a fatal net,
And like birds caught in a snare,
So are the sons of men entrapped in the time of their calamity,
When it falleth suddenly upon them.
- 13 This wisdom also have I seen under the sun,
And it seemed great to me—
- 14 There was a little city,
And few men in it,
And a great king came against it and besieged it,
And threw up a military causeway against it:
- 15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man,
And he saved that city by his wisdom;
Yet no one remembered this same poor man.
- 16 Therefore say I,
Though wisdom is better than strength,
Yet the wisdom of the poor is despised,
And his words are not listened to:
- 17 Though the quiet words of the wise have much advantage
Over the vociferations of a fool of fools,
And wisdom is better than weapons of war,
Yet one fool destroyeth much good:
- 1 As a dead fly maketh sweet ointment to stink,
So a little folly overpowereth (much) wisdom and honour.
- 2 Nevertheless the mind of the wise man turns toward his right hand,
But the mind of the fool to his left;
- 3 For so soon as the fool setteth his foot in the street
He betrayeth his lack of understanding;
Yet he saith of every one (he meeteth), "He is a fool!"
- 4 If the anger of thy ruler be kindled against thee,
Resent it not:
Patience will avert a graver wrong.
- 5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun,
An outrage which only a ruler can commit:
- 6 A great fool is lifted to high place,
While the noble sit degraded:
- 7 I have seen servants upon horses,
And masters walking like servants on the ground.
- 8 Yet he that diggeth a pit shall fall into it;
And whoso breaketh down a wall a serpent shall bite him;
- 9 He who pulleth down stones shall be hurt therewith;
And whoso cleaveth logs shall be cut.
- 10 If the axe be blunt, and he do not whet the edge,
He must put on more strength;
But wisdom should teach him to sharpen it.
- 11 If the serpent bite because it is not charmed,
There is no advantage to the charmer.
- 12 The words of the wise man's mouth win him grace;
But the lips of a fool swallow him up,
- 13 For the words of his mouth are folly at the beginning,
And end in malignant madness.
- 14 The fool is full of words,
Though no man knoweth what shall be,
Either here or hereafter:
And who can tell him?
- 15 The work of a fool wearieth him,
For he cannot even find his way to the city.

VER. 9. "Enjoy thyself with any woman." The word here rendered "woman" does not mean "wife." And as the Hebrew Preacher is here speaking under the mask of the lover of pleasure, this immoral maxim is at least consistent with the part he plays. More than one good critic, however, read "a wife" for "any woman."

VER. 3. *Setteth his foot in the street.* Literally, "walketh in the road." The sentence seems to be a proverb used to denote the extreme stupidity of the fool who, the very moment he leaves his house, is bewildered, cannot even find his way from one familiar spot to another, and sees his own folly in every face he meets.

VER. 4. *Resent it not.* Literally, "Quit not thy place."—See note on chapter viii. ver. 3.

VER. 7. To ride upon a horse is still a mark of distinction in many Eastern States. In Turkish cities, till of late, no Christian was permitted to ride any nobler beast than an ass or a mule: so neither were the Jews, in the Middle Ages, in any Christian city.

VER. 10. Ginsburg renders this difficult and much-disputed passage thus: "If the axe be blunt, and he do not sharpen it beforehand, he shall only increase the army; the advantage of repairing hath wisdom," and explains it as meaning: "If any insulted subject lift a blunt axe against the trunk of despotism, he will only make the tyrant increase his army, and thereby augment his own sufferings; but it is the prerogative of wisdom to repair the mischief which such precipitate folly occasions." I have offered what seems a simpler explanation in the comment on this passage, and have tried to give a simpler, yet not less accurate, rendering in the text. But there are almost as many readings of this difficult verse as there are critics; and it is impossible to do more than make a hesitating choice among them.

VER. 11. *The charmer.* Literally, "the master of the tongue." The allusion of the phrase is of course to the subtle cantillations by which the charmer drew, or was thought to draw, serpents from their "lurk," and to render them harmless.

VER. 15. *He cannot even find his way to the city;* a pro-

- 16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child,
And thy princes feast in the morning!
- 17 Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is noble,
And thy princes eat at due hours,
For strength and not for revelry!
- 18 Through slothful hands the roof falleth in,
And through lazy hands the house lets in the rain.
- 19 They turn bread, and wine, which cheereth life, into revelry;
And money has to pay for all.
- 20 Nevertheless revile not the king even in thy thoughts,
Nor a prince even in thy bed-chamber,
Lest the bird of the air carry the report,
And the winged tribes tell the story.

- 1 Cast thy bread upon the waters,
For in time thou mayest find the good of it;
- 2 Give a portion to seven, and even to eight,
For thou knowest not what calamity may come upon the earth.
- 3 When the clouds are full of rain,
They empty it upon the earth;
And when the tree falleth, toward south or north,
In the place where the tree falleth there will it lie.
- 4 Whoso watcheth the wind shall not sow,
And he who observeth the clouds shall not reap;
- 5 As thou knowest the course of the wind
As little as that of the embryo in the womb of the pregnant,
So thou knowest not the work of God,
Who worketh all things.
- 6 Sow, then, thy seed in the morning,
And slack not thy hand in the evening,
Since thou knowest not which shall prosper,
this or that,
Or whether both shall prove good:
- 7 And the light shall be sweet to thee,
And it shall be pleasant to thine eyes to behold the sun:
- 8 For even if a man should live many years,
He ought to rejoice in them all,
And to remember that there will be many dark days;
Yea, that all that cometh is vanity.
- 9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth,
And let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth;
And pursue the ways of thine heart,
And that which thine eyes desire;

But in a wise
Use and a wise
Enjoyment of
the Present
Life;
xi. 1-8.

Combined with
a steadfast
Faith in the
Life to come.
xi. 9-xii. 7.

- And know that for all these
God will bring thee into judgment:
- 10 Banish, therefore, care from thy mind,
And put away sadness from thy flesh,
For youth and manhood are vanity.
- 1 And remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
xii.
Before the evil days come,
And the years approach of which thou shalt say,
"I have no pleasure in them;"
- 2 Before the sun groweth dark,
And the light, and the moon, and the stars;
And the clouds return after the rain:
- 3 When the keepers of the house shall quake,
And the men of power crouch down;
When the grinding-maids shall stop because so few are left,
And the women who look out of the lattices shall be shrouded in darkness,
And the door shall be closed on the street:
- 4 When the sound of the mills shall cease,
And the swallow fly shrieking to and fro,
And all the song-birds drop silently into their nests.
- 5 There shall be terror at that which cometh from the height,
And fear shall beset the highway:
The almond also shall be rejected,
And the locust be loathed,
And the caper-berry provoke no appetite;
Because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners pace up and down the street;—
- 6 Before the silver cord snappeth asunder,
And the golden bowl escapeth;
Before the pitcher be shattered at the fountain,
And the wheel is broken at the well;
- 7 And the body is cast into the earth from which it came,
And the spirit returneth to God who gave it.

THE EPILOGUE.

IN WHICH THE PROBLEM OF THE BOOK
IS CONCLUSIVELY SOLVED.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 8-14.

- 8 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,
All is vanity!
- 9 And not only was the Preacher a wise man;
He also taught the people wisdom,
And compared, collected, and arranged many proverbs.
- 10 The Preacher sought out words of comfort,
And wrote down in uprightness words of truth.

verbal saying. It denotes the fool who has not wit enough even to keep a highroad, to walk in the beaten path which leads to a capital city. The thought was evidently familiar to Jewish literature; for Isaiah (xxxv. 8) speaks of the way of holiness as a highway in which "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err."

VERS. 18, 19. *And money pays for all*; i. e., the money of the people. The slothful prodigal rulers, under whose mal-administration the whole fabric of the State was fast falling into decay, extorted the means for their profligate revelry from their toil-worn and oppressed subjects. It is significant of the caution, induced by the extreme tyranny of the time, that the whole description of its political condition is conveyed in proverbs more enigmatical than usual, and capable of being interpreted in more senses than one.

VER. 3. *The women who look out of the lattices*; i. e., the luxurious ladies of the harem looking through the windows to see what is going on outside. Compare Judges v. 28; 2 Samuel vi. 16; and 2 Kings ix. 30.

VER. 4. *The swallow*, etc. Literally, "the bird shall arise for a noise," i. e., the bird which flies abroad and makes a noise at the approach of a tempest: viz., the swallow. *All the song-birds*. Literally, "all the daughters of song," a Hebraism for birds.

VER. 5. *From the height*, i. e., from heaven. *The locust be loathed*. It is commonly assumed that the locust was only eaten by the poor; but Aristotle ("Hist. Anim." v. 30) names them as a delicacy, and Ginsburg affirms that they are still considered so by the cultivated and well-to-do Arabs. *His long home*. Literally, "his eternal home," the domus æterna of the early Christian tombs.

- 11 The words of the Wise are like goads,
And those of the Masters of the Assemblies
like spikes driven home,
Given out by the same Shepherd.
- 12 And of what is more than these, my son,
beware;
For of making of many books there is no end,
And much study is a weariness to the flesh.
- 13 The conclusion of the matter is this;—
That God taketh cognisance of all things:
Fear Him, therefore, and keep His command-
ments,
For this it behoveth every man to do,
- 14 Since God will bring every deed to the judg-
ment
Appointed for every secret thing,
Whether it be good or whether it be bad.

EXPOSITION.

THE PROLOGUE.

IN WHICH THE PROBLEM OF THE BOOK IS INDIRECTLY STATED.

ECCLESIASTES i. 1-II.

THE search for the *summum bonum*, the quest of the Chief Good, is the theme of the Book Ecclesiastes. Naturally we look to find this theme, this problem, this "riddle of the painful earth," distinctly stated in the opening verses of the Book. It is stated, but not distinctly. For the Book is an autobiographical poem, the journal of the Preacher's inward life set forth in a dramatic form. "A man of ripe wisdom and mature experience, he takes us into his confidence. He unclasps the secret volume, and invites us to read it with him. He lays before us what he has been, what he has thought and done, what he has seen and felt and suffered; and then he asks us to listen to the judgment which he has deliberately formed on a review of the whole."* But that he may the more unreservedly lay bare his heart to us, he uses the poet's privilege, and presents himself to us under a mask and wrapped in Solomon's ample mantle. And a dramatic poet conveys his conceptions of human character and circumstance and action, not by direct picturesque descriptions, but, placing men before us "in their habit as they lived," he makes them speak to us, and leaves us to infer their character and condition from their words.

In accordance with the rules of his art, the dramatic preacher brings himself on the stage of his poem, permits us to hear his most penetrating and characteristic utterances, confesses his own most secret and inward experiences, and thus enables us to conceive and to judge him. He is true to his artistic canons from the outset. His prologue, unlike that of the Book of Job, is cast in the dramatic form. Instead of giving us a clear statement of the moral problem he is

about to discuss, he opens with the characteristic utterances of the man who, wearied with many futile endeavours, gathers up his remaining strength to recount the experiments he has tried and the conclusion he has reached. Like Browning, one of the most dramatic of modern poets, he plunges abruptly into his theme, and speaks to us from the first through "feigned lips." Just as in reading the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," or the "Epistle of Karshish, the Arab Physician," or a score other of Browning's poems, we have first to glance through it in order to collect the scattered hints which indicate the speaker and the time, and then laboriously to think ourselves back, by their help, into the time and conditions of the speaker, so also with this Hebrew poem. It opens abruptly with "words of the Preacher," who is at once the author and the hero of the drama. "Who is he," we ask, "and what?" "When did he live, and what place did he fill?" And at present we can only reply, He is the voice of one crying in the wilderness of Oriental antiquity, and saying, "Vanity of vanities! *all* is vanity!"* For what intent, then, does his voice break the long silence? Of what ethical mood is this pathetic note the expression? What prompts his despairing cry?

It is the old contrast—old as literature, old as man—between the ordered steadfastness of nature and the disorder and brevity of human life. The Preacher gazes on the universe above and around him. The ancient earth is firm and strong beneath his feet. The sun runs his race with joy, sinks exhausted into its ocean bed, but rises on the morrow, like a giant refreshed with old wine, to renew its course. The variable and inconstant wind, which bloweth where it listeth, blows from the same quarters, runs through the very circuit which was its haunt in the time of the world's grey fathers. The streams which ebb and flow, which go and come, run along time-worn beds and are fed from their ancient source. But man, "to one point constant never," shifts from change to change. As compared with the calm uniformity of nature, his life is a mere phantasy, passing for ever through a tedious and limited range of forms, each of which is as unsubstantial as the fabric of a vision, many of which are as base and sordid as they are unreal, and all of which, for ever in a flux, elude the grasp of those who pursue them, or disappoint those who hold them in their hands. "All is vanity; for man has no profit," no adequate and enduring reward, "for all his labour;" literally, "no balance, no surplus, on the balance-sheet of life:" less happy, because less stable, than the earth on which he dwells, he comes and goes, while the earth goes on for ever (vv. 2-4).

This painful contrast between the ordered stability of nature and the changeful and profitless disorder of human life is emphasised by a detailed reference to the large natural forces which rule the world, and which abide unchanged, although to us they seem the very types of change. The figure of ver. 5 is, of course, that of the racer. The sun rises every morning to run its course, pursues it through the day, "pants," as one well-nigh breathless, toward its goal, and sinks at night into its subterranean bed in the sea; but, though exhausted and breathless at night, it rises on the morrow refreshed, and eager, like a strong, swift man, to renew its

VER. 13. *God taketh cognisance of all things.* Literally, "Everything is noted" or "heard," *i. e.*, by God the Judge. Ginsburg conjectures, not without reason, as I think, that the Sacred Name was omitted from this clause of the verse simply because the Author wished to reserve it for the more emphatic clause which follows it. Many good scholars, however, read the clause as meaning simply, "The conclusion of the matter, *when all has been heard,*" *i. e.*, which even the Sages can adduce.

* Dean Perowne, in *The Expositor*, First Series, vol. ix.

* Compare Horace (*Od.* iv. 7, 9): *Pulvis et umbra sumus.*

daily race. In ver. 6 the wind is represented as having a regular law and circuit, though it now blows South, and now veers round to the North. The East and West are not mentioned, probably because they are tacitly referred to in the rising and setting sun of the previous verse: all the four quarters are included between the two. In ver. 7 the streams are described as returning on their sources; but there is no allusion here, as we might suppose, to the tides,—and indeed tidal rivers are comparatively rare,—or to the rain which brings back the water evaporated from the surface of the streams and of the sea. The reference is, rather, to an ancient conception of the physical order of nature held by the Hebrew as by other races, according to which the ocean, fed by the streams, sent back a constant supply through subterraneous passages and channels, in which the salt was filtered out of it; through these they supposed the rivers to return to the place whence they came. The ruling sentiment of these verses is that, while all the natural elements and forces, even the most variable and inconstant, renew their strength and return upon their course, for frail man there is no return; permanence and uniformity characterise *them*, while transitoriness and instability mark *him* for their own. They seem to vanish and disappear; the sun sinks, the winds lull, the streams run dry; but they all come back again: for him there is no coming back; once gone, he is gone for ever.

But it is vain to talk of these or other instances of the weary yet restless activity of the universe; “man cannot utter it.” For, besides these elemental illustrations, the world is crowded with illustrations of incessant change, which yet move within narrow bounds and do nothing to relieve its sameliness. So numerous are they, so innumerable, that the curious eye and inquisitive ear of man would be worn out before they had completed the tale of them: and if eye and ear could never be satisfied with hearing and seeing, how much less the slower tongue with speaking (ver. 8)? All through the universe what hath been still is and will be; what was done is done still and always will be done; the sun still running the same race, the winds still blowing from the same points, the streams still flowing between the same banks and returning by the same channels. If any man suppose that he has discovered new phenomena, any natural fact which has not been repeating itself from the beginning, it is only because he is ignorant of that which has been from of old (vv. 9, 10).^{*} Yet, while in nature all things return on their course and abide for ever, man’s day is soon spent, his force soon exhausted. *He* does not return; nay, he is not so much as remembered by those who come after him. Just as we have forgotten those who were before us, so those who live after us will forget us (ver. 11). The burden of all this unintelligible world lies heavily on the Preacher’s soul. He is weary of the world’s “everlasting sameness.” The miseries and confusions of the human lot baffle and oppress his thoughts. Above all, the contrast between Nature and Man, between its massive and stately permanence and the frailty and brevity of our existence, breeds in him the despairing mood of which we have the keynote

in his cry, “vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!”

Yet this is not the only, not the inevitable, mood of the mind as it ponders that great contrast. *We* have learned to look upon it with other, perhaps with wider, eyes. We say, How grand, how soothing, how hopeful is the spectacle of nature’s uniformity! How it lifts us above the fluctuations of inward thought, and gladdens us with a sense of stability and repose! As we see the ancient inviolable laws working out into the same gracious and beautiful results day after day and year by year, and reflect that “what has been will be,” we are redeemed from our bondage to vanity and corruption; we look up with composed and reverent trust to Him who is our God and Father, and onward to the stable and glorious immortality we are to spend with Him; we argue with Habakkuk (chap. i. ver. 12), “Art not *Thou* from everlasting. O Lord our God, our Holy One? *We* shall not die,” but live.

But if we did not know the Ruler of the universe to be our God and Father; if our thoughts had still to “jump the life to come” or to leap at it with a mere guess; if we had to cross the gulf of death on no more solid bridge than a peradventure; if, in short, our life were infinitely more troubled and uncertain than it is, and the true good of life and its bright sustaining hope were still to seek, how would it be with us then? Then, like the Preacher, we might feel the steadfastness and uniformity of nature as an affront to our vanity and weakness. In place of drinking in hope and composure from the fair visage and unbroken order of the universe, we might deem its face to be darkened with a frown or its eye to be glancing on us with bitter irony. Instead of finding in its inevitable order and permanence a hopeful prophecy of *our* recovery into an unbroken order and an enduring peace, we might passionately demand why, on an abiding earth and under an unchanging heaven, we should die and be forgotten; why, more inconstant than the variable wind, more evanescent than the parching stream, one generation should go never to return, and another generation come to enjoy the gains of those who were before them, and to blot their memory from the earth.

This, indeed, *has* been the impassioned protest and outcry of every age. Literature is full of it. The contrast between the tranquil unchanging sky, with its myriads of pure lustrous stars, which are always there and always in a happy concert, and the frailty of man rushing blindly through his brief and perturbed course has lent its ground-tones to the poetry of every race. We meet it everywhere. It is the oldest of old songs. In all the many languages of the divided earth we hear how the generations of men pass swiftly and stormfully across its bosom, “searching the serene heavens with the inquest of their beseeching looks,” but winning no response; asking always, and always in vain, “Why are we thus? why are we thus? frail as the moth, and of few days like the flower?” It is this contrast between the serenity and the stability of nature and the frailty and turbulence of man which afflicts Coheleth and drives him to conclusions of despair. Here is man, “so noble in reason, so infinite in faculty, in apprehension so like a god,” longing with an ardent intensity for the peace which results from the equipoise and

^{*} So Marcus Aurelius (“Meditt.,” xi. 1): “They that come after us will see nothing new; and they who went before saw nothing more than we have seen.”

happy occupation of his various powers; and yet his whole life is wasted in labours and tumults, in perplexity and strife; he goes to his grave with his cravings unsatisfied, his powers untrained, unharmonised, knowing no rest till he lies in the narrow bed from which is no uprising! What wonder if to such an one as he "this goodly frame, the earth, seems but a sterile promontory" stretching out a little space into the dark, infinite void; "this most excellent canopy, the air . . . this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire," nothing but "a foul, pestilential congregation of vapours"? What wonder if, for him, the very beauty of nature should turn into a repulsive hideousness, and its steadfast, unchanging order be held a satire on the disorder and vanity of his life?

Solomon, moreover,—and Solomon in his premature old age, sated and weary, is the mask under which the Preacher conceals his natural face,—had had a large experience of life, had tried its ambitions, its lusts, its pursuits and pleasures; he had tested every promise of good which it held forth, and found them all illusory; he had drunk of every stream, and found no pure living water with which he could slake his thirst. And men such as he, sated but not satisfied, jaded with voluptuous delights and without the peace of faith, commonly look out on the world with haggard eyes. They feed their despair on the natural order and purity which they feel to be a rebuke to the impurity of their own restless and perturbed hearts. Many of us have, no doubt, stood on Richmond Hill, and looked with softening eyes on the rich pastures dotted with cattle, and broken with clumps of trees through which shoot up village spires, while the full, placid Thames winds in many a curve through pasture and wood. It is not a grand or romantic scene; but on a quiet evening, in the long level rays of the setting sun, it is a scene to inspire content and thankful, peaceful thoughts. Wilberforce tells us that he once stood in the balcony of a villa looking down on this scene. Beside him stood the owner of the villa, a duke notorious for his profligacy in a profligate age; and as they looked across the stream, the duke cried out, "O that river! there it runs, on and on, and I am so weary of it!" And *there* you have the very mood of this Prologue; the mood for which the fair, smiling heavens and the gracious, bountiful earth carry no benediction of peace, because they are reflected from a heart all tossed into crossing and impure waves.

All things depend on the heart we bring to them. This very contrast between Nature and Man has no despair in it, breeds no dispeace or anger in the heart at leisure from itself and at peace with God. Tennyson, for instance, makes a merry musical brook sing to us on this very theme.

"I come from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally
And sparkle out among the fern,
To bicker down a valley.

"I chatter over stony ways
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

"I chatter, chatter as I flow
To join the brimming river;
*For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.*

"I steal by lawns and grassy plots,
I slide by hazel covers;
I move the sweet forget-me-nots
That grow for happy lovers.

"I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance
Among my skimming swallows;
I make the netted sunbeams dance
Against my sanded shallows.

"I murmur under moon and stars
In brambly wildernesses;
I linger by my shingly bars;
I loiter round my cresses,

"And out again I curve and flow
To join the brimming river;
*For men may come and men may go
But I go on for ever.*"

It is the very plaint of the Preacher set to sweet music. He murmurs, "One generation passeth, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever;" while the refrain of the Brook is,—

"For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever."

Yet we do not feel that the Song of the Brook should feed any mood of grief and despair. The tune that it sings to the sleeping woods all night is "a cheerful tune." By some subtle process we are made to share its bright, tender hilarity, though we too are of the men that come and go. Into what a fume would the Hebrew Preacher have been thrown had any little "babbling brook" dared to sing this saucy song *to him*. He would have felt it as an insult, and have assumed that the merry, innocent creature was "crowing" over the swiftly passing generations of men. But, for the Christian Poet, the Brook sings a song whose blithe dulcet strain attunes the heart to the quiet harmonies of peace and good-will.

Again I say all depends on the heart we turn to Nature. It was because his heart was heavy with the memory of many sins and many failures, because too the lofty Christian hopes were beyond his reach, that this "son of David" grew mournful and bitter in her presence.

This, then, is the mood in which the Preacher commences his quest of the Chief Good. He is driven to it by the need of finding that in which he can rest. As a rule, it is only on the most stringent compulsions that we any of us undertake this high Quest. Of their profound need of a Chief Good most men are but seldom and faintly conscious; but to the favoured few, who are to lead and mould the public thought, it comes with a force they cannot resist. It was thus with Coheleth. He could not endure to think that those who have "all things put under their feet" should lie at the mercy of accidents from which their realm is exempt; that *they* should be the mere fools of change, while *that* abides unchanged for ever. And, therefore, he set out to discover the conditions on which they might become partakers of the order and stability and peace of nature; the conditions on which, raised above all the tides and storms of change, they might sit calm and serene even though the heavens should be folded as a scroll and the earth be shaken from its foundations. This, and only this, will he recognise as the Chief Good, the Good appropriate to the nature of man, because capable of satisfying all his cravings and supplying all his wants.

FIRST SECTION.

THE QUEST OF THE CHIEF GOOD IN WISDOM AND IN PLEASURE.

ECCLESIASTES i. 12-ii. 26.

OPPRESSED by his profound sense of the vanity of the life which man lives amid the play of permanent natural forces, Coheleth sets out on the search for that true and supreme Good which it will be well for the sons of men to pursue through their brief day; the good which will sustain them under all their toils, and be "a portion" so large and enduring as to satisfy even their vast desires.

1. And, as was natural in so wise a man, he turns first to *Wisdom*. He gives himself diligently to inquire into all the actions and toils of men. He will ascertain whether a larger acquaintance with their conditions, a deeper insight into the facts, a more just and complete estimate of their lot, will remove the depression which weighs upon his heart. He devotes himself earnestly to this Quest, and acquires a "greater wisdom than all who were before him."

The Quest in
Wisdom.
i. 12-18.

This wisdom, however, is not a scientific knowledge of facts or of social and political laws, nor is it the result of philosophical speculations on "the first good or the first fair," or on the nature and constitution of man. It is the wisdom that is born of wide and varied experience, not of abstract study. He acquaints himself with the facts of human life, with the circumstances, thoughts, feelings, hopes, and aims of all sorts and conditions of men. He is fain to know "all that men do under the sun," "all that is done under heaven." Like the Arabian Caliph, "the good Haroun Alraschid," we may suppose that Coheleth goes forth in disguise to visit all quarters of the city; to talk with barbers, druggists, calenders, porters, with merchants and mariners, husbandmen and tradesmen, mechanics and artisans; to try conclusions with travellers and with the blunt wits of home-keeping men. He will look with his own eyes and learn for himself what their lives are like, how they conceive of the human lot, and what, if any, are the mysteries which sadden and perplex them. He will ascertain whether *they* have any key that will unlock his perplexities, any wisdom that will solve his problems or help him to bear his burden with a more cheerful heart. Because his depression was fed by every fresh contemplation of the order of the universe, he turns from nature to "the proper study of mankind."

But this also he finds a heavy and disappointing task. After a wide and dispassionate scrutiny, when he has "seen *much* wisdom and knowledge," he concludes that man has no fair reward "for all his labour that he laboureth under the sun," that no wisdom avails to set straight that which is crooked in human affairs, or to supply that which is lacking in them. The sense of vanity bred by his contemplation of the steadfast round of nature only grows more profound and more painful as he reflects on the numberless and manifold disorders which afflict humanity. And hence, before he ventures on a new experiment, he makes a pathetic appeal to the heart which he had so earnestly applied to the search,

and in which he had stored up so large and various a knowledge, and confesses that "even this is vexation of spirit," that "in much wisdom is much sadness," and that "to multiply knowledge is to multiply sorrow."

And whether we consider the nature of the case or the conditions of the time in which this Book was written, we shall not be surprised at the mournful conclusion to which he comes. For the time was full of cruel oppressions and wrongs. Life was insecure. To acquire property was to court extortion. The Hebrews, and even the conquering race which ruled them, were slaves to the caprice of satraps and magistrates whose days were wasted in revelry and in the unbridled indulgence of their lusts. And to go among the various conditions of men groaning under a despotism like that of the Turk, whose foot strikes with barrenness every spot on which it treads; to see all the fair rewards of honest toil withheld, the noble degraded and the foolish exalted, the righteous trodden down by the feet of the wicked; all this was not likely to quicken cheerful thoughts in a wise man's heart: instead of solving, it could but complicate and darken the problems over which he was already brooding in despair.

And, apart from the special wrongs and oppressions of the time, it is inevitable that the thoughtful student of men and manners should become a sadder as he becomes a wiser man. To multiply knowledge, at least of this kind, is to multiply sorrow. We need not be cynics and leave our tub only to reflect on the dishonesty of our neighbours, we need only go through the world with open and observant eyes in order to learn that "in much wisdom is much sadness." Recall the wisest of modern times, those who have had the most intimate acquaintance with man and men, Goethe and Carlyle for example; are they not all touched with a profound sadness? * Do they not look with some scorn on the common life of the mass of men, with its base passions and pleasures, struggles and rewards? and, in proportion as they have the spirit of Christ, is not their very scorn kindly, springing from a pity which lies deeper than itself? Did not even the Master Himself, though full of ruth and grace, share their feeling as He saw publicans growing rich by extortion, hypocrites mounting to Moses' chair, subtle, cruel foxes couched on thrones, scribes hiding the key of knowledge, and the blind multitude following their blind leaders into the ditch?

Nay, if we look out on the world of to-day, can we say that even the majority of men are

* Père Lacordaire has a fine passage on this theme. "Weak and little minds find here below a nourishment which suffices for their intellect and satisfies their love. They do not discover the emptiness of visible things because they are incapable of sounding them to the bottom. But a soul which God has drawn nearer to the Infinite very soon feels the narrow limits within which it is pent; it experiences moments of inexpressible sadness, the cause of which for a long time remains a mystery; it even seems as though some strange concurrence of events must have chanced in order thus to disturb its life; and all the while the trouble comes from a higher source. In reading the lives of the Saints, we find that nearly all of them have felt that sweet melancholy of which the ancients said *that there was no genius without it*. In fact, melancholy is inseparable from every mind that looks below the surface and every heart that feels profoundly. Not that we should take complacency in it, for it is a malady that enervates when we do not shake it off; and it has but two remedies—*Death or God*." Elsewhere, still quite in the spirit of the Preacher, he says: "Every day I feel more and more that all is vanity. *I cannot leave my heart in this heap of mud.*"

wise and pure? Is it always the swift who win the race, and the strong who carry off the honours of the battle? Do none of our "intelligent lack bread," nor any of the learned favour? Are there no fools lifted to high places to show with how little wisdom the world is governed, and no brave and noble breasts dinted by the blows of hostile circumstances or wounded by "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"? Are all our workmen diligent, and all our masters fair? Are no false measures and balances known in our markets, and no frauds on our exchanges? Are none of our homes dungeons, with fathers and husbands for jailors? Do we never hear, as we stand without, the sound of cruel blows and the shrieks of tortured captives? Are there no hypocrites in our Churches "that with devotion's visage sugar o'er" a corrupt heart? And do the best men always gain the highest place and honour? Are there none in our midst who have to bear—

"The whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes?"

Alas, if we think to find the true Good in a wide and varied knowledge of the conditions of men, their hopes and fears, their struggles and successes, their loves and hates, their rights and wrongs, their pleasures and their pains, we shall but share the defeat of the Preacher, and repeat his bitter cry, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" For, as he himself implies at the very outset (ver. 13), "this sore task," this eternal quest of a wisdom which will solve the problems and remove the inequalities of human life, is God's *gift* to the children of men,—this search for a solution they never reach. Age after age, unwarned by the failure of those who took this road before them, they renew the hopeless quest.

2. But if we cannot reach the object of our Quest in Wisdom, we may, perchance, find it in Pleasure. This experiment also The Quest in the Preacher has tried, tried on Pleasure. the largest scale and under the ii. 1-11. most auspicious conditions. Wisdom failing to satisfy the large desires of his soul, or even to lift it from its depression, he turns to mirth.* Once more, as he forthwith announces, he is disappointed in the result. He pronounces mirth a brief madness; in itself, like wisdom, a good, it is not the Chief Good; to make it supreme is to rob it of its natural charm.

Not content with this general verdict, however, he recounts the details of his experiment, that he may deter us from repeating it. Speaking in the person of Solomon and utilising the facts of his experience, Cobelet claims to have started in the quest with the greatest advantages; for "what can he do who cometh after the king whom they made king long ago?" He surrounded himself with all the luxuries of an Oriental prince, not out of any vulgar love of show and ostentation, nor out of any strong sensual addictions, but that he might discover wherein the secret and fascination of pleasure lay, and what it could do for a man who pursued it

wisely. He built himself new, costly palaces, as the Sultan of Turkey used to do almost every year. He laid out paradises, planted them with vines and fruit-trees of every sort, and large shady groves to screen off and attemper the heat of the sun.* He dug great tanks and reservoirs of water, and cut channels which carried the cool vital stream through the gardens and to the roots of the trees. He bought men and maids, and surrounded himself with the retinue of servants and slaves requisite to keep his palaces and paradises in order, to serve his sumptuous tables, to swell his pomp: *i. e.*, he gathered together such a train of ministers, attendants, domestics, indoor and outdoor slaves, as is still thought necessary to the dignity of an Oriental "lord." His herds of flocks, a main source of Oriental wealth, were of finer strain and larger in number than had been known before. He amassed enormous treasures of silver and gold, the common Oriental hoard. He collected the peculiar treasures "of kings and of the kingdoms;" whatever special commodity was yielded by any foreign land was caught up for his use by his officers or presented to him by his allies.† He hired famous musicians and singers, and gave himself to those delights of harmony which have had a peculiar charm for the Hebrews of all ages. He crowded his harem with the beauties both of his own and of foreign lands. He withheld nothing from them that his eyes desired, and kept not his heart from any pleasure. He set himself seriously and intelligently to make happiness his portion; and, while cherishing or cheering his body with pleasures, he did not rush into them with the blind eagerness "whose violent property foredoes itself" and defeats its own ends. His "mind guided him wisely" amid his delights; his "wisdom helped him" to select, and combine, and vary them, to enhance and prolong their sweetness by a certain art and temperance in the enjoyment of them.

"He built his soul a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell;
He said, 'Oh, Soul, make merry and carouse.
Dear Soul, for all is well!'"

Alas, all was *not* well, though he took much pains to make and think it well. Even his choice delights soon palled upon his taste, and brought on conclusions of disgust. Even in his lordly pleasure-house he was haunted by the grim, menacing spectres which troubled him before it was built. In the harem, in the paradise he had planted, under the groves, beside the fountains, at the sumptuous banquet,—a bursting bubble, a falling leaf, an empty wine cup, a passing blush, sufficed to bring back the thought of the brevity and the emptiness of life. When he had run the

* "One such pleasure as this there was at Etam, Solomon's Belvedere, as Josephus informs us ('Antiq.' vii. 7, 3). Thither it was the custom of the king, he says, to resort when he made his morning excursions from the city, clad in a white garment, and driving his chariot, surrounded by his body-guard of young men in the flower of their age, clad in Tyrian purple, and with gold dust strewed upon their hair, so that their whole head sparkled when the sun shone upon it, and mounted upon horses from the royal stables, famed for their beauty and fleetness."—Dr. Perowne, *The Expositor*, First Series, vol. x.

† In speaking of the Persian revenue, Rawlinson says that besides a definite money payment, "a payment, the nature and amount of which were also fixed, had to be made in kind, each province being required to furnish that commodity, or those commodities, for which it was most celebrated,"—as, for example, grain, sheep, cattle, mules, fine breeds of horses, beautiful slaves.—"The Five Great Monarchies," vol. iv. chap. vii. p. 421.

* So Goethe's *Faust*, after having failed to solve the insoluble problems of life by study and research, "plunges deep in pleasure," that he "may thus still the burning thirst of passionate desire."

full career of pleasure, and turned to contemplate his delights and the labour they had cost him, he found that these also were vanity and vexation of spirit, that there was no "profit" in them, that they could not satisfy the deep, incessant craving of the soul for a true and lasting Good.

Is not his sad verdict as true as it is sad? We have not his wealth of resources. Nevertheless there may have been a time when our hearts were as intent on pleasure as was his. We may have pursued whatever sensuous, intellectual, or æsthetic excitements were open to us with a growing eagerness till we have lived in a whirl of craving and stimulating desire and indulgence, in which the claims of duty have been neglected and the rebukes of conscience unheeded. And if we have passed through this experience, if we have been carried for a time into this giddy round, have we not come out of it jaded, exhausted, despising ourselves for our folly, disgusted with what once seemed the very top and crown of delight? Do we not mourn, our after life through, over energies wasted and opportunities lost? Are we not sadder, if wiser, men for our brief frenzy? As we return to the sober duties and simple joys of life, do not we say to Mirth, "Thou art mad!" and to Pleasure, "What canst thou do for us?" Yes, our verdict is that of the Preacher, "Lo, this too is vanity!" *Non enim hilaritate, nec lascivia, nec visu, aut joco, comite levitatis, sed sæpe etiam tristes firmitate, et constantia sunt beati.**

It is characteristic of the philosophic temper of our Author, I think, that, after pronouncing Wisdom and Mirth vanities in which the true Good is not to be found, he does not at once

proceed to try a new experiment, but pauses to compare these two "vanities," and to reason out his preference of one over the other. *His* vanity is wisdom. For it is only in one respect that he puts mirth and wisdom on an equality, viz., that they neither of them are, or lead up to, the supreme Good. In all other respects he affirms wisdom to be as much better than pleasure as light is better than darkness, as much better as it is to have eyes that see the light than to be blind and walk in a constant gloom (vv. 12-14). It is because wisdom is a light and enables men to see that he accords it his preference. It is by the light of wisdom that he has learned the vanity of mirth, nay, the insufficiency of wisdom itself. But for that light he might still be pursuing pleasures which could not satisfy, or laboriously acquiring a knowledge which would only deepen his sadness. Wisdom had opened his eyes to see that he must seek the Good which gives rest and peace in other regions. He no longer goes on his Quest in utter blindness, with all the world before him where to choose, but with no indication of the course he should, or should not, take. He has already learned that two large provinces of human life will not yield him what he seeks, that he must expend no more of his brief day and failing energies on these.

Therefore wisdom is better than mirth. Nevertheless it is not best, nor can it remove the dejections of a thoughtful heart. Somewhere there is, there must be, that which is better still. For wisdom cannot explain to him why the same fate should befall both the sage and the fool (ver.

* Cicero, "De Fin.," Lib. II. Cap. 20.

15), nor can it abate the anger that burns within him against an injustice so obvious and flagrant. Wisdom cannot even explain why, even if the sage must die no less than the fool, both must be forgotten wellnigh as soon as they are gone (vv. 16, 17); nor can it soften the hatred of life and its labours which this lesser yet patent injustice has kindled in his heart. Nay, wisdom, for all so brightly as it shines, throws no light on an injustice which, if of lower degree, frets and perplexes his mind,—why a man who has laboured prudently and dexterously and has acquired great gains should, when he dies, leave all to one who has not laboured therein, without even the poor consolation of knowing whether he will be a wise man or an idiot (vv. 19-21). In short, the whole skein of life is in a dismal tangle which wisdom itself, dearly as he loves it, cannot unravel; and the tangle is that man has no fair "profit" from his labours, "since his task grieveth and vexeth him all his days, and even at night his heart hath no rest;" and when he dies he loses all his gains, such as they are, for ever, and cannot so much as be sure that his heir will be any the better for them. "This also is vanity" (vv. 22, 23).

And yet, good things are surely good, and there is a wise and gracious enjoyment of earthly delights. It is right that a man should eat and drink, and take a natural pleasure in his

The Conclusion.
ii. 24-26.

toils and gains. Who, indeed, has a stronger claim than the labourer himself to eat and enjoy the fruit of his labours? Still, even this natural enjoyment is the gift of God; apart from His blessing the heaviest toils will produce but a scanty harvest, and the faculty of enjoying that harvest may be lacking. It is lacking to the sinner; *his* task is to heap up gains which the good will inherit. But he that is good before God will have the gains of the sinner added to his own, with wisdom to enjoy both.* This, whatever appearances may sometimes suggest, is the law of God's giving: that the good shall have abundance, while the bad lack; that more shall be given to him who has wisdom to use what he has aright, while from him who is destitute of this wisdom, even that which he hath shall be taken away. Nevertheless even this wise use and enjoyment of temporal good does not and cannot satisfy the craving heart of man; even this, when it is made the ruling aim and chief good of life, is vexation of spirit.

Thus the First Act of the Drama closes with a negative. The moral problem is as far from being solved as at the outset. All we have learned is that one or two avenues along which we urge the Quest will not lead us to the end we seek. As yet the Preacher has only the *ad interim* conclusion to offer us, that both Wisdom and Mirth are good, though neither, nor both combined, is the supreme Good; that we are therefore to acquire wisdom and knowledge, and to blend pleasure with our toils; that we are to believe pleasure and wisdom to be the gifts of God, to believe also that they are bestowed, not

* This affirmation, so surprising at first sight, is also made by Job (chap. xxvii. vv. 13, 16), "This is the doom of the wicked man from God. . . . Though he heap up silver like dust, and gather robes as mire, that which he hath gathered shall the righteous wear, and the innocent shall divide his silver."

in caprice, but according to a law which deals out good to the good and evil to the evil. We shall have other opportunities of weighing and appraising his counsel—it is often repeated—and of seeing how it works into and forms part of Coheleth's final solution of the painful riddle of the earth, the baffling mystery of life.

SECOND SECTION.

THE QUEST OF THE CHIEF GOOD IN DEVOTION TO THE AFFAIRS OF BUSINESS.

ECCLESIASTES iii. 1-v. 20.

I. IF the true Good is not to be found in the School where Wisdom utters her voice, nor in the Garden in which Pleasure spreads her lures: may it not be found in the Market, in devotion to Business and Public Affairs? The Preacher will try this experiment also. He gives himself to study and consider it. But at the very outset he discovers that he is in the iron grip of immutable Divine ordinances, by which "seasons" are appointed for every undertaking under heaven (ver. 1), ordinances which derange man's best-laid schemes, and "shape his ends, rough-hew them how he will," that no one can do anything to purpose "apart from God," except by conforming to the ordinances, or laws, in which He has expressed His will (comp. chap. ii., vv. 24-26).

The time of birth, for instance, and the time of death, are ordained by a Power over which men have no control; they begin to be, and they cease to be, at hours whose stroke they can neither hasten nor retard. The season for sowing and the season for reaping are fixed with any reference to their wish; they must plant and gather in when the unchangeable laws of nature will permit (ver. 2). Even those violent deaths, and those narrow escapes from death, which seem most purely fortuitous, are predetermined; as are also the accidents which befall our abodes (ver. 3). So, again, if only because determined by these accidents, are the feelings with which we regard them, our weeping and our laughter, our mourning and our rejoicing (ver. 4). If we only clear a plot of ground from stones in order that we may cultivate it, or that we may fence it in with a wall; or if an enemy cast stones over our arable land to unfit it for uses of husbandry—a malignant act frequent in the East—and we have painfully to gather them out again: even this, which seems so purely within the scope of human free-will, is also within the scope of the Divine decrees—as are the very embraces we bestow on those dear to us, or withhold from them (ver. 5). The varying and unstable desires which prompt us to seek this object or that as earnestly as we afterwards carelessly cast it away, and the passions which impel us to rend our garments over our losses, and by-and-bye to sew up the rents not without some little wonder that we should ever have been so deeply moved by that which now sits so lightly on us; these passions and desires, which at one time strike us dumb with grief and so soon after make us voluble with joy, with all our fleeting

and easily-moved hates and loves, strifes and reconciliations, move within the circle of law, although they wear so lawless a look, and are obsequious to the fixed canons of Heaven (vv. 6-8). They travel their cycles; they return in their appointed order. The uniformity of nature is reproduced in the uniform recurrence of the chances and changes of human life; for in this, as in that, God repeats Himself, recalling the past (ver. 15). The thing that *is* is that which hath been, and that which will be. Social laws are as constant and as inflexible as natural laws. The social generalisations of modern science—as given, for instance, in Buckle's "History"—are but a methodical elaboration of the conclusion at which the Preacher here arrives.

Of what use, then, was it for men to "kick against the goads," to attempt to modify immutable ordinances? "Whatever God hath ordained continueth for ever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be taken from it" (ver. 14). Nay, why should we care to alter or modify the social order? Everything is beautiful and appropriate in its season, from birth to death, from war to peace (ver. 11). If we cannot find the satisfying Good in the events and affairs of life, that is not because we could devise a happier order for them, but because "God hath put *eternity* into our hearts" as well as time, and did not intend that we should be satisfied till we attain an eternal good. If only we "understood" that, if only we recognised God's design for us "from beginning to end," and suffered eternity no less than time to have its due of us, we should not fret ourselves in vain endeavours to change the unchangeable, or to find an enduring good in that which is fugitive and perishable. We should rejoice and do ourselves good all our brief life (ver. 12); we should eat and drink and take pleasure in our labours (ver. 13); we should feel that this faculty for innocently enjoying simple pleasures and wholesome toils is "a gift of God:" we should conclude that God had ordained that regular cycle and order of events which so often forestalls the wish and endeavour of the moment, in order that we should fear Him in place of relying on ourselves (ver. 14), and trust our future to Him who so wisely and graciously recalls the past.

But not only are our endeavours to find the "good" of our labours thwarted by the gracious, inflexible laws of the just God; they are often baffled by the in-justice of ungracious men. In the days of Coheleth, Iniquity sat in the seat of justice, wrestling all rules of equity to its base private ends (ver. 16). Unjust judges and rapacious satraps put the fair rewards of labour and skill and integrity in jeopardy, insomuch that if a man by industry and thrift, by a wise observance of Divine laws and by taking occasions as they rose, had acquired affluence, he was too often, in the expressive Eastern phrase, but as a sponge which any petty despot might squeeze. The frightful oppressions of the time were a heavy burden to the Hebrew Preacher. He brooded over them, seeking for aids to faith and comfortable words wherewith to solace the oppressed. For a moment he thought he had lit on the true comfort, "Well, well," he said within himself, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there

The Quest obstructed by Divine Ordinances. iii. 1-15.

And by Human Injustice and Perversity. iii. 16-iv. 3.

is a time for every thing and for every deed with Him" (ver. 17). Could he have rested in this thought, it would have been "a sovereign balm" to him, or indeed to any other Hebrew; although to us, who have learned to desire the redemption rather than the punishment of the wicked, their redemption *through* their inevitable punishments, the true comfort would still have been wanting. But he could not rest in it, could not hold it fast, and confesses that he could not. He lays his heart bare before us. We are permitted to trace the fluctuating thoughts and emotions which swept across it. No sooner has he whispered to his heart that God, who is at leisure from Himself and has endless time at his command, will visit the oppressors and avenge the oppressed, than his thoughts take a new turn, and he adds: "And yet God *may* have sifted the children of men only to shew them that they are no better than the beasts" (ver. 18): *this* may be his aim in all the wrongs by which they are tried. Repugnant as the thought is, it nevertheless fascinates him for the instant, and he yields to its wasting and degrading magic. He not only fears, suspects, thinks that man is no better than a beast; he is quite sure of it, and proceeds to argue it out. His argument is very sweeping, very sombre. "A mere chance is man, and the beast a mere chance." Both spring from a mere accident, no one can tell how, and have a blind hazard for a creator; and "both are subject to the same chance," or mischance, throughout their lives, all the decisions of their intelligence and will being overruled by the decrees of an inscrutable fate. Both perish under the same power of death, suffer the same pangs of dissolution, are taken at unawares by the same invisible yet resistless force. The bodies of both spring from the same dust, and moulder back into dust. Nay, "both have the same spirit;" and though vain man sometimes boasts that at death his spirit goeth upward, while that of the beast goeth downward, yet who can prove it? For himself, and in his present mood, Coheleth doubts, and even denies it. He is absolutely convinced that in origin and life and death, in body and spirit and final fate, man is as the beast is, and hath no advantage over the beast (vv. 19-21). And therefore he falls back on his old conclusion, though now with a sadder heart than ever, that man will do wisely, that, being so blind and having so dark a prospect, he cannot do more wisely than to take what pleasure and enjoy what good he can amid his labours. *If* he is a beast, *as* he is a beast, let him at least learn of the beasts that simple, tranquil enjoyment of the good of the passing moment, untroubled by any vexing presage of what is to come, in which it must be allowed that they are greater proficients than he (ver. 22).

Thus, after rising in the first fifteen verses of this Third Chapter, to an almost Christian height of patience, and resignation, and holy trust in the providence of God, Coheleth is smitten by the injustice and oppressions of man into the depths of a pessimistic materialism.

But now a new question arises. The Preacher's survey of human life has shaken his faith even in the conclusion which he has announced from the first, viz., that there is nothing better for a man than a quiet content, a busy cheerfulness, a tranquil enjoyment of the fruit of his toils. *This* at least he has supposed to be possi-

ble: but is it? All the activities, industries, tranquillities of life are jeopardised, now by the inflexible ordinances of Heaven, and again by the capricious tyranny of man. To this tyranny his fellow-countrymen are now exposed. They groan under its heaviest oppressions. As he turns and once more reflects (chap. iv. ver. 1) on their unalleviated and unfriended misery, he doubts whether content, or even resignation, can be expected of them. With a tender sympathy that lingers on the details of their unhappy lot, and deepens into a passionate and despairing melancholy, he witnesses their sufferings and "counts the tears" of the oppressed. With the emphasis of a Hebrew and an Oriental, he marks and emphasises the fact that "they had no comforter," that though "their oppressors were violent, yet they had no comforter." For throughout the East, and among the Jews to this day, the manifestation of sympathy with those who suffer is far more common and ceremonious than it is with us. Neighbours and acquaintances are expected to pay long visits of condolence; friends and kinsfolk will travel long distances to pay them. Their respective places and duties in the house of mourning, their dress, words, bearing, precedence, are regulated by an ancient and elaborate etiquette. And, strange as it may seem to us, these visits are regarded not only as gratifying tokens of respect to the dead, but as a singular relief and comfort to the living. To the Preacher and his fellow-captives, therefore, it would be a bitter aggravation of their grief that, while suffering under the most cruel oppressions of misfortune, they were compelled to forego the solace of these customary tokens of respect and sympathy. As he pondered their sad and unfriended condition, Coheleth—like Job, when his comforters failed him—is moved to curse his day. The dead, he affirms, are happier than the living,*—even the dead who died so long ago that the fate most dreaded in the East had befallen them, and the very *memory* of them had perished from the earth: while happier than either the dead, who have had to suffer in their time, or than the living, whose doom had still to be borne, were those who had never seen the light, never been born into a world all disordered and out of course (vv. 2, 3).†

* Xerxes, in his invasion of Greece, conceived the wish "to look upon all his host." A throne was erected for him on a hill near Abydos, sitting on which he looked down and saw the Hælléspont covered with his ships, and the vast plain swarming with his troops. As he looked, he wept; and when his uncle Artabanus asked him the cause of his tears, he replied: "There came upon me a sudden pity when I thought of the shortness of man's life, and considered that of all this host, so numerous as it is, not one will be alive when a hundred years are gone by." This is one of the most striking and best known incidents in the life of the Persian despot; but the rejoinder of Artabanus, though in a far higher strain, is less generally known. I quote it here as an illustration of the Preacher's mood. Said Artabanus: "And yet there are sadder things in life than that. Short as our time is, there is no man, whether it be here among this multitude or elsewhere, who is so happy as not to have felt the wish—I will not say once, but full many a time—that he were dead rather than alive. Calamities fall on us, sicknesses vex and harass us, and make life, short though it be, to appear long. *So death, through the wretchedness of our life, is a most sweet refuge to our race.*"—"Herodotus," Book VII. c. 46.

† So in Sophocles ("Oed. Col.," 1225) we read—I quote from Dear Plumptre's translation:

"Never to be at all
Excels all fame;
Quickly, next best, to pass
From whence we came."

This stinging sense of the miserable estate of his race has, however, diverted the Preacher from the conduct of the main argument he had in hand: to that he now returns (ver. 4). And now he argues: You cannot hope to get good fruit from a bad root. But the several industries in which you are tempted to seek "the chief good and market of your time" have a most base and evil origin; they "spring from man's jealous rivalry with his neighbour." Every man tries to outdo and to outsell his neighbours; to secure a larger business, to surround himself with a more profuse luxury, or to amass an ampler hoard of gold. This business life of yours is utterly selfish, and therefore utterly base. You are not content with a sufficient provision for simple wants. You do not seek your neighbour's good. You have no noble or patriotic aim. Your ruling intention is to enrich yourselves at the expense of neighbours who, in their turn, are *your* rivals rather than your neighbours, and who try to get the better of you just as you try to get the better of them. Can you hope to find the true Good in a life whose aims are so sordid, whose motives so selfish? The very sluggard who folds his hands in indolence so long as he has bread to eat is a wiser man than you; for he has at least his "handful of quiet," and knows some little enjoyment of life; while you, driven on by jealous competition and the eager cravings of insatiate desire, have neither leisure nor appetite for enjoyment: both your hands are full, indeed, but there is no quiet in them, only labour, labour, labour, with vexation of spirit (vv. 5, 6).

It is rendered
hopeless by the
base origin of
Human In-
dustries.
iv. 4-8.

So intense and selfish was this rivalry, increase of appetite growing by what it fed upon, so keen grew the desire to amass, that the Preacher paints a portrait, for which no doubt many a *Hebrew* might have sat, of a man—nay, rather, of a miser—who, though solitary and kinless, with not even a son or a brother to inherit his wealth, nevertheless hoards up riches to the close of his life; there is no end to his labours; he never can be rich enough to allow himself any enjoyment of his gains (vv. 7, 8).

Now a jealous rivalry culminating in mere avarice,—that surely is not the wisest or noblest spirit of which those are capable who devote themselves to affairs. Even "the idols of the market" may have a purer cult. Business, like Wisdom or Mirth, may neither be, nor contain, the supreme Good: still, like them, it is not in itself and of necessity an evil. There must be a better mode of devotion to it than this selfish and greedy one; and such a mode Coheleth, before he pursues his argument to a close, pauses to point out. As if anticipating a modern theory which grows in favour with the wiser sort of mercantile men, he suggests that co-operation—of course I use the word in its etymological rather than in its technical sense—should be substituted for competition. "Two are better than one," he argues; "union is better than isolation; conjoint labour brings the larger reward" (ver. 9). To bring his suggestion home to the business bosom of men, he uses five illustrations, four of which have a strong Oriental colouring.

Yet these are
capable of a
nobler Motive
and Mode.
iv. 9-16.

The first is that of two pedestrians (ver. 10); if one should fall—and such an accident, owing

to the bad roads and long cumbrous robes common in the East, was by no means infrequent—the other is ready to set him on his feet; while, if he is alone, the least that can befall him is that his robe will be trampled and bemired before he can gather himself up again. In the second illustration (ver. 11), our two travellers, wearied by their journey, sleep together at its close. Now in Syria the nights are often keen and frosty, and the heat of the day makes men more susceptible to the cold. The sleeping-chambers, moreover, have only unglazed lattices which let in the frosty air as well as the welcome light; the bed is commonly a simple mat, the bedclothes only the garments worn through the day. And therefore the natives huddle together for the sake of warmth. To lie alone was to lie shivering in the chill night air. The third illustration (ver. 12) is also taken from the East. Our two travellers, lying snug and warm on their common mat, buried in slumber, that "dear repose for limbs with travel tired," were very likely to be disturbed by thieves who had dug a hole through the clay walls of the house, or crept under the tent, to carry off what they could. These thieves, always on the alert for travellers, are marvellously supple, rapid, and silent in their movements; but as the traveller, aware of his danger, commonly puts his "bag of needments" or valuables under his head, it does sometimes happen that the deftest thief will rouse him by withdrawing it. If one of our two wayfarers was thus aroused, he would call on his comrade for help, and between them the thief would stand a poor chance; but the solitary traveller, suddenly roused from sleep, with no helper at hand, might very easily stand a worse chance than the thief. The fourth illustration (ver. 12) is that of the threefold cord—three strands twisted into one, which, as we all know, English no less than Hebrew, is much more than three times as strong as any one of the separate strands.

But in the fifth and most elaborate illustration (vv. 13, 14), we are once more carried back to the East. The slightest acquaintance with Oriental history will teach us how uncertain is the tenure of royal power; how often it has happened that a prisoner has been led from a dungeon to a throne, and a prince suddenly deposed and reduced to impotence and penury. Coheleth supposes such a case. On the one hand, we have a king old, but not venerable, since, long as he has lived, he has not "even yet learned to accept admonition;" he has led a solitary, selfish, suspicious life, secluded himself in his harem, surrounded himself with a troop of flattering courtiers and slaves. On the other hand, we have the poor but wise young man, "the affable youth," who has lived with all sorts and conditions of men, acquainted himself with their habits and wants and desires, and conciliated their regard. His growing popularity alarms the old despot and his minions. He is cast into prison. His wrongs and sufferings endear him to the wronged and suffering people. By a sudden outbreak of popular wrath, by a revolution such as often sweeps through Eastern states, he is set free, and led from the prison to the throne, although he was once so poor that none would do him reverence. This is the picture in the mind's eye of the Preacher; and, as he contemplates it, he rises into a kind of prophetic rapture, and cries, "I see—I see all the living

who walk under the sun flocking to the youth who stands up in the old king's stead; there is no end to the multitude of the people over whom he ruleth!" (ver. 15).

By these graphic illustrations Coheleth sets forth the superiority of the sociable over the solitary and selfish temper, of union over isolation, of the neighbourly goodwill which leads men to combine for common ends over the jealous rivalry which prompts them to take advantage of each other, and to labour each for himself alone.

But even as he urges this better, happier temper on men occupied with business and public affairs, even as he contemplates its brightest illustration in the youthful prisoner whose winning and sociable qualities have lifted him to a throne, the old mood of melancholy comes back on him; there is the familiar pathetic break in his voice as he concludes (ver. 16), that even this wise youth, who wins all hearts for a time, will soon be forgotten; that "even this," for all so hopeful as it looks, "is vanity and vexation of spirit."

A profound gloom rests on the second act of this Drama. It has already taught us that we are helpless in the grip of laws which we had no voice in making; that we often lie at the mercy of men whose mercy is but a caprice; that in our origin and end, in body and spirit, in faculty and prospect, in our lives and pleasures, we are no better than the beasts which perish: that the avocations into which we plunge, and amid which we seek to forget our sad estate, spring from our jealousy the one of the other, and tend to a lonely miserliness without use or charm. The Preacher's familiar conclusion—"Be tranquil, be content, enjoy as much as you can"—has grown doubtful to him. He has seen the brightest promise come to nought. In a new and profounder sense, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

But, though passing through a great darkness, he sees, and reflects, some little light. Even when facts seem to contradict it, he holds fast to the conclusion that wisdom is better than folly, and kindness better than selfishness, and to do good, even though you lose by it, better than to do evil and gain by it. His faith wavers only for a moment; it never wholly loosens its hold. And, in the fifth chapter, the light grows, though even here the darkness does not altogether disappear. We are sensible that the twilight in which we stand is not that of evening, which will deepen into night, but that of morning, which will shine more and more until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in the calm heaven of patient tranquil hearts.

The men of affairs are led from the vocations of the Market and the intrigues of the Divan into the House of God. Our first glance at the worshippers is not hopeful or inspiring. For here are men who offer sacrifices in lieu of obedience; and here are men whose prayers are a voluble repetition of phrases which run far in advance of their limping thoughts and desires: and there are men quick to make vows

So also a
happier and
more effective
Method of
Worship is
open to Men;
v. 1-7.

in moments of peril, but slow to redeem them when the peril is past. At first the House of God looks very like a House of Merchandise, in which brokers and traders drive a traffic as dishonest as any that disgraces the Exchange. But while the merchants and politicians stand criticising the conduct of the worshippers, the Preacher turns upon them and shows them that *they* are the worshippers whom they criticise; that he has held up a glass in which they see themselves as others see them; that it is *they* who vow and do not pay, *they* who hurry on their mouths to utter words which their hearts do not prompt, *they* who take the roundabout course of sinning and sacrificing for sin instead of that plain road of obedience which leads straight to God.

But what comfort for them is there in that? How should it help them, to be beguiled into condemning themselves? Truly there would not be much comfort in it did not the compassionate Preacher forthwith disclose the secret of this dishonest worship, and give them counsels of amendment. He discloses the secret in two verses (vv. 3 and 7), which have much perplexed the readers of this Book. He there explains that just as a mind harassed by much occupation and the many cares it breeds cannot rest even at night, but busies itself in framing wild disturbing dreams, so also is it with the foolish worshipper who, for want of thought and reverence, pours out before God a multitude of unsifted and unconsidered wishes in a multitude of words. In effect he says to them: "You men of affairs often get little help or comfort from the worship of God because you come to it with preoccupied hearts, just as a man gets little comfort from his bed because his brain, jaded and yet excited by many cares, will not suffer him to rest. Hence it is that you promise more than you perform, and utter prayers more devout than any honest expression of your desires would warrant, and offer sacrifices to avoid the charge and trouble of obedience to the Divine laws. And as I have shown you a more excellent way of transacting business than the selfish grasping mode to which you are addicted, so also I will show you a more excellent style of worship. Go to the House of God 'with a straight foot,' a foot trained to walk in the path of obedience. Keep your heart, set a watch over it, lest it should be diverted from the simple and devout homage it should pay. Do not urge and press it to a false emotion, to a strained and insincere mood. Let your words be few and reverent when you speak to the Great King. Do not vow except under the compulsion of steadfast resolves, and pay your vows even to your own hurt when once they are made. Do not anger God, or the angel of God who, as you believe, presides over the altar, with idle unreal talk and idle half-meant resolves, making vows of which you afterwards repent and do not keep, pleading that you made them in error or infirmity. But in all the exercises of your worship show a holy fear of the Almighty; and then, under the worst oppressions of fortune and the heaviest calamities of time, you shall find the House of God a *Sanctuary*, and his worship a strength, a consolation, and a delight." This, surely, was very wholesome counsel for men of business in hard times.

Not content with this, however, the Preacher

goes on to show how, when they returned from the House of God to the common round of life, and were once more exposed to its miseries and distractions, there were certain comfortable and sustaining thoughts on which they might stay their spirits. To the worship of the Sanctuary he would have them add a strengthening trust in the Providence of God. That Providence was expressed, as in other ordinances, so also in these two:

And a more helpful and consolatory Trust in the Divine Providence.
v. 8-17.

First; whatever oppressions and perversions of justice and equity there were in the land (ver. 8), still the judges and satraps who oppressed them were not supreme; there was an official hierarchy in which superior watched over superior, and if justice were not to be had of the one, it might be had of another who was above him; if it were not to be had of any, no, not even of the king himself, there was this reassuring conviction that, in the last resort, even the king was "the servant of the field" (ver. 9), *i. e.*, was dependent on the wealth and produce of the land, and could not, therefore, be unjust with impunity, or push his oppressions too far lest he should decrease his revenue or depopulate his realm. This was "the advantage" the people had; and if it were in itself but a slight advantage to this man or that, clearly it was a great advantage to the body politic; while as an indication of the Providence of God, of the care with which He had arranged for the general well-being, it was full of consolation.

The second fact, or class of facts, in which they might recognise the gracious care of God was this,—That the unjust judges and wealthy rapacious "lords" who oppressed them had very much less satisfaction in their fraudulent gains than they might suppose. God had so made men that injustice and selfishness defeated their own ends, and those who lived for wealth, and would do evil to acquire it, made but a poor bargain after all. "He that *loveth* silver is never satisfied with silver, nor he that *clings* to wealth with what it yields" (ver. 10). "When riches increase, they increase that consume them"—dependents, parasites, slaves, flock around the man who rises to wealth and place. He cannot eat and drink more, or enjoy more, than when he was a man simply well-to-do in the world; the only advantage he has is that he sees others consume what he has acquired at so great a cost (ver. 11).* He cannot know the sweet refreshing sleep of husbandmen weary with toil (ver. 12), for his heart is full of care and apprehension. Robbers may drive off his flocks, or "lift" his cattle; his investments may fail, or his secret hoard be plundered; he must trust much to servants, and they may be unfaithful to their trust; his official superiors may ruin him with the bribes they extort, or the prince himself may want a sponge to squeeze. If none of these evils befall him, he may apprehend, and

have cause to apprehend, that his heir longs for his death, and will prove little better than a fool, wasting in wanton riot what *he* has amassed with much painful toil (vv. 13, 14). And, in any event, he cannot take his wealth with him on his last journey (vv. 15, 16). So that, naturally enough, he is much perturbed, and "hath great vexation and grief" (ver. 17), cannot sleep for his apprehensive care for his "abundance;" and at last must go out of the world as bare and unprovided as he came into it.* He "labours for the wind," and reaps what he has sown. Was such a life, mounting to such a close, a thing to long for and toil for? Was it worth while to hurl oneself against the adamant laws of Heaven and risk the oppressions of earth, to injure one's neighbours, to sink into an insincere and distracted worship, and a weakening distrust of the providence of God, in order to spend anxious toilsome days and sleepless nights, and at last to go out of the world naked of all but guilt, and rich in nothing but the memory of frauds and wrongs? Might not even a captive or a slave, whose sleep was sweetened by toil, and who, from his trust in God and the sacred delights of honest worship, gathered strength to endure all the oppressions of the time, and to enjoy whatever alleviations and innocent pleasures were vouchsafed him—might not even he be a wiser, happier man than the despot at whose caprice he stood?

For himself Coheleth has a very decided opinion on this point. He is quite sure that his first conclusion is sound, though for a moment he had questioned its soundness, and that a quiet, cheerful, and obedient heart is greater riches than the wealthiest estate. With all the emphasis of renewed and now immovable conviction he declares, Behold, that which I have said holds good; it is well for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labours through the brief day of his life. And I have also said—and this too is true—that a man to whom God hath given riches and wealth—for even a rich man may be a good man and use his wealth wisely—if He hath also enabled him to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour—this too is a most Divine gift. He does not fret over the brevity of his life; it is not much, or often, or sadly in his thoughts: for he knows that the joy his heart takes in the toils and pleasures of life is approved by God, or even, as the phrase seems to mean, corresponds in some measure with the joy of God Himself; that his tranquil enjoyment is a reflection of the Divine peace.

II.† There are not many Englishmen who devote themselves solely or mainly to the acquisition of Wisdom, and who, that they may teach

* Compare Psalm xlix. vv. 16, 17:

Be not afraid though one be made rich,
Or if the glory of his house be increased:
For he shall carry away nothing with him when he dieth:
Neither shall his pomp follow him.

* Ginsburg quotes a capital illustration of this verse from the dialogue of Pheraulas and Sacian (Xenophon, "Cyrop." viii. 3): "Do you think, Sacian, that I live with more pleasure the more I possess? . . . By having this abundance I gain merely this, that I have to guard more, to distribute more to others, and have the trouble of taking care of more; for a great many attendants now demand of me their food, their drink, and their clothes. Whosoever, therefore, is greatly pleased with the possession of riches will, be assured, feel much annoyed at the expenditure of them."

† In commenting on Sections II and III. of this Book I found that both the exposition of the sacred text and the application of its lessons to the details of modern life would gain in force by being handled separately. The second part of each of these chapters consists mainly, therefore, of an exhortation based on the previous exposition, the marginal notes indicating the passages of Holy Writ on which these exhortations are based.

the children of men that which is good, live laborious days, withdrawing from the general pursuit of wealth and scorning the lures of ease and self-indulgence; such men, indeed, are but a small minority in any age or land. Nor do those who give themselves exclusively to the pursuit of Pleasure constitute more than a small and miserable class, though most of us have wasted on it days that we could ill spare. But when the Hebrew Preacher, having followed his quest of the supreme Good in Pleasure and Wisdom, turns to the affairs of Business—and I use that term as including both commerce and politics—he enters a field of action and inquiry with which we are nearly all familiar, and can hardly fail to speak words which will touch us close home. For, whatever else we may or may not be, we are most of us among the worshippers of the great god Traffic—a god whose wholesome, benignant face too often lowers and darkens, or ever we are aware, into the sordid and malignant features of Mammon.

Now in dealing with this broad and momentous province of human life the Preacher exhibits the candour and the temperance which marked his treatment of Wisdom and Mirth. Just as he would not suffer us to think of Wisdom as in itself an evil, nor of Pleasure as an evil, so neither will he allow us to think of Business as essentially and of necessity an evil. This, like those, may be abused to our hurt; but none the less they may all be used, and were meant to be used, for our own and our neighbours' good. Pursued in the right method, from the right motive, with the due moderation and reserve, Business, as he is careful to point out, besides bringing other great advantages, may be a new bond of union and brotherhood: it develops intercourse among men and races of men, and should develop sympathy, goodwill, and a mutual helpfulness. Nevertheless, thrift may degenerate into miserliness, and the honest industry of content into a dishonest eagerness for an excessive devotion to it. These degenerate undue gains, and a wise attention to business into tendencies had struck their roots deep into the Hebrew mind of his day, and brought forth many bitter fruits. The Preacher describes and denounces them; he lays an axe to the very roots of these evil growths: but it is only that he may clear a space for the fairer and more wholesome growths which sprang beside them, and of which they were the wild bastard offshoots.

Throughout this second section of the Book, his subject is excessive devotion to Business, and the correctives to it which his experience enables him to suggest.

1. His handling of the subject is very thorough and complete. Men of business might do worse than get the lessons he here teaches by heart. According to him, their excessive devotion to affairs springs from a "jealous rivalry"; it tends to form in them a grasping covetous temper which can never be satisfied, to produce a materialistic scepticism of all that is noble, spiritual, aspiring in thought and action, to render their worship formal and insincere, and, in general, to incapacitate them for any quiet happy enjoyment of their life. This is his diagnosis of their disease, or of that diseased tendency which, if it be for the most part latent in them, always threatens to become pronounced and to infect all healthy conditions of the soul.

(a) Let us glance once more at the several symptoms we have already heard him discuss, and consider whether or not they accord with the results of our own observation and experience. Is it true, then—or, rather, is it not true—that our devotion to business is becoming excessive and exhausting, and that this devotion springs mainly from our jealous rivalry and competition with each other? If, some two or three and twenty centuries ago, the Jews were bent every man on outdoing and outselling his neighbour; if his main ambition was to amass greater wealth or to secure a larger business than his competitors, or to make a handsomer show before the world; if in the urgent pursuit of this ambition he held his neighbours not as neighbours, but as unscrupulous rivals, keen for gain at his expense and to rise by his fall; if, to reach his end, he was willing to get up early and go late to rest, to force all his energies into an injurious activity and strain them close to the snapping point: if this were what a Jew of that time was like, might you not easily take it for a portrait of many an English merchant, manufacturer, lawyer, or politician? Is it not as accurate a delineation of our life as it could be of any ancient form of life? If it be, as I think it is, we have grave need to take the Preacher's warning. We gravely need to remember that the stream cannot rise above its source, nor the fruit be better than the root from which it grows; that the business ardour which has its origin in a base and selfish motive can only be a base and selfish ardour. When men gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles, then, but not before, we may look to find a satisfying good in "all the toil and all the dexterity in toil" which spring from this "jealous rivalry of the one with the other."

Devotion to
Business
springs from
Jealous Competition:
iv. 4.*

(b) Nor, in the face of facts patent to the most cursory observer, can we deny that this eager successful conduct of business and excessive devotion to the tends to produce a grasping, covetous temper which, however much it has gained, is for ever seeking more. It is not only true that the stream cannot rise above its source; it is also true that the stream *will* run downward, and must inevitably contract many pollutions from the lower levels on which it declines. The ardour which impels men to devote themselves with eager intensity to the labours of the Market may often have an origin as pure as that of the stream which bubbles up on the hills, amid grass and ferns, and runs tinkling along its clear and rocky channels, setting its labours to a happy music, singing its low sweet song to the sweet listening air. But as it runs on, if it swell in volume and power, it also *sinks* and grows foul. Bent at first on acquiring the means to support a widowed mother, or to justify him in taking a wife, or to provide for his children, or to win an honourable place in his neighbours' eyes, or to achieve the chance of self-culture and self-development, or to serve some public and worthy end, the man of business and affairs too often suffers himself to become

It tends to form
a Covetous
Temper;
iv. 8.

* Coheleth's description is so true and pertinent, it hits so many of our modern faults and sins, that I am obliged to cite my authority for every paragraph lest I should be suspected of putting a private and personal interpretation on these ancient words.

more and more absorbed in his pursuits. He conceives larger schemes, is drawn into more perilous enterprises, and advances through these to fresh openings and opportunities, until at last, long after his original ends are compassed and forgotten, he finds himself possessed by the mere craving to extend his labours, resources, influence, if not by the mere craving to amass—a craving which often “teareth” and “tormenteth” him, but which can only be exorcised by an exertion of spiritual force which would leave him half dead. “He has no one with him, not even a son or a brother;” the dear mother or wife is long since dead; his children, to use his own detestable phrase, are “off his hands”; the public good has slipped from his memory and aims: but still “there is no end to all his labours, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches.” Coheleth speaks of one such man: alas, of how many such might we speak!

(c) The “speculation” in the eye of business men is not commonly of a philosophic cast, and therefore we do not look to find them *arguing* themselves into the materialism which infected the Hebrew Preacher as he contemplated them and their blind devotion to their idol. They are far, perhaps very far, from thinking that in the body and spirit, in origin and end, man is no better than the beast, a creature of the same accident and subject to “the same chance.” But though they do not reason out a conclusion so sombre and depressing, do they not practically acquiesce in it? If it is far from their thoughts, do they not *live* in its close neighbourhood? Their mind, like the dyer’s hand, is subdued to that it works in. Accustomed to think mainly of material interests, their character is materialised. They are disposed to weigh all things—truth, righteousness, the motives and aims of nobler men—in the scales of the market, and can very hardly believe that they should attach any grave value to aught which will not lend itself to their coarse handling. In their judgment, mental culture, or the graces of moral character, or single-hearted devotion to lofty ends, are not worthy to be compared with a full purse or large possessions. They regard as little better than a fool, of whom it is very kind of them to take a little care, the man who has thrown away what they call “his chances,” in order that he may learn wisdom or do good. Giving, perhaps, a cheerful and unforced accord to the current moral maxims and popular creed, they permit neither to rule their conduct. If they do not say, “Man is no better than a beast,” they carry themselves as if he were no better, as though he had no instincts or interests above those of the thrifty ant, or the cunning beaver, or the military locust, or the insatiable leech—although they are both surprised and affronted when one is at the pains to translate their deeds into words. Judged by their deeds, they *are* sceptics and materialists, since they have no vital faith in that which is spiritual and unseen. They have found “the life of their hands,” and they are content with it. Give them whatever furnishes the senses, whatever in them holds by sense, and they will cheerfully let all else go. But such a materialism as this is far more injurious, far more likely to be fatal, than that which reflects, and argues, and utters itself in words, and refutes itself by the very powers which it employs. With them the

malady has struck inward, and is beyond the reach of cure save by the most searching and drastic remedies.

(d) But now if, like Coheleth, we follow these men to the Temple, what is the scene that meets our eye? In the English Temple, I fear, that which would first strike an unaccustomed observer would be the fact that very few men of business are there. They are “conspicuous by their absence,” or, at best, noted for an only occasional attendance. The Hebrew Temple was crowded with men; in the English Temple it is the other sex which predominates. But glance at the men who are there? Do you detect no signs of weariness and perfunctoriness? Do you hear no vows which will never be paid, and which they do not intend to pay even when they make them? no prayers which go beyond any honest and candid expression of their desires? Do you not feel and know that many of them are making an unwilling sacrifice to the decencies and the proprieties, instead of worshipping God the Spirit in spirit and nerving themselves for the difficulties of obedience to the Divine law? Listen: they are saying, “Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we bless Thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but *above all* for Thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.” But *are* these ineffable spiritual benefits “above all” else to them? Do they care for “the means of grace” as much even as for the state of the market, or for “the hope of glory” as much as for success or promotion? Which is most in their thoughts, their lives, their aspirations, for which will they take most pains and make most sacrifices—for what *they* mean by the beautiful phrase “all the blessings of this life,” or for that sacred and crowning act of the Divine Mercy, “the redemption,” in which God has once for all revealed His fatherly forgiving love?

What is it that makes their worship formal and insincere? It is the very cause which, as the Preacher tells us, produced the like evil effect upon the Jews. They come into the Temple with preoccupied hearts. Their thoughts are distracted by the cares of life even as they bend in worship. And hence even the most sacred words turn to “idle talk” on their lips, as remote from the true feeling of the moment as “the multitude of dreams” which haunt the night; they utter fervent prayers without any due sense of their meaning, or any hearty wish to have them granted.

(e) Now surely a life so thick with perils, so beset with temptations, should have a very large and certain reward to offer. But has it? For one, Coheleth thinks it has not. In his judgment, according to his experience, instead of making a man happier even in this present time, to which it limits his thoughts and aims, it robs him of all quiet and happy enjoyment of his life. And, mark, it is not the unsuccessful man of business, who might naturally feel sore and aggrieved, but the successful man, the man who has made a fortune and prospered in his schemes, whom the Preacher describes as having lost all faculty of enjoying his gains. Even the man who has wealth and abundance, so that

To make Worship Formal and Insincere.
V. 1-7.

To produce a Materialistic Scepticism;
iii. 18-21.

And to take from Life its Quiet and Innocent Enjoyments.
V. 10-17.

his soul lacketh nothing of all that he desireth, is placed before us as the slave of unsatisfied desire and constant apprehension. Both his hands are so full of labour that he cannot lay hold on quiet. Though he loves silver so well, and has so much of it, he is not satisfied therewith; his riches yield him no certain and abiding delight. And how can he be in "happy plight" who is

"debarred the benefit of rest?

When day's oppression is not eased by night,
But day by night, and night by day, oppress'd?
And each, though enemies to either's reign,
Do in consent shake hands to torture him."

The sound sleep of humble contented labour is denied him. He is haunted by perpetual apprehensions that "there is some ill a-brewing to his rest," that evil in some dreaded shape will befall him. He doubts "the filching age will steal his treasure." He knows that when he is called hence he can carry away nothing in his hand; all his gains must be left to his heir, who may either turn out a wanton fool or be crushed and degraded by the burden and temptations of a wealth for which he has not laboured. And hence, amid all his toils and gains, even the most prosperous and successful man suspects that he has been "labouring for the wind" and may reap the whirlwind: "he is much perturbed, and hath vexation and grief."

Is the picture overdrawn? Is not the description as true to modern experience as to that of "the antique world"? Shakespeare, who is our great English authority on the facts of human experience, thought it quite as true. His Merchant of Venice has argosies on every sea; and two of his friends, hearing him confess that sadness makes such a want-wit of him that he has much ado to know himself, tell him that his "mind is tossing on the ocean" with his ships. They proceed to discuss the natural effects of having so many enterprises on hand. One says:

"Believe me, Sir, had I such venture forth,
The better part of my affections would
Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still
Plucking the grass, to know where sits the wind;
Peering in maps for ports, and piers, and roads;
And every object that might make me fear
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt
Would make me sad."

And the other adds:

"My wind, cooling my broth,
Would blow me to an ague, when I thought
What harm a wind too great at sea might do.
I should not see the sandy hour-glass run,
But I should think of shallows and of flats,
And see my wealthy Andrew dock'd in sand,
Vailing her high-top lower than her ribs
To kiss her burial. Should I go to church
And see the holy edifice of stone,
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
Which, touching but my gentle vessel's side,
Would scatter all her spices in the stream;
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks;
And, in a word, but even now worth this,
And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought
To think on this; and shall I lack the thought
That such a thing bechanced would make me sad?"

"Abundance suffereth not the rich to sleep;" the thought that his "riches may perish in some unlucky adventure" rings a perpetual alarm in his ears: "all his days he eateth in darkness, and is much perturbed, and hath vexation and grief." These are the words of the Hebrew Preacher: are not our own great poet's words an expressive commentary on them, an absolute confirmation of them, covering them point by point? And shall we envy the wealthy merchant whose two hands are thus "full of labour and

vexation of spirit"? Is not "the husbandman whose sleep is sweet, whether he eat little or much," better off than he? Nay, has not even the sluggard who, so long as he hath meat, foldeth his hands in quiet, a truer enjoyment of his life?

Of course Coheleth does not mean to imply that every man of business degenerates into a miserly sceptic, whose worship is a formulated hypocrisy and whose life is haunted with saddening apprehensions of misfortune. No doubt there were then, as there are now, many men of business who were wise enough to "take pleasure in all their labours," to cast their burden of care on Him in whose care stand both tomorrow and to-day; men to whom worship was a calming and strengthening communion with the Father of their spirits, and who advanced, through toil, to worthy or even noble ends. He means simply that these are the perils to which all men of business are exposed, and into which they fall so soon as their devotion to its affairs grows excessive. "Make business, and success in business, your chief good, your ruling aim, and you will come to think of your neighbours as selfish rivals; you will begin to look askance on the lofty spiritual qualities which refuse to bow to the yoke of Mammon; your worship will sink into an insecure formalism; your life will be vexed and saddened with fears which will strangle the very faculty of tranquil enjoyment:" this is the warning of the Preacher; a warning of which our generation, in such urgent sinful haste to be rich, stands in very special need.

2. But what checks, what correctives, what remedies, would the Preacher have us apply to the diseased tendencies of the time? How shall men of business save themselves from being absorbed in its interests and affairs?

(a) Well, the very sense of danger to which they are exposed—a danger so insidious, so profound, so fatal—should surely induce caution and a wary self-control. The symptoms of the disease are described that we may judge whether or not we are infected by it; its dreadful issues that, if infected, we may study a cure. The man who loves riches is placed before us that we may learn what he is really like—that he is not the careless happy being we often assume him to be. We see him decline on the low bare levels of covetousness and materialism, hypocrisy and fear; and, as we look, the Preacher turns upon us with, "There, *that* is the slave of Mammon in his habit as he lives. Do you care to be like that? Will you break your heart unless you are allowed to assume his heavy and degrading burden?"

This is one help to a wise content with our lot; but he has many more at our service, and notably this,—that an undue devotion to the toils of business is contrary to the will, the design, the providence of God. God, he argues, has fixed a time for every undertaking under heaven, and has made each of them beautiful in its season, but only then. By his kindly ordinances He has sought to divert us from an injurious excess in toil. Our sowing and our reaping, our time of rest and

The Correctives of this Devotion are a Sense of its Perils;
v. 10-17.

And the Conviction that it is opposed to the Will of God as expressed in the Ordinances of his Providence,
iii. 1-8.

our time for work, the time to save and the time to spend, the time to gain and the time to lose,—all these, with all the fluctuating feelings they excite in us: in short, our whole life, from the cradle to the grave, is under, or should be under, law to Him. It is only when we violate His gracious ordinances,—working when we should be at rest, waking when we should sleep, saving when we should spend, weeping over losses which are real gains, or laughing over gains which will prove to be losses,—that we run into excess, and break up the peaceful order and tranquil flow of the life which He designed for us.

Because we will not be obsequious to the ordinances of His wisdom, He permits us to meet a new check in the caprice and injustice of man—making even these to praise Him by subserving our good. If we do not suffer the violent oppressions which drew tears from the Preacher's fellow-captives, we nevertheless stand very much at the mercy of our neighbours in so far as our outward haps are concerned. Unwise human laws or an unjust administration of them, or the selfish rapacity of individual men—brokers who rig the market; bankers whose long prayers are a pretence under cloak of which they rob widows and orphans, and sometimes *make* them; bankrupts for whose wounds the Gazette has a singular power of healing, since they come out of it "sunder" men than they went in: these are only some of the instruments by which the labours of the diligent are shorn of their due reward. And we are to take these checks as correctives, to find in the losses which men inflict the gifts of a gracious God. He permits us to suffer these and the like disasters lest our hearts should be overmuch set on getting gain. He graciously permits us to suffer them that, seeing how often the wicked thrive (in a way and for a time) on the decay of the upright, we may learn that there is something better than wealth, more enduring, more satisfying, and may seek that higher good.

Nay, going to the very root of the matter and expounding its whole philosophy, the Preacher teaches us that wealth, however great and greatly used, *cannot* satisfy men, since God has "*put eternity into their hearts*" as well as time: and how should all the kingdoms of a world that must soon pass content those who are to live for ever? * This saying, "God has put *eternity* into their hearts," is one of the most profound in the whole Book, and one of the most beautiful and suggestive. What it means is that, even if a man would confine his aims and desires within "the bounds and coasts of Time," he cannot do it. The very structure of his nature forbids it. For time, with all that it inherits, sweeps by him like a torrent, so that, if he would secure any lasting good, he *must* lay hold of that which is eternal. We may well call this world, for all so solid as it looks, "a perishing world;" for, like our own bodies, it is in a perpetual flux, perishing every moment

* M. de Lamennais—the founder of the most religious school of thinkers in modern France, from whom such men as Count Montalembert, Père Lacordaire, and Maurice Guérin, drew their earliest inspiration—asks, "Do you know what it is that makes men the most suffering of all creatures?" and replies, "It is that *he has one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite, and that he is torn asunder*, not by four horses, as in the horrible old times, but *between two worlds*."

In the Wrongs which He permits Men to inflict upon us; iii. 16-iv. 3.

But above all, in the immortal Cravings which He has quickened in the Soul. iii. 11.

that it may live a little longer, and must soon come to an end. But we, in our true selves, we who dwell inside the body and use its members as the workman uses his tools, how can we find a satisfying good whether in the body or in the world which is akin to it? *We* want a good as lasting as ourselves. Nothing short of that can be our chief good, or inspire us with a true content.

"Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend:

and we might as well think to build a stable habitation on the waves which break upon the pebbled shore as to find an enduring good in the sequent minutes which carry us down the stream of time. It is only because we do not understand this "work of God" in putting eternity into our hearts and therefore making it impossible for us to be content with anything less than an eternal good: it is because, plunged in the flesh and its cares and delights, we forget the grandeur of our nature, and are tempted to sell our immortal birthright for a mess of pottage which, however much we enjoy it to-day, will leave us hungry to-morrow: it is only, I say, because we fail to understand this work of God "from beginning to end," that we ever delude ourselves with the hope of finding in aught the earth yields a good in which we can rest.

(b) A noble philosophy this, and pregnant with practical counsels of great value. For if, as we close our study of this Section of the Book, we ask, "What good advice does the Preacher offer that we can take and act upon?" we shall find that he gives us at least three serviceable maxims.

To all men of business conscious of their special dangers and anxious to avoid them, he says, first: Replace the competition which springs from your jealous and selfish rivalry, with the co-operation which is born of sympathy and breeds goodwill. "Two are better than one. Union is better than isolation. Conjoint labour has the greater reward." Instead of seeking to take advantage of your neighbours, try to help them. Instead of standing alone, associate with your fellows. Instead of aiming at purely selfish ends, pursue your ends in common. Indeed the wise Hebrew Preacher anticipates the Golden Rule to a remarkable extent, and, in effect, bids us love our neighbour as ourself, look on his things as well as our own, and do to all men as we would that they should do to us.

His second maxim is: Replace the formality of your worship with a reverent and steadfast sincerity. Keep your foot when you go to the House of God. Put obedience before sacrifice. Do not hurry on your mouth to the utterance of words which transcend the desires of your heart. Be not one of those who

Practical Maxims deduced from this View of the Business-life.

A Maxim on Co-operation. iv. 9-16.

A Maxim on Worship. v. 1-7.

"Words for virtue take,
As though mere wood a shrine would make." *

* Horace, "Ep." 6, Lib. I:
"Virtutem verba putant, ut
Lucum ligna."

Do not come into the Temple with a pre-occupied spirit, a spirit distracted with thoughts that travel different ways. Realise the presence of the Great King, and speak to Him with the reverence due to a King. Keep the vows you have made in His house after you have left it. Seek and serve Him with all your hearts, and ye shall find rest to your souls.

And his last maxim is: Replace your grasping self-sufficiency with a constant trust in the fatherly providence of God. If you see oppression or suffer wrong, if your schemes are thwarted and your enterprises fail, you need not therefore lose the quiet repose and settled peace which spring from a sense of duty discharged and the undisturbed possession of the main good of life. God is over all, and rules all the undertakings of man, giving each its season and place, and causing all to work together for the good of the loving and trustful heart. Trust in Him, and you shall feel, even though you cannot prove,

A Maxim on
Trust in God
v. 8-17.

"That every cloud that spreads above,
And velleth love, itself is love.

Trust in Him and you shall find that

"The slow sweet hours that bring us all things good,
The slow sad hours that bring us all things ill
And all good things from evil,"

as they strike on the great horologe of Time, are set to a growing music by the hand of God; a music which rises and falls as we listen, but which nevertheless swells through all its saddest cadences and dying falls toward that harmonious close, that "undisturbed concert," in which all discords will be drowned.

THIRD SECTION.

THE QUEST OF THE CHIEF GOOD IN WEALTH, AND IN THE GOLDEN MEAN.

ECCLESIASTES vi., vii., and viii. 1-15.

In the foregoing Section Coheleth has shown that the Chief Good is not to be found in that Devotion to the affairs of Business which was, and still is, characteristic of the Hebrew race. This devotion is commonly inspired either by the desire to amass great wealth, for the sake of the status, influence, and means of lavish enjoyment it is assumed to confer; or by the more modest desire to secure a competence, to stand in that golden mean of comfort which is darkened by no harassing fears of future penury or need. By a logical sequence of thought, therefore, he advances from his discussion on Devotion to Business, to consider the leading motives by which it is inspired. The questions he now asks and answers are, in effect, (1) Will Wealth confer the good, the tranquil, and enduring satisfaction which men seek? And if not, (2) Will that moderate provision for the present and for the future to which the more prudent restrict their aim?

His discussion of the first of these questions, although very matterful, is comparatively brief; in part, perhaps, because in the previous Section he has already dwelt on many of the drawbacks which accompany wealth; and still more, probably, because, while there are few men in any age to whom great wealth is possible,

The Quest in
Wealth.
vi.

there would be unusually few in the company of poor men for whose instruction he wrote. Brief and simple as the discussion is, however, we shall misapprehend it unless we bear in mind that Coheleth is arguing, not against wealth, but against mistaking wealth for the Chief Good.

Let us observe, then, that throughout this sixth chapter the Preacher is dealing with the *lover* of riches, not with the rich man; that he is speaking, not against wealth, but against mistaking wealth for the Chief Good. The man who *trusts* in riches is placed before us; and, that we may see him at his best, he has the riches in which he trusts. God has given him "his good things," given him them to the full. He lacks nothing that he desireth—nothing at least that wealth can command. Yet, because he does not accept his abundance as the gift of God, and hold the Giver better than the gift, he cannot enjoy it. But how do we know that he has suffered his riches to take an undue place in his regard? We know it by this sure token—that he cannot leave God to take care of them, and of him. He frets about them, and about what will become of them when he is gone. He has no son, perchance, to inherit them, no child, only some "stranger" whom he has adopted (ver. 2)—and almost all childless Orientals adopt strangers to this day, as we have found, to our cost, in India. A profound horror at the thought of being dead to name and fame and use through lack of heirs was, and is, very prevalent in the East. Even faithful Abraham, when God had promised him the supreme good, broke out with the remonstrance, "What canst Thou give me when I am going off childless, and have no heir but my body-servant, Eliezer of Damascus?" Because this feeling lay close to the Oriental heart, the Preacher is at some pains to show what a "vanity" it is. He argues: "Even if you should beget a hundred children, instead of being childless; even though you should live a thousand years, and the grave did not wait for you instead of living close before you: yet, so long as you were not content to leave your riches in the hands of God, you would fret and perplex yourself with fears. An abortion would be better off than you, although it cometh in nothingness and goeth in darkness; for it would know a rest denied to you, and sink without apprehension into the 'place' from which all your apprehensions cannot save you (vv. 3-6). Foolish man! it is not because you lack an heir that you are perturbed in spirit. If you had one, you would find some other cause for care; you would be none the less fretted and perturbed; for you would still be thinking of your riches rather than of the God who gave them, and still dread the moment in which you must part with them, in order to return to Him."

The Man who
makes Riches
his Chief Good
is haunted by
Fears and Per-
plexities:
vi. 1-6.

From this plain practical argument Coheleth passes to an argument of more philosophic reach. "All the labour of this man is *for his mouth*:" that is to say, his wealth, with all that it commands, appeals only to sense and appetite; it feeds "the lust of the eye, or the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life," and therefore his *soul* cannot be satisfied therewith" (ver. 7). *That* craves a higher nutriment, a more enduring good. God has put eternity into

For God has put
Eternity into
his Heart;
vi. 7-10.

it: and how can that which is immortal be contented with the lucky haps and comfortable conditions of time? Unless some immortal provision be made for the immortal spirit, it will pine, and protest, and crave, till all power of happily enjoying outward good be lost. Nay, if the spirit in man be craving and unfed, whatever his outward conditions, or his faculty for enjoying them, he cannot be at rest. The wise man may be able to extract from the gains of time a pleasure denied to the fool; and the poor man, his penury preventing him from indulging passion and appetite to satiety, may have a keener enjoyment of them than the magnate who has tried them to the full and has grown weary of them. In a certain sense, as compared the one with the other, the poor man may have an "advantage" over the rich, and the wise man over the fool; for "it is better to enjoy the good we have than to crave a good beyond our reach;" and this much the wise man, or even the poor man, may achieve. Yet, after all, what advantage have they? The thirst of the soul is still unslaked; no sensual or sensuous enjoyment can satisfy that. All human action and enjoyment is under law to God. No one is so wise, or so strong, as to contend successfully against Him or his ordinances. And it is He who has given men an immortal nature, with cravings that wander through eternity; it is He who has ordained that they shall know no rest until they rest in Him (vv. 8-10).

Look once more at your means and possessions. Multiply them as you will. Still there are many reasons why if you seek your chief good in them, they should prove vanity and breed vexation of spirit. One is, that beyond a certain point you can neither use nor enjoy them. They add to your pomp. They enable you to fill a larger place in the world's eye. They swell and magnify the vain show in which you walk. But, after all, they add to your discomfort rather than your comfort. You have so much the more to manage, and look after, and take care of: but you yourself, instead of being better off than you were, have only taken a heavier task on your hands. And what advantage is there in that?

Another reason is, that it is hard, so hard as to be impossible, for you to know "what it is good" for you to have. That on which you have set your heart may prove to be an evil rather than a good when at last you get it. The fair fruit, so pleasant and desirable to the eye that, to possess it, you were content to labour and deny yourself for years, may turn to an apple of Sodom in your mouth, and yield you, in place of sweet pulp and juice, only the bitter ashes of disappointment.

And a third reason is, that the more you acquire the more you must dispose of when you are called away from this life: and who can tell what shall be after him? How are you so to dispose of your gains as to be sure that they will do good and not harm, and carry comfort to the hearts of those whom you love, and not breed envy, alienation, and strife?

These are the Preacher's arguments against an undue love of riches, against making them

so dear a good that we can neither enjoy them while we have them, nor trust them to the disposal of God when we must leave them behind us. Are they not sound arguments? Should we be saddened by them, or comforted? We can only be saddened by them if we love wealth, or long for it, with an inordinate desire. If we can trust in God to give us all that it will be really good for us to have in return for our honest toil, the arguments of the Preacher are full of comfort and hope for us, whether we be rich or whether we be poor.

There be many that say, "Who will show us any gold?" mistaking gold for their god or good. For though there can be few in any age to whom great wealth is possible, there are many who crave it and believe that to have it is to possess the supreme felicity. It is not only the rich who "trust in riches." As a rule, perhaps, they trust in them less than the poor, since they have tried them, and know pretty exactly both how much, and how little, they can do. It is those who have not tried them, and to whom poverty brings many undeniable hardships, who are most sorely tempted to trust in them as the sovereign remedy for the ills of life. So that the counsels of the sixth chapter may have a wider scope than we sometimes think they have. But, whether they apply to many or to few, there can be no doubt that the counsels of the seventh and eighth chapters are applicable to the vast majority of men. For here the Preacher discusses the Golden Mean in which most of us would like to stand. Many of us dare not ask for great wealth lest it should prove a burden we could very hardly bear; but we have no scruple in adopting Agur's prayer, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with food proportioned to my need: Let me have a comfortable competence in which I shall be at an equal remove from the temptations whether of extreme wealth or of extreme penury."

Now the endeavour to secure a competence may be, not lawful only, but most laudable; since God means us to make the best of the capacities He has given us and the opportunities He sends us. Nevertheless, we may pursue this right end from a wrong motive, in a wrong spirit. Both spirit and motive are wrong if we pursue our competence as if it were a good so great that we can know no content unless we attain it. For what is it that animates such a pursuit save distrust in the providence of God? Left in his hands, we do not feel that we should be safe; whereas if we had our fortune in our own hands, and were secured against chances and changes by a few comfortable securities, we should feel safe enough. This feeling is, surely, very general: we are all of us in danger of slipping into this form of unquiet distrust in the fatherly providence of God.

Because the feeling is both general and strong, the Hebrew Preacher addresses himself to it at some length. His object now is to place before us a man who does not aim at great affluence, but, guided by prudence and common sense, makes it his ruling aim to stand well with his neighbours and to lay by a moderate provision for future wants. The Preacher opens the discussion by

The Quest in
the Golden
Mean.
vii., viii. 1-15.

And much
that he gains
only feeds
Vanity;
vi. 11.

Neither can he
tell what it
will be good
for him to
have,
vi. 12.

Nor foresee
what will
become of his
Gains.
vi. 12.

The Method of
the Man who
seeks a
Competence.
vii. 1-14.

stating the maxims or rules of conduct by which such an one would be apt to guide himself. One of his first aims would be to secure "a good name," since that would prepossess men in his favour, and open before him many avenues which would otherwise be closed.* Just as one entering a crowded Oriental room with some choice fragrance exhaling from person and apparel would find bright faces turned toward him, and a ready way opened for his approach, so the bearer of a good name would find many willing to meet him, and traffic with him, and heed him. As the years passed, his good name, if he kept it, would diffuse itself over a wider area with a more pungent effect, so that the day of his death would be better than the day of his birth—to leave a good name being so much more honourable than to inherit one (chap. vii. ver. 1).

But how would he go about to acquire his good name? Again the answer carries us back to the East. Nothing is more striking to a Western traveller than the dignified gravity of the superior Oriental races. In public they rarely smile, almost never laugh, and hardly ever express surprise. Cool, courteous, self-possessed, they bear good news or bad, prosperous or adverse fortune, with a proud equanimity. This equal mind, expressing itself in a grave dignified bearing, is, with them, well-nigh indispensable to success in public life. And, therefore, our friend in quest of a good name betakes himself to the house of mourning rather than to the house of feasting; he holds that serious thought on the end of all men is better than the wanton foolish mirth which crackles like thorns under a kettle, making a great sputter, but soon going out; and would rather have his heart bettered by the reproof of the wise than listen to the song of fools over the wine-cup (vv. 2-6). Knowing that he cannot be much with fools without sharing their folly, fearing that they may lead him into those excesses in which the wisest mind is infatuated and the kindest heart hardened and corrupted (ver. 7), he elects rather to walk with a sad countenance, among the wise, to the house of mourning and meditation, than to hurry with fools to the banquet in which wine and song and laughter drown serious reflection, and leave the heart worse than they found it. What though the wise reprove him when he errs? What though, as he listens to their reproof, his heart at times grows hot within him? The end of their reproof is better than the beginning (ver. 8); as he reflects upon it, he learns from it, profits by it, and by patient endurance of it wins a good from it which haughty resentment would have cast away. Unlike the fools, therefore, whose wanton mirth turns into bitter anger at the mere sound of reproof, he will not suffer his spirit to be hurried into a hot resentment, but will compel that which injures them to do him good (ver. 9). Nor will he rail even at the fools who fleet the passing hour, or account that, because they are so many and so bold, "the time is out of joint." He will show himself not only wiser than the foolish, but wiser than many of the wise: for while they—and here surely the Preacher hits a very common habit of the studious life—are disposed to look fondly back on some past age as greater or happier than that in which they live, and ask, "How

is it that former days were better than these?" he will conclude that the question springs rather from their querulousness than from their wisdom, and make the best of the time, and of the conditions of the time, in which it has pleased God to place him (ver. 10).

But if any ask, "Why has he renounced the pursuit of that wealth on which many are bent who are less capable of using it than he?" the answer comes that he has discovered Wisdom to be as good as Wealth, and even better. Not only is Wisdom as secure a defence against the ills of life as Wealth, but it has this great advantage—that "it fortifies or vivifies the heart," while wealth often burdens and enfeebles it. Wisdom quickens and braces the spirit for any fortune, gives it new life or new strength, inspires an inward serenity which does not lie at the mercy of outward accidents (vv. 11, 12). It teaches a man to regard all the conditions of life as ordained and shaped by God, and weans him from the vain endeavour, on which many exhaust their strength, to straighten that which God has made crooked, that which crosses and thwarts his inclinations (ver. 13); once let him see that the thing is crooked, and was meant to be crooked, and he will accept and adapt himself to it, instead of wearying himself in futile attempts to make, or to think, it straight.

And there is one very good reason why God should permit many crooks in our lot, very good reason therefore why a wise man should look on them with an equal mind. For God sends the crooked as well as the straight, adversity as well as prosperity, in order that we should know that He has "made *this* as well as *that*," and accept both from his benign hand. He interlaces his providences, and veils his providences, in order that, unable to foresee the future, we may learn to put our trust in Him rather than in any earthly good (ver. 14). It therefore behoves a man whose heart has been bettered by much meditation, and by the reproofs of the wise, to take both crooked and straight, both evil and good, from the hand of God, and to trust in Him whatever may befall.*

So far, I think, we shall follow and assent to this theory of human life; our sympathies will go with the man who seeks to acquire a good name, to grow wise, But when he proceeds to apply to stand in the Golden Mean. his theory, to deduce practical rules from it, we can only give him a qualified assent, nay, must often altogether withhold our assent. The main conclusion he draws is, indeed, quite unobjectionable: it is, that in action, as well as in opinion, we should avoid excess, that we should keep the happy mean between intemperance and indifference.

But the very first moral he infers from this conclusion is open to the most serious objection. He has seen both the righteous die in his righteousness without receiving any reward from it, and the wicked live long in his wickedness to enjoy his ill-gotten gains. And from these two mysterious facts,

The Perils to which it exposes him.
vii. 15-
viii. 31.

He is likely to compromise Conscience:
vii. 15-20.

* So in the hymn of Cleanthes to Zeus, as rendered by the Dean of Wells:

"Thou alone knowest how to change the odd
To even, and to make the crooked straight:
And things discordant find accord in Thee.
Thus in one whole Thou blendest ill with good,
So that one law works on for evermore."

* "There are three crowns; of the law, the priesthood, and the kingship; but the crown of a good name is greater than them all."—TALMUD.

which much exercised many of the Prophets and Psalmists of Israel, he infers that a prudent man will neither be very righteous, since he will gain nothing by it, and may lose the friendship of those who are content with the current morality; nor very wicked, since, though he may lose little by this so long as he lives, he will very surely hasten his death (vv. 16, 17). It is the part of prudence to lay hold on both; to permit a temperate indulgence both in virtue and in vice, carrying neither to excess (ver. 18)—a doctrine still very dear to the mere man of the world. In this temperance there lies a strength greater than that of an army in a beleaguered city; for no righteous man is wholly righteous (vv. 19, 20): to aim at so lofty an ideal will be to attempt "to wind ourselves too high for mortal man below the sky;" we shall only fail if we make the attempt; we shall be grievously disappointed if we expect other men to succeed where we have failed; we shall lose faith in them, and in ourselves; we shall suffer many pangs of shame, remorse, and defeated hope: and, therefore, it is well at once to make up our minds that we are, and need be, no better than our neighbours, that we are not to blame ourselves for customary and occasional slips; that, if we are but moderate, we may lay one hand on righteousness and another on wickedness without taking much harm. A most immoral moral, though it is as popular to-day as it ever was.

The second rule which this temperate Monitor infers from his general theory is, That we are not to be overmuch troubled by what people say about us. Servants are adduced as an illustration, partly, no doubt, because they *are* commonly acquainted with their masters' faults, and partly because they do sometimes speak about them, and even exaggerate them. "Let them speak," is his counsel, "and don't be too curious to know what they say; you may be sure that they will say pretty much what you often say of your neighbours or superiors; if they depreciate you, you depreciate others, and you can hardly expect a more generous treatment than you accord." Now if this moral stood alone, it would be both shrewd and wholesome. But it does not stand alone; and in its connection it means, I fear, that if we take the moderate course prescribed by worldly prudence; if we are righteous without being too righteous, and wicked without being too wicked, and our neighbours should begin to say, "He is hardly so good as he seems," or "I could tell a tale of him an if I would," we are not to be greatly moved by "any such ambiguous givings out;" we are not to be overmuch concerned that our neighbours have discovered our secret slips, since we have often discovered the like slips in them, and know very well that "there is not on earth a righteous man who doeth good and sinneth not." In short, as we are not to be too hard on ourselves for an occasional and decorous indulgence in vice, so neither are we to be very much vexed by the censures which neighbours as guilty as ourselves pass on our conduct. Taken in this its connected sense, the moral is as immoral as that which preceded it.

Here, indeed, our prudent Monitor drops a hint that he himself is not content with a theory which leads to such results. He has tried this "wisdom," but he is not satisfied with it. He

desired a higher wisdom, suspecting that there must be a nobler theory of life than this; but it was too far away for him to reach, too deep for him to fathom. After all his researches that which was far off remained far off, deep remained deep: he could not attain the higher wisdom he sought (vv. 23, 24). And so he falls back on the wisdom he had tried, and draws a third moral from it which is somewhat difficult to handle.

It is said of an English satirist that when any friend confessed himself in trouble and asked his advice, his first question was, "Who is she?"—taking it for granted that a woman must be at the bottom of the mischief. And the Hebrew cynic appears to have been of his mind. He cannot but see that the best of men sin sometimes, that even the most temperate are hurried into excesses which their prudence condemns. And when he turns to discover what it is that bewitches them, he finds no other solution of the mystery than—Woman. Sweet and pleasant as she seems, she is "more bitter than death," her heart is a snare, her hands are chains. He whom God loves will escape from her net after brief captivity; only the fool and the sinner are held fast in it (vv. 25, 26). Nor is this a hasty conclusion. Our Hebrew cynic has deliberately gone out, with the lantern of his wisdom in his hand, to search for an honest man and an honest woman. He has been scrupulously careful in his search, "taking things," *i. e.*, indications of character, "one by one;" but though he has found one honest man in a thousand, he has never lit on an honest and good woman (vv. 27, 28). Was not the fault in the eyes of the seeker rather than in the faces into which he peered? Perhaps it was. It would be to-day and here; but was it there and on that far-distant yesterday? The Orientals would still say "No." All through the East, from the hour in which Adam cast the blame of his disobedience on Eve to the present hour, men have followed the example of their first father. Even St. Chrysostom, who should have known better, affirms that when the devil took from Job all he had, he did not take his wife, "because he thought she would greatly help him to conquer that saint of God." Mohammed sings in the same key with the Christian Father: he affirms that since the creation of the world there have been only four perfect women, though it a little redeems the cynicism of his speech to learn that, of these four perfect women, one was his wife and another his daughter; for the good man may have meant a compliment to them rather than an insult to the sex. But if there be any truth in this estimate, if in the East the women were, and are, worse than the men, it is the men who have made them what they are.* Robbed of their natural dignity and use as help-meets, condemned to be mere toys, trained only to minister to sense, what wonder if they have fallen below their due place and honour? Of all cowardly cynicisms that surely is the meanest which, denying women any chance of being good, condemns them for being bad. Our Hebrew cynic seems to have had some faint sense of his unfairness; for he concludes his tirade

To despise
Women :
vii. 25-29.

To be indifferent to Censure :
vii. 21, 22.

* Not, however, that the sentiment was confined to the East. The Greek poets have many such sayings as, "A woman is a burden full of ills:" and, "Where women are, all evils there are found."

against the sex with the admission that "God made man upright"—the word "man" here, as in Genesis, standing for the whole race, male and female—and that if all women, and nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of every thousand, have become bad, it is because they have degraded themselves and one another by the evil "devices" they have sought out (ver. 29).

The fourth and last rule inferred from this prudent moderate view of life is, That we are to submit with hopeful resignation to the wrongs which spring from human tyranny and injustice. Unclouded by gusts of passion, the wise temperate Oriental carries a "bright countenance" to the king's divan. Though the king should rate him with "evil words," he will remember his "oath of fealty," and not rise up in resentment, still less rush out in open revolt. He knows that the word of a king is potent; that it will be of no use to show a hot mutinous temper; that by a meek endurance of wrath he may allay or avert it. He knows, too, that obedience and submission are not likely to provoke insult and contumely; and that if now and then he is exposed to an undeserved insult, any defence, and especially an angry defence, will but damage his cause (chap. viii. vv. 1-5). Moreover, a man who keeps himself cool and will not permit anger to blind him may, in the worst event, foresee that a time of retribution will surely come on the king, or the satrap, who is habitually unjust; that the people will revolt from him and exact heavy penalties for the wrongs they have endured; that death, "that fell arrest without all bail," will carry him away. *He* can see that time of retribution drawing nigh, although the tyrant, fooled by impunity, is not aware of its approach; he can also see that when it comes it will be as a war in which no furlough is granted, and whose disastrous close no craft can evade. All this execution of long-delayed justice he has seen again and again; and therefore he will not suffer his resentment to hurry him into dangerous courses, but will calmly await the action of those social laws which compel every man to reap the due reward of his deeds (vv. 5-9).

Nevertheless he has also seen times in which retribution did *not* overtake oppressors; times even when, in the person of children as wicked and tyrannical as themselves, they "came again" to renew their injustice, and to blot out the memory of the righteous from the earth (ver. 10). And such times have no more disastrous result than this, that they undermine faith and subvert morality. Men see that no immediate sentence is pronounced against the wicked, that they live long in their wickedness and beget children to perpetuate it; and the faith of the good in the overruling providence of God is shaken and strained, while the vast majority of men set themselves to do the evil which flaunts its triumphs before their eyes (ver. 11). None the less the Preacher is quite sure that it is the part of wisdom to trust in the laws and look for the judgments of God: he is quite sure that the triumph of the wicked will soon pass, while that of the good will endure (vv. 12, 13); and therefore, as a man of prudent and forecasting spirit, he will submit to injustice, but not inflict it, or at least not carry it to any dangerous excess.

And to be in-
different to
Public
Wrongs.
viii. 1-13.

This is by no means a noble or lofty view of human life; the line of conduct it prescribes is often as immoral as it is ignoble; and we may feel some natural surprise at hearing counsels so base from the lips of the inspired Hebrew Preacher. But we ought to know him, and his method of instruction, well enough by this time to be sure that he is at least as sensible of their baseness as we can be; that he is here speaking to us, not in his own person, but dramatically, and from the lips of the man who, that he may secure a good name and an easy position in the world, is disposed to accommodate himself to the current maxims of his time, and company. If we ever had any doubt on this point, it is set at rest by the closing verses of the Section before us. For in these verses the Preacher lowers his mask, and tells us plainly that we cannot and must not attempt to rest in the theory he has just put before us, that to follow out its practical corollaries will lead us away from the Chief Good, not toward it. More than once he has already hinted to us that *this* "wisdom" is not the highest wisdom; and now he frankly avows that he is as unsatisfied as ever, as far as ever from ending his Quest; that his last key will not unlock those mysteries of life which have baffled him from the first. He still holds, indeed, that it is better to be righteous than to be wicked, though he now sees that even the prudently righteous often have a wage like that of the wicked, and that the prudently wicked often have a wage like that of the righteous (ver. 14). This new theory of life, therefore, he confesses to be "a vanity" as great and deceptive as any of those he has hitherto tried. And as even yet it does not suit him to give us his true theory and announce his final conclusion, he falls back on the conclusion we have so often heard, that the best thing a man can do is to eat and to drink, and to carry a clear enjoying temper through all the days, and all the tasks, which God giveth him under the sun (ver. 15). How this familiar conclusion fits into his final conclusion, and is part of it, though not the whole, we shall see in our study of the next and last section of the Book.

The Preacher
condemns this
Theory of
Human Life,
and declares
the Quest to
be still unat-
tained.
viii. 14, 15.

II.—If, as Milton sings,

"To know
That which before us lies in daily life
Is the prime wisdom,"

we are surely much indebted to the Hebrew Preacher. *He* does not "sit on a hill apart" discussing fate, freewill, foreknowledge absolute, or any lofty abstruse theme. He walks with us, in the common round, to the daily task, and talks to us of that which lies before and around us in our daily life. Nor does he speak as one raised high above the folly and weakness by which we are constantly betrayed. He has trodden the very paths we tread. He shares our craving and has pursued our quest after "that which is good." He has been misled by the illusions by which we are beguiled. And his aim is to save us from fruitless researches and defeated hopes by placing his experience at our command. He speaks, therefore, to our real need, and speaks with a cordial sympathy which renders his counsel very welcome.

We are so made that we can find no rest until

we find a supreme Good, a Good which will satisfy all our faculties, passions, aspirations. For *this* we search with ardour; but our ardour is not always under law to wisdom. We often assume that we have reached our chief Good while it is still far off, or that we are at least looking for it in the right direction when in truth we have turned our back upon it. Sometimes we seek for it in the pursuit of knowledge, sometimes in pleasure and self-indulgence, sometimes in fervent devotion to secular affairs; sometimes in love, sometimes in wealth, and sometimes in a modest yet competent provision for our future wants. And if, when we have acquired the special good we seek, we find that our hearts are still craving and restless, still hungering for a larger good, we are apt to think that if we had a little more of that which so far has disappointed us; if we were somewhat wiser, or if our pleasures were more varied; if we had a little more love or a larger estate, all would be well with us, and we should be at peace. Perhaps in time we get our "little more," but still our hearts do not cry, "Hold, enough!"—enough being always a little more than we have; till at last, weary and disappointed in our quest, we begin to despair of ourselves and to distrust the goodness of God. "If God be good," we ask, "why has He made us thus—always seeking yet never finding, urged on by imperious appetites which are never satisfied, impelled by hopes which for ever elude our grasp?" And because we cannot answer the question, we cry out, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

"Ah, no," replies the kindly Preacher who has himself known this despairing mood and surmounted it; "no, *all* is not vanity. There is a chief Good, a satisfying Good, although you have not found it yet; and you have not found it because you have not looked for it where alone it can be found. Once take the right path, follow the right clue, and you will find a Good which will make all else good to you, a Good which will lend a new sweetness to your wisdom and your mirth, your labour and your gain." But men are very slow to believe that they have wasted their time and strength, that they have wholly mistaken their path; they are reluctant to believe that a little more of that of which they have already acquired so much, and which they have always held to be best, will not yield them the satisfaction they seek. And therefore the wise Preacher, instead of telling us at once where the true Good is to be found, takes much pains to convince us that it is not to be found where we have been wont to seek it. He places before us a man of the largest wisdom, whose pleasures were exquisitely varied and combined, a man whose devotion to affairs was the most perfect and successful, a man of imperial nature and wealth, and whose heart had glowed with all the fervours of love; and this man—*himself* under a thin disguise—so rarely gifted and of such ample conditions, confesses that he could not find the Chief Good in any one of the directions in which we commonly seek it, although he had travelled farther in every direction than we can hope to go. If we are of a rational temper, if we are open to argument and persuasion, if we are not resolved to buy our own experience at a heavy, perhaps a ruinous, cost, how can we but accept the wise Hebrew's counsel, and cease to look for the sat-

isfying Good in quarters in which he assures us it is not to be found?

We have already considered his argument as it bore on the men of his own time; we have now to make its application to our own age. As his custom is, the Preacher does not develop his argument in open logical sequence; he does not write a moral essay, but paints us a dramatic picture.

He depicts a man who trusts in riches, but honestly believes that wealth is the chief Good, or, at lowest, the way to it. This man has laboured diligently and dexterously to acquire affluence, and he *has* acquired it. Like the rich man of the Parable, he has much goods, and barns that grow fuller as they grow bigger. "God has given him riches and wealth and abundance, so that his soul"—not having learned how to look for anything higher—"lacks nothing of all that it desireth."

The Quest in
Wealth.
vi.

He has reached his aim, then, acquired what he holds to be good. Can he not be content with it? No: for though he bids his soul make merry and be glad, it obstinately refuses to obey. It is darkened with perplexities, haunted by vague longings, fretted and stung with perpetual care. Now that he has his riches, he goes in dread lest he should lose them: he is unable to decide how he may best employ them, or how to dispose of them when he must leave them behind him. God has given them to him; but he is not at all sure that God will show an equal wisdom in giving them to some one else when he is gone. And so the poor rich man sits steeped in wealth up to his chin—up to his chin, but not up to his lips, for he has no "power to enjoy" it. Burdened with jealous care, he grudges that others should share what he cannot enjoy, grudges above all that, when he is dead, another should possess what has been of so little comfort to him. "If thou art rich," says Shakespeare,

The Man who
makes Riches
his Chief Good
is haunted by
Fears and Per-
plexities.
vi. 1-6.

"thou art poor ;

For like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bearest thy heavy riches but a journey,
And Death unloads thee."

But our rich man is not only like an ass; he is even more stupid: for the ass would not have his back bent even with golden ingots if he could help it, and is only too thankful when the burden is lifted from his back; while the rich man not only *will* plod on beneath his heavy load, but, in his dread of being unladen at his journey's end, imposes on himself a burden heavier than all his ingots, and *will bear that* as well as his gold. He creeps along beneath his double load, and brays quite pitifully if you so much as put out a hand to ease him.

It is not of much use, perhaps, to argue with one so besotted: but lest *we* should slip into his degraded estate, the Preacher points out for our instruction the source of his disquiet, and shows why it is impossible in the very nature of things that he should know content. Among other sources of disquiet he notes these three. (1) That "there are many things which increase vanity:" that is to say, many of the acquisitions of the rich man only augment his outward pomp and state. Beyond a certain point

Much that he
gains only
feeds Vanity.
vi. 11.

he cannot possibly enjoy the good things he possesses; he cannot, for instance, live in all his costly mansions at once, nor eat and drink all the sumptuous fare set on his table, nor carry his whole wardrobe on his back. He is hampered with superfluities which breed care, but yield him no comfort. And, as he grudges that others should enjoy them, all this abundance, all that goes beyond his personal gratification, so far from being an "advantage" to him, is only a burden and a torment. (2) Another source of disquiet is, that no man, not even he, "can tell what is good for man in life," what will be really helpful and pleasant to him. Many things which attract desire pall upon the taste. And as "the day of our our vain life is brief," gone "like a shadow," he may flit away before he has had a chance of using much that he has laboriously acquired. (3) And a third source of disquiet is, that the more a man has the more he must leave; and this is a fact which cuts him two ways, with a keen double edge. For the more he has the less he likes leaving it; and the more he has the more is he puzzled how to leave it. He cannot tell "what shall be after him," and so he makes one will to-day and another to-morrow, and very likely dies intestate after all.

He cannot tell what it will be good for him to have:
vi. 12.

Nor foresee what will become of his Gains:
vi. 12.

Is not that a true picture, a picture true to life? Bulwer Lytton tells us how one of our wealthiest peers once complained to him that he was never so happy and well-served as when he was a bachelor in chambers; that his splendid mansion was a dreary solitude to him, and the long train of domestics his masters rather than his servants. And more than once he depicts, as in "The Caxtons," a man of immense fortune and estate as so occupied in learning and discharging the heavy duties of property, so tied and hampered by the thought of what was expected of him, as to fret under a constant weight of care and to lose all the sweet uses of life. And have not we ourselves known men who have grown more penurious as they have grown richer, men unable to decide what it would be really good or even pleasant for them to do, more and more anxious as to how they should devise their abundance? "I am a poor rich man, burdened with money; but I have nothing else," was the saying of a notorious millionaire, who died while he was signing a cheque for £10,000, some twenty years ago.

But the Hebrew Preacher is not content to paint a picture of the Rich Man and his perplexities—a picture as true to the life now as it was then. He also points out *how* it is that the lover of riches came to be the man he is, and why he can never lay hold on the supreme Good. "All the labour of this man is for his mouth," for the senses and whatever gratifies sense; and therefore, however prosperous he may be, "yet his soul cannot be satisfied." For the soul is not fed by that which feeds the senses. God has "put eternity" into it. It craves an eternal sustenance. It cannot rest till it gains access to "the living water," and "the meat which endureth," and the good "wine of the kingdom." A beast—if indeed beasts have no souls, which I neither deny nor admit—may

And because God has put Eternity into his heart, He cannot be content with Temporal Good.
vi. 7-10.

be content if only he be placed in comfortable outward conditions: but a man, simply because he is a man, must have a wholesome and happy inward life before he can be content. His hunger and thirst after righteousness must be satisfied. He must know that, when flesh and heart fail him, he will be received into an eternal habitation. He must have a treasure which the moth cannot corrupt, nor the thief filch from him. We cannot escape our nature any more than we can jump off our shadow; and our very nature cries out for an immortal good. Hence it is that the rich man who trusts in his riches, and not in the God who gave them to him, carries within him a hungry craving soul. Hence it is that *all* who trust in riches, and hold them to be the Chief Good, are restless and unsatisfied. For, as the Preacher reminds us, it is very true both that the rich man may not be a fool, and that the poor man may trust in the riches he has not won. By virtue of his wisdom, the wise rich man may so vary and combine the good things of this life as to win from them a gratification denied to the sot whose sordid heart is set on gold; and the poor man, because he has so few of the enjoyments which wealth can buy, may snatch at the few that come his way with the violent delight which has violent ends. Both may "enjoy the good they have" rather than "crave a good beyond their (present) reach:" but if they mistake that good for the Supreme Good, neither their poverty nor their wisdom will save them from the misery of a fatal mistake. For they too have souls, *are* souls; and the soul is not to be satisfied with that which goes in at the mouth. Wise or foolish, rich or poor, whosoever *trusts* in riches is either like the ass whose back is bent with a weight of gold, or he is worse than the ass, and *longs* to take a burden on his back of which only Death can unlade him.

2. But now, to come closer home, to draw nearer to that prime wisdom which consists in knowing that which lies before us in our daily life, let us glance at the Man who aims to stand in the Golden Mean; the man who does not aspire to heap up a great fortune, but is anxious to secure a modest competence. He is more on our own level; for *our* trust in riches is, for the most part, qualified by other trusts. If we believe in Gold, we also believe in Wisdom and in Mirth; if we labour to provide for the future, we also wish to use and enjoy the present. We think it well that we should know something of the world about us, and take some pleasure in our life. We think that to put money in our purse should not be our only aim, though it should be a leading aim. We admit that "the love of money is a root of all evil"—one of the roots from which all forms and kinds of evil may spring; and, to save ourselves from falling into that base lust, we limit our desires. We shall be content if we can put by a moderate sum, and we flatter ourself that we desire even so much as that, not for its own sake, but for the means of knowledge, or of usefulness, or of innocent enjoyment with which it will furnish us. "Nothing I should like better," says many a man, "than to retire from business as soon as I have enough to live upon, and to devote myself to this branch of study or that province of art, or to take my share of

The Quest in the Golden Mean.
vii. 1-
viii. 13.

public duties, or to give myself to a cheerful domestic life." It speaks well for our time, I think, that while in a few large cities there are still many in haste to be rich and very rich, in the country and in hundreds of provincial towns there are thousands of men who know that wealth is not the Chief Good, and who do not care to don the livery of Mammon. Nevertheless, though their aim be "most sweet and commendable," it has perils of its own, imminent and deadly perils, which few of us altogether escape. And these perils are clearly set before us in the sketch of the Hebrew Preacher. As I reproduce that sketch, suffer me, for the sake of brevity, while carefully retaining the antique outlines, to fill in with modern details.

Suppose a young man to start in life with this theory, this plan, this aim, distinctly before him:—he is to be ruled by prudence and plain common sense: he will try to stand well with the world, and to make a moderate provision for future wants. This aim will beget a certain temperance of thought and action. He will permit himself no extravagances—no wandering out of bounds, and perhaps no enthusiasms, for he wants to establish "a good name," a good reputation, which shall go before him like "a sweet perfume" and dispose men's hearts toward him. And, therefore, he carries a sober face, frequents the company of older, wiser men, is grateful for any hints their experience may furnish, and takes even their "reproof" with a good grace. He walks in the beaten paths, knowing the world to be impatient of novelties. The wanton mirth and crackling laughter of fools in the house of feasting are not for him. He is not to be seduced from the plain prudent course which he has marked out for himself, whether by inward provocation or outward allurements. If he is a young lawyer, he will write no poetry, attorneys holding literary men in suspicion. If he is a young doctor, homeopathy, hydropathy, and all new-fangled schemes of medicine will disclose their charms to him in vain. If he is a young clergyman, he will be conspicuous for his orthodoxy, and for his emphatic assent to all that the leaders of opinion in the Church think or may think. If he is a young manufacturer or merchant, he will be no breeder of costly patents and inventions, but will be among the first to profit by them whenever they are found to pay. Whatever he may be, he will not be of those who try to make crooked things straight and rough places plain. He wants to get on; and the best way to get on is to keep the beaten path and push forward in that. And he will be patient—not throwing up the game because for a time the chances go against him, but waiting till the times mend and his chances improve. So far as he can, he will keep the middle of the stream that, when the tide which leads on to fortune sets in, he may be of the first to take it at the flood and sail easily on to his desired haven.

In all this there may be no conscious insincerity, and not much perhaps that calls for censure. For all young men are not wise with the highest wisdom, nor original, nor brave with the courage which follows Truth in scorn of consequence. And our young man may not be dowered with the love of loves, the hate of hates, the scorn of scorns. He may be of a nature es-

entially prudent and commonplace, or training and habit may have superinduced a second nature. To him a primrose may be a primrose and nothing more; his instinctive thought, as he looks at it, may be how he can reproduce its colour in some of his textures or extract a saleable perfume from its nectared cup. He may even think that primroses are a mistake, and that 'tis pity they were not pot-herbs; or he may assume that he shall have plenty of time to gather primroses by-and-bye, but that for the present he must be content to pick pot-herbs for the market. In his way, he may even be a religious man; he may admit that both prosperity and adversity are of God, that we must take patiently whatever He may send; and he may heartily desire to be on good terms with Him who alone "can order all things as He please."

But here we light on his first grave peril; for he will carry his temperance into his religion, and he may subordinate even that to his desire to get on. Looking on men in their religious aspect, he sees that they are divided into two classes, the righteous and the wicked. As he considers them, he concludes that on the whole the righteous have the best of it, that godliness is real gain. But he soon discovers that this first rough conclusion needs to be carefully qualified. For, as he studies men more closely, he perceives that at times the righteous die in their righteousness without being the better for it, and the wicked live on in their wickedness without being the worse for it. He perceives that while the very wicked die before their time, the very righteous, those who are always reaching forth to that which is before them and rising to new heights of insight and obedience, are "forsaken," that they are left alone in the thinly-peopled solitude to which they have climbed, losing the sympathy even of those who once walked with them. Now, these are facts; and a prudent sensible man tries to accept facts, and to adjust himself to them, even when they are adverse to his wishes and conclusions. He does not want to be left alone, nor to die before his time. And therefore, taking these new facts into account, he infers that it will be best to be good without being too good, and to indulge himself with an occasional lapse into some general and customary wickedness without being too wicked. Nay, he is disposed to believe that "whoso feareth God," studying the facts of his providence and drawing logical inferences from them, "will lay hold of both" wickedness and righteousness, and will blend them in that proportion which the facts seem to favour. But here Conscience protests, urging that to do evil can never be good. To pacify it, he adduces the notorious fact that "there is not a righteous man on earth who doeth good, and sinneth not." "Conscience," he says, "you are really too strict and straitlaced, too hard on one who wants to do as well as he can. You go quite too far. How can you expect me to be better than great saints and men after God's own heart?" And so, with a wronged and pious air, he turns to lay one hand on wickedness and another on righteousness, quite content to be no better than his neighbours and to let Conscience sulk herself into a sweeter mood.

The Method of
the Man who
seeks a Com-
petence.
viii. 1-14.

The Perils to
which it ex-
poses him.
vii. 15-
viii. 13.

He is likely to
compromise
Conscience;
vii. 15-20.

Conscience being silenced, Prudence steps in. And Prudence says, "People will talk. They will take note of your slips, and tattle about them. Unless you are very, very careful, you will damage your reputation; and if you do that, how can you hope to get on?" Now as the man is specially devoted to Prudence, and has found her kind mistress and useful monitress in one, he is at first a little staggered to find her taking part against him. But he soon recovers himself, and replies: "Dear Prudence, you know as well as I do that people don't like a man to be better than themselves. Of course they will talk if they catch me tripping; but I don't mean to do more than trip, and a man who trips gains ground in recovering himself, and goes all the faster for a while. Besides, we all trip; some fall, even. And I talk of my neighbours just as they talk of me; and we all like each other the better for being birds of one feather."

At this Prudence smiles and stops her mouth. But being very willing to assist so quick-witted a disciple, she presently returns and says: "Are you not rather a long while in securing your little Competence? Is there no short cut to it? Why not take a wife with a small fortune of her own, or with connexions who could help you on?" Now the man, not being a bad man, but one who would fain be good so far as he knows goodness, is somewhat taken aback by such a suggestion as this. He thinks Prudence must be growing very worldly and mercenary. He says within himself, "Surely *love* should be sacred! A man should not prostitute *that* in order to get on! If I marry a woman simply or mainly for her money, what worse degradation can I inflict on her or on myself? how shall I be better than those old Hebrews and Orientals who held women to be only a toy or a convenience? To do that, would be to make a snare and a net of her indeed, to degrade her from her true place and function, and possibly would lead me to think of her as even worse than I had made her." Nevertheless, his heart being very much set on securing a Competence, and an accident of the sort which he calls "providences" putting a foolish woman with a pocketful of money in his way, he takes both the counsel of Prudence and a wife to match.

The world, we may be sure, thinks none the worse of him for that. Once more he has proved himself a man whose eye is steadfastly bent on "the main chance," and who knows how to seize occasions as they rise. But he, who has thus profaned the inner sanctuary of his own soul, is not likely to be sensitive to the large claims of public duty. If he sees oppression, if the tyranny of a man or a class mounts to a height which calls for rebuke and opposition, *he* is not likely to sacrifice comfort and risk either property or popularity that he may assail iniquity in her strong places. It is not such men as he who, when the times are out of joint, feel that they are born to set them right. Prudence is still his guide, and Prudence says, "Let things alone; they will right themselves in time. The social laws will avenge themselves on the head of the oppressor, and deliver the oppressed. You can do little to hasten their action. Why, to gain so little, should you risk so much?" And the

To be indifferent to Censure;
vii. 21, 22.

To despise
Women;
vii. 25-29.

And to be indifferent to
Public
Wrongs.
viii. 1-13.

man is content to sit still with folded hands when every hand that can strike a blow for right is wanted in the strife, and can even quote texts of Scripture to prove that in "quietness, and confidence" in the action of Divine Laws, is the true strength.

Now I make my appeal to those who daily enter the world of business—is not this the tone of that world? are not these the very perils to which you lie open? How often have you heard men recount the slips of the righteous in order to justify themselves for not assuming to be righteous overmuch! How often have you heard them vindicate their own occasional errors by citing the errors of those who give greater heed to religion than they do, or make a louder profession of it! How often have you heard them congratulate a neighbour on his good luck in carrying off an heiress, or speak of wedded love itself as a mere help to worldly advancement! How often have you heard them sneer at the nonsensical enthusiasm which has led certain men to "throw away their chances in life" in order to devote themselves to the service of truth, or to forfeit popularity that they might lead a forlorn hope against customary wrongs, and thank God that no such maggot ever bit their brains! If during the years which have elapsed since I too "went on 'Change,'" the general tone has not risen a whole heaven—and I have heard of no such miracle—I know that you must daily hear such things as these, and worse than these; and that not only from irreligious men of bad character, but from men who take a fair place in our Christian congregations. From the time of the wise Preacher to the present hour this sort of talk has been going on, and the scheme of life from which it springs has been stoutly held. There is the more need, therefore, for you to listen to and weigh the Preacher's conclusion. For his conclusion is, that this scheme of life is wholly and irredeemably wrong, that it tends to make a man a coward and a slave, that it cannot satisfy the large desires of the soul, and that it cheats him of the Chief Good. His conclusion is, that the man who so sets his heart on acquiring even a Competence that he cannot be content without it, has no genuine trust in God, since he is willing to give in to immoral maxims and customs in order to secure that which, as he thinks, will make him largely independent of the Divine Providence.

The Preacher speaks as to wise men, to men of some experience of the world. Judge you what he says.

FOURTH SECTION.

THE QUEST ACHIEVED. THE CHIEF GOOD IS TO BE FOUND. NOT IN WISDOM, NOR IN PLEASURE, NOR IN DEVOTION TO AFFAIRS AND ITS REWARDS; BUT IN A WISE USE AND A WISE ENJOYMENT OF THE PRESENT LIFE, COMBINED WITH A STEADFAST FAITH IN THE LIFE TO COME.

ECCLESIASTES viii. 16-xii. 7.

At last we approach the end of our Quest. The Preacher has found the Chief Good, and will show us where to find it. But are we even

The Preacher
condemns this
Theory, and
declares the
Quest to be still
unattained.
vii. 14, 15.

yet prepared to welcome it and to lay hold of it? Apparently he thinks we are not. For, though he has already warned us that it is not to be found in Wealth or Industry, in Pleasure or Wisdom, he repeats his warning in this last Section of his Book, as if he still suspected us of hankering after our old errors. Not till he has again assured us that we shall miss our mark if we seek the supreme Good in any of the directions in which it is commonly sought, does he direct us to the sole path in which we shall not seek in vain. Once more, therefore, we must gird up the loins of our mind to follow him along his several lines of thought, encouraged by the assurance that the end of our journey is not far off.

1. The Preacher commences this Section by carefully defining his position and equipment as he starts on his final course. As yet he carries no lamp of Revelation in his hand, although he will not venture beyond a certain point without it. For the present he will trust to Reason and Experience, and mark the conclusions to which these conduct when unaided by any direct light from Heaven. His first conclusion is that Wisdom, which of all temporal goods still stands foremost with him, is incapable of yielding a true content. Much as it can do for man, it cannot solve the moral problems which task and afflict his heart, the problems which he *must* solve before he can be at peace. He may be so bent on solving these by Wisdom as to see "no sleep in his eyes by day or night;" he may rely on Wisdom with a confidence so genuine as to suppose at times that by its help he has "found out all the work of God"—really solved all the mysteries of the Divine Providence; but nevertheless "he has not found it out;" the illusion will soon pass, and the unsolved mysteries reappear dark and sombre as of old (chap. viii. vv. 16, 17). And the proof that he has failed is, first, that he is as incompetent to foresee the future as those who are not so wise as he. With all his sagacity, he cannot tell whether he shall meet "the love or the hatred" of his fellows. His lot is as closely hidden in "the hand of God" as theirs, although he may be as much better as he is wiser than they (chap. ix. ver. 1). A second proof is that "the same fate" overtakes both the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked, and he is as unable to escape it as any of his neighbours. All die; and to men ignorant of the heavenly hope of the Gospel the indiscrimination of Death seems the most cruel and hopeless of wrongs. The Preacher, indeed, is not ignorant of that bright hope; but as yet he has not taken the lamp of Revelation into his hand: he is simply speaking the thought of those who have no higher guide than Reason, no brighter light than Reflection. And to these, their wisdom having taught them that to do right is infinitely better than to do wrong, no fact was so monstrous and inscrutable as that their lives should run to the same disastrous close with the lives of evil and violent men, that all alike should fall into the hands of "that churl, Death." As they revolved this fact, their hearts grew hot with a fierce resentment as natural as it was impotent, a resentment all the hotter because they knew how impotent it was. Therefore the

The Chief Good
not to be found
in Wisdom:
viii. 16-
ix. 6.

Preacher dwells on this fact, lingers over his description of it, adding touch to touch. "One fate comes to all," he says, "to the righteous and to the wicked, to the pure and to the impure, to the religious and to the irreligious, to the profane and to the reverent." If death be a good, the maddest fool and the vilest reprobate share it with the sage and the saint. If death be an evil, it is inflicted on the good as well as on the bad. None is exempt. Of all wrongs this is the greatest; of all problems this is the most insoluble. Nor is there any doubt as to the nature of death. To him for whom there shines no light of hope behind the darkness of the grave, death is the supreme evil. For to the living, however deject and wretched, there is still some hope that times may mend: even though in outward condition despicable as that unclean outcast, a dog—the homeless and masterless scavenger of Eastern cities—he had some advantage over the royal lion who, once couched on a throne, now lies in the dust rotting to dust. The living know at least that they must die; but the dead know not anything. The living can recall the past, and their memory harps fondly on notes which were once most sweet; but the very memory of the dead has perished, no music of the happy past can revive on their dulled sense, nor will any recall their names. The heavens are fair; the earth is beautiful and generous; the works of men are many and diverse and great; but they have "no more any portion for ever in aught that is done under the sun" (vv. 2-6).

This is the Preacher's description of the hopeless estate of the dead. His words would go straight home to the hearts of the men for whom he wrote, with a force even beyond that which they would have for heathen races. In their Captivity, they had renounced the worship of idols. They had renewed their covenant with Jehovah. Many of them were devoutly attached to the ordinances and commandments which they and their fathers had neglected in happier and more prosperous years. Yet their lives were made bitter to them with cruel bondage, and they had as little hope in their death as the Persians who embittered their lives, and probably even less. It was in this sore strait, and under the strong compulsions of the dreadful extremity, that the more studious and pious of their rabbis, like the Preacher himself, drew into an expressive context the passages scattered through their Sacred Books which hinted at a retributive life beyond the tomb, and settled into that firm persuasion of the immortality of the soul which, as a rule, they never henceforth altogether let go. But when the Preacher wrote, this settled and general conviction had not been reached. There were many among them who, as their thoughts circled round the mystery of death, could only cry, "Is this *the end*? is *this* the end?" To the great majority of them it seemed the end. And even the few, who sought an answer to the question by blending the Greek and Oriental with the Hebrew Wisdom, attained no clear answer to it. To mere human wisdom, Life remained a mystery, and Death a mystery still more cruel and impenetrable. Only those who listened to the Preachers and Prophets taught of God beheld the dawn which already began to glimmer on the darkness in which men sat.

Imagine, then, a Jew brought to the bitter pass which Coheleth has described. He has acquainted himself with Wisdom, native and foreign; and wisdom has led him to conclusions of virtue.

Nor in Pleasure:
ix. 7-12.

Nor is he of those who love virtue as they love music—without practising it. Believing that a righteous and religious carriage of himself will ensure happiness and equip him to encounter the problems of life, he has striven to be good and pure, to offer his sacrifices and pay his vows. But he has found that, despite his best endeavours, his life is not tranquil, that the very calamities which overtake the wicked overtake him, that that wise carriage of himself by which he thought to win love has provoked hatred, that death remains a frowning and inhospitable mystery. He hates death, and has no great love for the life which has brought him only labour and disappointment. Where is he likely to turn next? Wisdom having failed him, to what will he apply? At what conclusion will he arrive? Will not his conclusion be that standing conclusion of the baffled and the hapless, "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die"? Will he not say, "Why should I weary myself any more with studies which yield no certain science, and self-denials which meet with no reward? If a wise and pure conduct cannot secure me from the evils I dread, let me at least try to forget them and to grasp such poor delights as are still within my reach"? This, at all events, is the conclusion in which the Preacher lands him; and hence he takes occasion to review the pretensions of Pleasure or Mirth. To the baffled and hopeless devotee of Wisdom he says, "Go, then, eat thy bread with gladness, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. Cease to trouble yourself about God and His judgments. He, as you have seen, does not mete out rewards and punishments according to our merit or demerit; and as He does not punish the wicked after their deserts, you may be sure that He has long since accepted your wise virtuous endeavours, and will keep no score against you. Deck yourself in white festive garments; let no perfume be lacking to your head; add to your harem any woman who charms your eye: and, as the day of your life is brief at the best, let no hour of it slip by unenjoyed. As you have chosen Mirth for your portion, be as merry as you may. Whatever you can get, get; whatever you can do, do. You are on the road to the dark dismal grave where there is no work nor device; there is, therefore, the more reason why your journey should be a merry one" (vv. 7-10).

Thus the Preacher describes the Man of Pleasure, and the maxims by which he rules his life. How true the description is I need not tarry to prove; 'tis a point every man can judge for himself. Judge also whether the warning which the Preacher subjoins be not equally true to experience (vv. 11, 12). For, after having depicted, or personated, the Man who trusts in Wisdom, and the Man who devotes himself to Pleasure, he proceeds to show that even the Man who blends mirth with study, whose wisdom preserves him from the disgusts of satiety and vulgar lust, is nevertheless—to say nothing of the Chief Good—very far from having reached a certain good. Then, at least, "the race was not (always) to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither was bread to the wise, nor

riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the learned." Those who had the fairest chances had not always the happiest success; nor did those who bent themselves most strongly to their ends always reach their ends. Those who were wanton as birds, or heedless as fish, were often taken in the snare of calamity or swept up by the net of misfortune. At any moment a killing frost might blight all the growths of Wisdom and destroy all the sweet fruits of Pleasure; and if they had only these, what could they do but starve when these were gone? The good which was at the mercy of accident, which might vanish before the instant touch of disease or loss or pain, was not worthy to be, or to be compared with, the Chief Good, which is a good for all times, in all accidents and conditions, and renders him who has it equal to all events.

So far, then, Coheleth has been occupied in retracing the argument of the first Section of the Book. Now he returns upon the second and third Sections: he deals with the man who plunges into public affairs, who turns his wisdom to practical account and seeks to attain a competence,

Nor in Devotion to Affairs and its Rewards.
ix. 13-
x. 20.

if not a fortune. He lingers over this stage of his argument, probably because the Jews, then as always, even in exile and under the most cruel oppression, were a remarkably energetic, practical, money-getting race, with a singular faculty of dealing with political issues or handling the market; and, as he slowly pursues it, he drops many hints of the social and political conditions of the time. Two features of it he takes much to heart: first, that wisdom, even of the most practical and sagacious sort, did not win its fair recognition and reward—a very natural complaint in so wise a man; and, secondly, that his people were under tyrants so gross, self-indulgent, indolent, and unstatesman-like as the Persians of his day—also a natural complaint in a man of so wise and patriotic spirit.

He opens with an anecdote in proof of the slight regard in which the most valuable and remunerative sagacity was held. He tells us of a poor man—and I have sometimes thought that this poor man may have been the Author himself; for the military leaders of the Jews, though among the most expert strategists of that era, were often very learned and studious men—who lived in a little city, with only a few inhabitants. A great king came up against the city, besieged it, threw up the lofty military causeway, as high as the walls, from which it was the fashion of the time to deliver the assault. By his Archimedian wit the poor man hit on a stratagem which saved the city; but though his service was so signal, and the city so little that the "few men in it" must have seen him every day, "yet no one remembered that same poor man," or lent a hand to lift him from his poverty. Wise as he was, his wisdom did not bring him bread, nor riches, nor favour (vv. 13-15). Therefore, concludes the Preacher, wisdom, great gift though it is, and better, as in this instance, than "an army to a beleaguered city" (chap. vii. ver. 19), is not of itself sufficient to secure success. A poor man's wisdom—as many an inventor has found—is despised even by those who profit by it. Although his counsel, in the day of extremity, is infinitely

more valuable than the loud bluster of fools, or of a ruler among fools, nevertheless the ruler, because he is foolish, may be affronted to find one of the poorest men in the place wiser than himself; he may easily cast his "merit in the eye of scorn," and so rob him both of the honour and the reward of his achievement (vv. 16, 17)—an ancient saw not without modern instances. For the fool is a great power in the world, especially the fool who is wise in his own conceit. Insignificant in himself, he may nevertheless do great harm and "destroy much good." Just as a tiny fly, when it is dead, may make the sweetest ointment offensive by infusing its own evil savour, so a man, when his wit is gone, may with his little folly cause many sensible men to distrust the wisdom they should honour (chap. x. ver. 1):—who has not met such a hot-headed want-wit in, for example, the lobbies of the House of Commons? To a wise man, such as Coheleth, the fool, the presumptuous conceited fool, is "rank and smells to heaven," infecting sweeter natures than his own with a most pestilent corruption. He paints us a picture of him—paints it with a keen graphic scorn which, if the eyes of the fool were in his head (chap. ii. ver. 14), and "what he is pleased to call his mind" could for a moment shift from his left hand to his right (ver. 2), might make him nearly as contemptible to himself as he is to others. As we read ver. 3 the unhappy wretch stands before us. We see him coming out of his house; he goes dawdling down the street, for ever wandering from the path, attracted by the merest trifle, staring at familiar objects with eyes that have no recognition in them, knowing neither himself nor others; and, with pointed finger, chuckles after every sober citizen he meets, "There goes a fool!"

Yet a fool quite as foolish and malignant as this, quite as indecent even in outward behaviour, may be lifted to high place, and has ere now sat on an imperial throne.* The Preacher had seen many of them suddenly raised to power, while nobles were degraded, and high functionaries of State reduced to an abject servitude. Now if the poor wise man have to attend the durbar, or sit in the divan, of a foolish capricious despot, how should he bear himself? The Preacher counsels meekness and submission. He is to sit unruffled even though the ruler should rate him, lest by resentment he should provoke some graver outrage (vv. 4-7: comp. chap. viii. ver. 3). To strengthen him in his submission, the Preacher hints at cautions and consolations which, because free and open speech was very dangerous under the Persian despotism, he wraps up in obscure maxims capable of a double sense—nay, as the commentators have shown, capable of a good many more senses than two—to the true sense of which "a foolish ruler" was by no means likely to penetrate, even if they fell into his hands.

The first of these maxims is, "He who diggeth a pit shall fall into it" (ver. 8). And the allusion is, of course, to an Eastern mode of

trapping wild beasts and game. The huntsman dug a pit, covered it with twigs and sods, and strewed the surface with bait; but as he dug many such pits, and some of them were long without a tenant, he might at any inadvertent moment fall into one of them himself. The proverb is capable of at least two interpretations. It may mean that the foolish despot, plotting the ruin of his wise servant, might in his anger go too far; and, betraying his intention, provoke a retaliative anger before which he himself would fall. Or it may mean that, should the wise servant seek to undermine the throne of the despot, he might be taken in his treachery and bring on himself the whole weight of the tyrant's wrath.

The second maxim is "Whoso breaketh down a wall, a serpent shall bite him" (ver. 8); and here, of course, the allusion is to the fact that snakes infect the crannies of old walls (comp. Amos v. 19). To set about dethroning a tyrant was like pulling down such a wall; you would break up the nest of many a reptile, many a venomous hanger-on, and might only get bit or stung for your pains. Or, again, in pulling out the stones of an old wall, you might let one of them fall on your foot; and in hacking out its timbers, you might cut yourself: that is to say, even if your conspiracy did not involve you in absolute ruin, it would be only too likely to do you serious and lasting injury (ver. 9).

The next adage runs (ver. 10), "if the axe be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, he must put on more strength, but wisdom should teach him to sharpen it," and is, perhaps, the most difficult passage in the Book. The Hebrew is read in a different way by almost every translator. As I read it, it means, in general, that it is not well to work with blunt tools when by a little labour and delay you may whet them to a keener edge. Read thus, the political rule implied in it is, "Do not attempt any great enterprise, any revolution or reform, till you have a well-considered scheme to go upon, and suitable instruments to carry it out with." But the special political import of it may be, "Your strength is nothing to that of the tyrant; do not therefore lift a blunt axe against the trunk of despotism: wait till you have put a sharp edge upon it." Or, the tyrant himself may be the blunt axe, and then the warning is, "Sharpen *him* up, repair him, use him and his caprices to serve your end; get your way by giving way to him, and by skilfully availing yourself of his varying moods." Which of these may be the true meaning of this obscure disputed passage, I do not undertake to say; but the latter of the two seems to be sustained by the adage which follows: "If the serpent bite because it is not charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer." For here, I think, there can be little doubt that the foolish angry ruler is the serpent, and the wise functionary the charmer who is to extract the venom of his anger. Let the foolish ruler be never so furious, the poor wise man, who is able "to cull the plots of best advantages," and to save a city, can surely devise a charm of soft submissive words which will turn away his wrath; just as the serpent-charmer of the East, by song and incantation, is at least reputed to draw serpents from their lurk, that he may pluck the venom from their teeth (ver. 11). For, as we are told in the very next verse, "the words of the wise man's mouth win him grace, while the lips of the fool destroy him."

* To cite only one instance out of many—other instances may be found in the Introduction—let the reader recall the Emperor Caligula, and refer, for example, to his reception of the Alexandrian Jews, as recorded by Philo, "Legat. ad Caium," cc. 44, 45; or by Merivale, in his "History of the Romans," chap. xlvii. pp. 47-50; or by Milman, in his "History of the Jews," Book xii. pp. 141-45. He will then know, to quote the phrase of Apollonius of Tyana, what "the kind of beast called a tyrant" is or may be.

And on this hint, on this casual mention of his name, the Preacher—who all this while, remember, is personating the sagacious man of the world, bent on rising to wealth, power, distinction—once more “comes down” on the fool. He speaks of him with a burning heat and contempt, as men versed in public affairs are wont to do, since they best know how much harm a voluble, impudent, self-conceited fool may do, how much good he may prevent. Here, then, is the fool of public life. He is a man always prating and predicting, although his words, only foolish at the first, swell and fret into a malignant madness before he has done, and although he of all men is least able to give good counsel, to seize occasions as they rise, or to foresee what is about to come to pass. Puffed up by the conceit of wisdom or of his own importance, he is for ever intermeddling with great affairs, though he has no notion how to handle them, and is incapable of even finding his way along the beaten road which leads to the capital city, of taking and keeping the plain and obvious path which the exigencies of the time require; while (ver. 3) he is forward to cry, “There goes a fool,” of every man who is wiser than himself (vv. 12-15). If he would only hold his tongue, he might pass muster; beguiled by his gravity and silence, men might give him credit for sagacity, and fit his foolish deeds with profound motives; but he *will* speak, and his words betray and “swallow him up.” Of course we have no such fools, “full of words,” to rise in their high place and wag their tongues to their own hurt—they are peculiar to Antiquity or to the East.

But *then* there were so many of them, and their influence in the State was so disastrous that, as the Preacher thinks of them, he breaks into an almost dithyrambic fervour, and cries, “Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child,* and thy princes feast in the morning! Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is noble, and thy princes eat at due hours, for strength and not for revelry!” Through the sloth and riot of these foolish rulers, the whole fabric of the State was fast fading into decay—the roof rotting and the rain leaking in. To support their inopportune and profligate revelry, they imposed crushing taxes on the people, which inspired in some a revolutionary discontent, and in some the apathy of despair. The Wise Exile foresaw that the end of a despotism so unjust and luxurious could not be far off; that when the storm rose and the wind blew, the ancient House, unrepaired in its decay, would topple on the heads of those who sat in its halls, revelling in a wicked mirth (vv. 16-19). Meantime, the sagacious servant of the State, perchance too of foreign extraction, unable to arrest the progress of decay, or not caring how soon it was consummated, would make his “market of the time;” he would carry himself warily; and, because the whole land was infested with the spies bred by despotism, he would give them no hold on him, nor so much as speak the simple truth of his foolish debauched rulers in the privacy of his own bed-chamber, or mutter his thoughts on the roof, lest some “bird of the air should carry the report” (ver. 20).

But if this were the condition of the time, if to rise in public life involved so many mean crafts

* What Coheleth means by the king being “a child” is best explained by Isa. iii. 12: “As for my people, their ruler is a wilful child, and women rule over him.”

and submissions, so many deadly imminent risks from spies and from fools clad in a little brief authority, how could any man hope to find the Chief Good in it? Wisdom did not always win promotion; virtue was inimical to success. The anger of an incapable idiot, or the whisper of an envious rival, or the caprice of a merciless despot, might at any moment undo the work of years, and expose the most upright and sagacious of men to the worst extremities of misfortune. There was no tranquillity, no freedom, no security, no dignity in such a life as this. Till this were resigned and some nobler, loftier aim found, there was no chance of reaching that great satisfying Good which lifts man above all accidents, and fixes him in a happy security from which no blow of Circumstance can dislodge him.

What that Good is, and where it may be found, the Preacher now proceeds to show. But, as his manner is, he does not say in so many words, “This is the Chief Good of man,” or “You will find it yonder;” but he places before us the man who is walking in the right path and drawing closer and closer to it. Even of him the Preacher does not give us any formal description; but, following what we have seen to be his favourite method, he gives us a string of maxims and counsels from which we are to infer what manner of man he is who happily achieves this great Quest.

But in a wise
Use and a wise
Enjoyment of
the Present
Life,
xi. 1-8.

And, at the very outset, we learn that this happy person is of a noble, unselfish, generous temper. Unlike the man who simply wants to get on and make a fortune, he grudges no man his gains; he looks on his neighbours’ interests as well as his own, and does good even to the evil and the unthankful.* He is one who “casts his bread upon the waters” (ch. xi. ver. 1), and who “gives a portion thereof to seven, and even to eight” (ver. 2). The familiar proverb of the first verse has long been read as an allusion to the sowing of rice and other grain from a boat, during the periodical inundation of certain Eastern rivers, especially the Nile. We have been taught to regard the husbandman pushing from the embanked village in his frail bark, to cast the grain he would gladly eat on the surface of the flood, as a type of Christian labour and charity. He denies himself; so also must we if we would do good. He has faith in the Divine laws, and trusts to receive his own again with usury, to reap a larger crop the longer he waits for it; and, in like manner, we are to trust in the Divine laws which bring us a hundredfold for every act of self-denying serv-

* One of the most elaborate proverbs in the Talmud is on Charity:—“Iron breaks the stone, fire melts iron, water extinguishes fire, the clouds drink up the water, a storm drives away the clouds, man withstands the storm, fear unmans man, wine dispels fear, sleep drives away wine, and death sweeps all away—even sleep. But Solomon the Wise says, Charity saves from death.” And there is hardly a finer passage in Shakespeare’s Sonnets than that (CXVI.) in which he sings the disinterestedness of Love, and its superiority to all change:

“Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.”

ice, and bless our "long patience" with the ampler harvest. But it is doubtful whether the Hebrew *usus loquendi* admits of this interpretation. It probably suggests another which, if unfamiliar to us, has a beauty of its own. In the East bread is commonly made in thin flat cakes, something like Passover cakes; and one of these cakes flung on the stream, though it would float on the current for a time, would soon sink; and once sunk would, unlike the grain from the boat, yield no return. And our charity should be like that. We should do good, "hoping for nothing again." We should show kindnesses which will be forgotten, never be returned, and be undismayed by the thanklessness of the task. It is not so thankless as it seems. For, first, we shall "find the good of it" in the loftier, more generous temper which the habit of doing good breeds and confirms. If no one else be the better for our kindness, we shall be the better, because the more kindly, for it. The quality of charity, like that of mercy, is twice blessed;

"It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

And, again, the task is not so thankless as it sometimes seems; for though many of our kind deeds may quicken no kindness in "him that takes," yet some of them will; and the more we help and succour the more likely are we to light upon at least a few who, when our need comes, will succour and console us. Even the most hardened have a certain tenderness for those who help them, if only the help meet a real need, and be given with grace. And, therefore, we may be very sure that if we give a portion of our bread to seven and even to eight, especially if they know that we ourselves have stomach for it all, at least one or two of them will share it with us when we need bread.

But is not this, after all, only a refined selfishness? If we give because we do not know how soon we may need a gift, and in order that we may by-and-bye "find the good of it," do not even the heathen and the publicans the same? Well, not many of them, I think. I have not observed that it is their habit to cast their bread on thankless waters. If they forbode calamity and loss, they provide against them, not by giving, but by hoarding; and even they themselves would hardly accept as a model of charity a man who buttoned up his pocket against every appeal, lest he should be yielding to a selfish motive, or be suspected of it. The refined selfishness of showing kindness and doing good even to the evil and the unthankful because we hope to find the good of it is by no means too common yet; we need not go in dread of it. Nor is it an altogether unworthy motive. St. Paul urges us to help a fallen brother on the express ground that we may need similar help some day (Gal. vi. 1); and *he* was not in the habit of appealing to base motives. Nay, the very Golden Rule itself which all men admire even if they do not walk by it, touches this spring of action; for among other meanings it surely has this, that we are to do to others as we would that they should do to us, in the hope that they will do to us as we have done to them. There are other higher meanings in the Rule of course, as there are other and purer motives for charity; but I do not know that we are any of us of so lofty a virtue that we need fear to show kindness in order to win kindness, or to give help that we may

get help when we need it. Possibly, to act on this motive may be the best and nearest way of rising to such higher motives as we can reach.

The first characteristic, then, of the man who is likely to achieve the Quest of the Chief Good is the Charity which prompts him to be gracious, and to show kindness, and to do good, even to the thankless and ungracious. And his second characteristic is the steadfast Industry which turns all seasons to account. The man of affairs, who wants to rise, waits on occasion; he is on the watch to avail himself of the moods and caprices of men and bend them to his interest. But he who has learned to value things at their true worth, and whose heart is fixed on the acquisition of the highest good, does not want to get on so much as to do his duty under all the variable conditions of life. Just as he will not withhold his hand from giving, lest some of the recipients of his charity should prove unworthy, so also he will not withdraw his hand from the labour appointed him, because this or that endeavour may be unproductive, or lest it should be thwarted by the ordinances of Heaven. He knows that the laws of Nature will hold on their way, often causing individual loss to promote the general good. He knows, for instance, that when the clouds are full of rain they *will* empty themselves upon the earth, even though they put his harvest in peril; and that when the wind is fierce it will blow down trees, even though it should also scatter the seed which he is sowing. But he does not therefore wait upon the wind till it is too late to sow, nor upon the clouds till his ungathered crops rot in the fields. He is conscious that, though he knows much, he knows little of these as of other works of God: he cannot tell whether this or that tree will be blown down; almost all he can be certain of is that, when the tree is down, it will lie where it has fallen, lifting its bleeding roots in dumb protest against the wind which has brought it low. But *this* too he knows, that it is "God who worketh all;" that *he* is not responsible for events beyond his control: that what he is responsible for is that he do the duty of the moment whatever wind may blow, and calmly leave the issue in the hand of God. And so he is not "over exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils;" diligent and undismayed, he goes on his way, giving himself heartily to the present duty, "sowing his seed morning and evening, although he cannot tell which shall prosper, this or that, or whether both shall prove good" (vv. 3-6). Windy March cannot blow him from his constant purpose, though it may blow the seed out of his hand; nor a rainy August melt him to despairing tears, though it may damage his harvest. He has done his duty, discharged his responsibility: let God see to the rest; whatever pleases God will content him.

This man, then, has learned one or two of the profoundest secrets of Wisdom, plain as they look. He has learned that, giving, we gain; and spending, thrive. He has also learned that a man's true care is himself; that all that pertains to the body, to the issues of labour, to the chances of fortune, is external to himself; that whatever form these may take, he may learn from them, and profit by them, and be content in them: that his true business in the world is to cultivate a strong and dutiful character which shall prepare him for any world or any fate; and that so long as he can do this, his main duty will

be done, his ruling object attained. *Totum in co est, ut tibi imperes.**

Is not this true wisdom? is it not an abiding good? Pleasures may bloom and fade. Speculations may shift and change. Riches may come and go—what else have they wings for? The body may sicken or strengthen. The favour of men may be conferred and withdrawn. There is no stability in these; and if we are dependent on them, we shall be variable and inconstant as they are. But if we make it our chief aim to do our duty whatever it may be, and to love and serve our neighbour whatever the attitude he may assume to us, we have an aim always within our reach, a duty we may always be doing, a good we may enjoy for ever. Standing on this rock, from which no wave of change can sweep us, “the light will be sweet to us, and it shall be pleasant to our eyes to behold the sun,” whatever the day, or the world, on which he may rise (ver. 7).

But is all our life to be taken up in meeting the claims of Duty and of Charity? Are we never to relax into mirth, never to look forward to a time in which reward will be more exactly adjusted to service? Yes, we are to do both this and that. It is very true that he who makes it his ruling to do the present duty, and to leave the future with God, will have a happy because a useful life. He that walks this path of duty

“only thirsting
For the right, and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes,
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting
Into glossy purples, which outred
All voluptuous garden roses.”

The path may often be steep and difficult; it may be overhung with threatening rocks and strewn with “stones of offence;” but he who pursues it, still pressing on “through the long gorge” and winning his way upward,

“Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled,
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is sun and moon.”

Nevertheless, if his life is to be full and complete, he must be able to pluck whatever bright flowers of joy spring beside his path, to find “laughing waters” in the crags he climbs, and to rejoice not only in “the glossy purples” of the armed and stubborn thistle, but in the delicate beauty of the ferns, the pure grace of the cyclamens, and the sweet breath of the fragrant grasses and flowers which haunt those severe heights. If he is to be a Man, rather than a Stoic or an Anchorite, he must add to his sense of duty a keen delight in all beauty, all grace, all innocent and noble pleasure. For the sake of others, too, as well as for his own sake, he must carry with him “the merry heart which doeth good like a medicine,” since, lacking that, he will neither do all the good he might, nor himself become perfect and complete. And it is proof, I think, of the good divinity, no less than of the broad humanity, of the Preacher that he lays much stress on this point. He not only bids us enjoy life, but gives us cogent reasons for enjoying it. “Even,” he says, “if a man should live many years, he ought to enjoy them all.” But why? “Because there will be many dark days,” days of old age and growing infirmity in which pleasures will lose their charm; days of death through which he will sleep quietly in the

dark stillness of the grave, beyond the touch of any happy excitement (ver. 8). Therefore the man who attains the Chief Good will not only do the duty of the moment; he will also enjoy the pleasure of the moment. *He* will not toil through the long day of life till, spent and weary, he has no power to enjoy his “much goods,” or no time for his soul to “make merry the glad.” While he is “a young man,” he will “rejoice in his youth, and let his heart cheer him,” and go after the pleasures which attract youth (ver. 9). While his heart is still fresh, when pleasures are most innocent and healthful, easiest of attainment and unalloyed by anxiety and care, he will cultivate that cheerful temper which is a prime safeguard against vice, discontent, and the morose fretfulness of a selfish old age.

But, soft; is not our man of men becoming a mere man of pleasure? No; for he recognises the claims of Duty and of

Charity. These keep his pleasures sweet and wholesome, prevent them from usurping the whole man, and landing him in the satiety and weariness of dissipation. But lest even these safeguards should

Combined with
a steadfast Faith
in the Life to
come.
x. 9-xii. 7.

prove insufficient, he has also this: he knows that “God will bring him into judgment;” that all his works, whether of charity or duty or recreation, will be weighed in the pure and even balance of Divine Justice (ver. 9). *This* is the secret of the pure heart—the heart that is kept pure amid all labours and cares and joys. But the intention of the Preacher in thus adverting to the Divine Judgment has been gravely misconstrued, wrested even to its very opposite. We too much forget what that Judgment must have seemed to the enslaved Jews;—how weighty a consolation, how bright a hope! They were captive exiles, oppressed by profligate despotic lords. Cleaving to the Divine Law with a passionate loyalty such as they had never felt in happier days, they were nevertheless exposed to the most dire and constant misfortunes. All the blessings which the Law pronounced on the obedient seemed withheld from them, all its promises of good and peace to be falsified; the wicked triumphed over them, and prospered in their wickedness. Now to a people whose convictions and hopes had suffered this miserable defeat, what truth would be more welcome than that of a life to come, in which all wrongs should be both righted and avenged, and all the promises in which they had hoped should receive a large fulfilment that would beggar hope? what prospect could be more cheerful and consolatory than that of a day of retribution on which their oppressors would be put to shame, and they would be recompensed for their fidelity to the law of God? This hope would be sweeter to them than any pleasure; it would lend a new zest to every pleasure, and make them more zealous in good works.

Nay, we know, from the Psalms composed during the Captivity, that the judgment of God *was* an incentive to hope and joy; that, instead of fearing it, the pious Jews looked forward to it with rapture and exultation. What, for example, can be more riant and joyful than the concluding strophe of Psalm xcvi.?

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof;
Let the field exult and all that therein is;
And let all the trees of the wood sing for joy
Before Jehovah: for He cometh,

* Cicero, “Tusc.,” lib. II. cap. 22.

*For He cometh to judge the earth,
To judge the world with righteousness,
And the peoples with his truth:*

or than the third strophe of Psalm xcviij.

*Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof;
The world, and they that dwell therein;
Let the floods clap their hands,
And let the hills sing for joy together
Before Jehovah: for he cometh to judge the earth;
With righteousness shall He judge the world,
And the peoples with equity.*

It is impossible to read these verses, and such verses as these, without feeling that the Jews of the Captivity anticipated the Divine Judgment, not with fear and dread, but with a hope and joy so deep and keen as that they summoned the whole round of Nature to share it and reflect it.

If we remembered this, we should not so readily agree with the Preachers and Commentators who assume Coheleth to be speaking ironically in this verse, and as though he would defy his readers to enjoy their pleasures with the thought of God and his judgment of them in their minds. We should rather understand that he was making life more cheerful to them; that he was removing the blight of despair which had fallen on it; that he was kindling in their dreary prospect a light which would shine even into their darkened present with gracious and healing rays. All wrongs would be easier to bear, all duties would be faced with better heart, all alleviating pleasures would grow more welcome, if once they were fully persuaded that there was a life beyond death, a life in which the good would be "comforted" and the evil "tormented." It is on the express ground that there is a Judgment that the Preacher, in the last verse of this chapter, bids them banish "care" and "sadness," or, as the words perhaps mean, "moroseness" and "trouble;" though he also adds another reason which no longer afflicts him much, viz., that "youth and manhood are vanity," soon gone, never to be recalled, and never enjoyed if the brief occasion is suffered to pass.

Mark how quickly the force of this great hope has reversed his position. Only in ver. 8, the very instant before he discloses his hope, he urges men to enjoy the present "because all that is coming is vanity," because there were so many dark days, days of infirm querulous age and silent dreary death before them. But here, in ver. 10, the very moment he has disclosed his hope, he urges them to enjoy the present, not because *the future* is vanity, but because *the present* is vanity, because youth and manhood soon pass and the pleasures proper to them will be out of reach. Why should they any longer be fretted with care and anxiety when the lamp of Revelation shone so brightly on the future? Why should they not be cheerful when so happy a prospect lay before them? Why should they sit brooding over their wrongs when their wrongs were so soon to be righted, and they were to enter on so ample a recompense of reward? Why should they not travel toward a future so welcome and inviting with hearts attuned to mirth and responsive to every touch of pleasure?

But is the thought of Judgment to be no check on our pleasures? Well, it is certainly used here as an incentive to pleasure, to cheerfulness. We are to be happy *because* we are to stand at the bar of God, because in the Judgment He will adjust and compensate all the wrongs and afflic-

tions of time. But it is not every one who can take to himself the full comfort of this argument. Only he can do that who makes it his ruling aim to do his duty and help his neighbour. And no doubt even he will find the hope of judgment—for with him it is a hope rather than a fear—a valuable check, not on his pleasures, but on those base counterfeits which often pass for pleasures, and which betray men, through voluptuousness, into satiety, disgust, remorse. Because he hopes to meet God, and has to give account of himself to God, he will resist the evil lusts which pollute and degrade the soul: and thus the prospect of Judgment will become a safeguard and a defence.

But he has a safeguard of even a more sovereign potency than this. For he not only looks forward to a future judgment, he is conscious of a present and constant judgment. God is with him wherever he goes. From "the days of his youth" he has "remembered his Creator" (chap. xii. ver. 1). He has remembered Him and given to the poor and needy. He has remembered Him, and doing all things as to Him, duty has grown light. He has remembered Him, and his pleasures have grown the sweeter because they were gifts from heaven, and because he has taken them, in a thankful spirit, for a temperate enjoyment. Of all safeguards to a life of virtue, this is the noblest and the best. We can afford, indeed, to part with none of them, for we are strangely weak, often where we least suspect it, and need all the helps we can get: but least of all can we afford to part with this. We need to remember that every sin is punished here and now, inwardly if not outwardly, and that these inward punishments are the most severe. We need to remember that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of God, to render an account of the deeds done in the body. But above all—if love, and not fear, is to be the animating motive of our life—we need to remember that God is always with us, observing what we do; and that, not that He may spy upon us and accumulate heavy charges against us, but that He may help us to do well; not to frown upon our pleasures, but to hallow, deepen, and prolong them, and to be Himself our Chief Good and our Supreme Delight.

"'Live while you live,' the Epicure would say,
'And seize the pleasure of the present day.'
'Live while you live,' the Sacred Preacher cries,
'And give to God each moment as it flies.'
Lord, in my view let both united be:
I live in pleasure while I live in Thee."*

Finally, the Preacher enforces this early and habitual reference of the soul to the Divine Presence and Will by a brief allusion to the impotence and weariness of a godless old age, and by a very striking description of the terrors of the death in which it culminates.

While "the dew of youth" is still fresh upon us we are to "remember our Creator" and his constant judgment of us lest, forgetting Him, we should waste our powers in sensual excess; lest temperate mirth should degenerate into an extravagant and wanton devotion to pleasure; lest the lust of mere physical enjoyment should outlive the power to enjoy, and, groaning under the penalties our unbridled indulgence has provoked, we should find "days of evil" rise on us in long succession, and draw out into "years" of fruitless desire, self-disgust, and despair (ver. 1).

* *Dum vivimus vivamus.*—Doddridge.

"Before the evil days come," and that they may not come; before "the years arrive of which we shall say, I have no pleasure in them," and that they may not arrive, we are to bethink us of the Pure and Awful Presence in which we daily stand. God is with us that we may not sin; with us in youth, that "the angel of his Presence" may save us from the sins to which youth is prone; with us, to save us from "the noted slips of youth and liberty," that our closing years may have the cheerful serenity of a happy old age.

To this admonition drawn from the miseries of godless age, the Preacher appends a description of the terrors of approaching death (vv. 2-5),—a description which has suffered many strange torments at the hands of critics and commentators. It has commonly been read as an allegorical, but singularly accurate, diagnosis of "the disease men call death," as setting forth in graphic figures the gradual decay of sense after sense, faculty after faculty.* Learned physicians have written treatises upon it, and have

*It may be worth while to specify some of the gross and absurd conjectures, some also of the strange differences, into which what may be called the *medical* reading of this passage has betrayed its advocates. Ginsburg has a marvellous collection of them in his "notes" to these verses. I select and combine only a few of them. The darkening of the light, the sun, the moon, and the stars (ver. 2) is taken by one great authority (the Talmud) to mean the darkening of the forehead, the nose, the soul, and the teeth; by another (the Chaldee Paraphrast), the obscuring of the face, the eyes, the cheeks, and the apples of the eyes; by a third (Dr. Smith, in his "Portraiture of Old Age"), for the decay of all the mental faculties. That "the clouds return after the rain" signifies, according to Ibn Ezra, the constant dimness of the eyes; according to Le Clerc, a bad influenza, accompanied with unceasing snuffing. "The keepers of the house" (ver. 3) are the ribs and the loins (Talmud), the knees (Chaldee), and the hands and arms (Ibn Ezra). "The men of power" are the thighs (Talmud) and the arms (Chaldee). "The grinding maids" are the teeth, and "the ladies who look out of the lattices" are the eyes, by general consent. "The door closed on the street" is the pores of the skin (Dr. Smith), the lips (Ibn Ezra), and the eyes (Henstenberg). That "the noise of the mills ceases" or "grows faint" (ver. 4) means that the mastication of food becomes imperfect (Dr. Smith), that the appetite fails (Chaldee), that the voice grows feeble (Grotius). That "the songbirds descend to their nests" signifies that music and songs are a bore to the aged man (Talmud), that he is no longer able to sing (Chaldee), that his ears are heavy (Grotius). The allusion to "the almond" (ver. 5) denotes that the haunch-bone shall come out from leanness (Talmud), or (Reynolds) it denotes the hoary hair which comes quickly on a man just as the almond-tree thrusts out her blossoms before any other tree; while at least half-a-dozen scholars and physicians take it as pointing to *membrum genitale* or *glans virilis*. That "the locust becomes a burden" means that the ankles swell (Chaldee), gout in the feet (Jerome), a projecting stomach (Le Clerc), the dry shrivelled frame of an old man (Dr. Smith). Almost all modern commentators take the reference to "the caper-berry" as marking the fact that condiments lose their power to provoke appetite with the aged, while many of the ancients took it as marking the failure of sexual desire. The "silver cord" and "golden bowl" of ver. 6 are the tongue and the skull (Chaldee), backbone and brain (Dr. Smith), urine and bladder (Gasper Sanctius); while the "bucket" is either the gall or the right ventricle of the heart, and "the wheel" that draws the water stands for the air-inspiring lungs.

Now of course it would not be just to condemn any interpretation simply because it is weighted with absurdities and contradictions such as these, though it surely requires a very strong reading to carry them. But when an interpretation is so obviously forced and fanciful, when it is so remarkably ingenious and leaves to ingenuity so wide and lawless a scope, we shall do well to hesitate before accepting it. And if another interpretation be offered us, as in the text, which gives a literal rendering to every phrase instead of a figurative one, which bases itself on the common household facts of Eastern experience instead of on the technicalities of Western science, which instead of being so indeterminate and fanciful as at times to be self-contradictory and grotesque, is coherent and impressive, we really have no alternative before us. We cannot but choose the one and reject the other.

been lost in admiration of the force and beauty of the metaphors in which it conveys the results of their special science, although they differ in their interpretation of almost every sentence, and are driven at times to the most gross and absurd conjectures in order to sustain their several theories. I need not give any detailed account of these speculations, for the simple reason that they are based, as I believe, on an entire misconception of the Sacred Text. Instead of being, as has been assumed, a figurative description of the dissolution of the body, it sets forth the threatening approach of death under the image of a tempest which, gathering over an Eastern city during the day, breaks upon it toward evening: so, at least, I, with many more, take it. And I do not know how we can better arrive at it than by considering what would be the incidents which would strike us if we were to stroll through the narrow tortuous streets of such a city as the day was closing in.

As we passed along we should find small rows of houses and shops, broken here and there by a wide stretch of blank wall, behind which were the mansions, harems, courtyards of its wealthier inhabitants. Round and within the low narrow gates which gave access to these mansions, we should see armed men lounging whose duty it is to guard the premises against robbers and intruders; these are "the keepers of the house," over whom, as over the whole household, are placed superior officials—members of the family often—or "men of power." Going through the gates and glancing up at the latticed windows, we might catch glimpses of the veiled faces of the ladies of the house who, not being permitted to stir abroad except on rare occasions and under jealous guardianship, are accustomed to amuse their dreary leisure, and to learn a little of what is going on around them, by "looking out of the windows." Within the house, the gentlemen of the family would be enjoying the chief meal of the day, provoking appetite with delicacies such as "the locust,"* or condiments such as "the caper-berry,"† or with choice fruit such as "the almond."‡ Above all the shrill

* This locust (*chāgāb*) is one of the four kinds which the Law of Moses marked out as fit for human food. To this day several kinds of locust are held to be an agreeable and nutritious diet. There are many ways of preparing them for the table. They may be pounded with flour and water, and made into cakes. They may be smoked, boiled, roasted, stewed, and fried in butter. They may be salted with salt; and thus treated are eaten by the Arabs as a great delicacy. Or they may be dried in the sun, and then steeped in wine: baskets of them, prepared in this way, are to be commonly seen in Eastern markets. Dr. Kitto, who often ate them, says that they taste like shrimps; Dr. Shaw says that they are quite as good as our freshwater crayfish.

† The caper-plant grows abundantly in Asia, as it does also in Africa and Southern Europe. It commonly springs in the crevices of walls, on heaps of ruins, or on barren wastes, and forms a diffuse many-branched shrub. Its flowers are large and showy: the four petals are white, but the long numerous stamens have their filaments tinged with purple, and terminate in yellow anthers. As the ovary ripens it droops and forms a pear-shaped berry which holds in its pulp many small seeds. Almost every part of the shrub has been used as a condiment by the ancients. The stalk and seed were salted, or preserved in vinegar or wine. Its bulbs are still held to be an agreeable sauce—we eat them with boiled mutton. And the berries possess irritant properties which win them high esteem among the Orientals as a provocative to appetite.

‡ The fruit of the almond-tree is still reckoned one of the most delicate and delicious fruits in the East. We may fancy that we are acquainted with it, that we know "almonds" as least as well as we know "raisins." But I believe that the almond we eat is only the kernel of the stone in the true almond; the fruit itself is of the same order with apricots, peaches, plums.

cries and noises of the city you would hear a loud humming sound rising on every side, for which you would be sorely puzzled to account if you were a stranger to Eastern habits. It is the sound of the cornmills which, towards evening, are at work in every house. A cornmill was indispensable to every Eastern family, since there were no public mills or bakers except the King's. The heat of the climate makes it necessary that corn should be ground and baked every day. And as the task of grinding at the mill was very irksome, only the most menial class of women, often slaves or captives, were employed upon it. Of course the noise caused by the revolution of the upper upon the nether millstone was very great when the mills were simultaneously at work in every house in the city. No sound is more familiar in the East; and, if it were suddenly stopped, the effect would be as striking as the sudden stoppage of all the wheels of traffic in an English town. So familiar was the sound, indeed, and of such good omen, that in Holy Writ it is used as a symbol of a happy, active, well-provided people; while the cessation of it is employed to denote want, and desolation, and despair. To an Oriental ear no threat would be more doleful and pathetic than that in Jeremiah (xxv. 10), "I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, *the sound of the millstones*, and the light of the candle."

Now suppose the day on which we rambled through the city had been boisterous and lowering; that heavy rain had fallen, obscuring all the lights of heaven; and that, as the evening drew on, the thick clouds, instead of dispersing, had "returned after the rain," so that setting sun and rising moon, and the growing light of stars, were all blotted from view (ver. 2). The tempest, long in gathering, breaks on the city; the lightnings flash through the darkness, making it more hideous; the thunder crashes and rolls above the roofs; the tearing rain beats at all lattices and floods all roads. If we cared to abide the pelting of the storm, we should have before us the very scene which the Preacher depicts. "The keepers of the house," the guards and porters would quake. "The men of power," the lords or owners of the house, or the officials who most closely attended on them, would crouch and tremble with apprehension. The maids at the mill would "stop" because one or other of the two women—two at least—whom it took to work the heavy millstone had been frightened from her task by the gleaming lightning and the pealing thunder. The ladies, looking out of their lattices, would be driven back into the darkest corners of the inner rooms of the harem. Every door would be closed and barred lest robbers, availing themselves of the darkness and its terrors, should creep in (ver. 3). "The noise of the mills" would grow faint or utterly cease, because the threatening tumult had terrified many, if not all, the grinding-maids from their work. The strong-winged "swallow," lover of wind and tempest, would flit to and fro with shrieks of joy; while the delicate "song-birds" would drop, silent and alarmed, into their nests. The gentlemen of the house would soon loose all gust for their delicate cates* and fruits; "the almond" would be

pushed aside, "the locust loathed," and even the stimulating "caper-berry provoke no appetite," fear being a singularly unwelcome and disappetising guest at a feast. In short, the whole people, stunned and confused by the awful and stupendous majesty of a tropical storm, would be affrighted at the terrors which come flaming from "the height" of heaven, to confront them on every highway (vv. 4, 5).

Such and so terrible is the tempest that at times sweeps over an Eastern city.* Such and so terrible, adds the Preacher, is death to the godless and sensual. They are carried away as by a storm; the wind riseth and snatcheth them out of their place. For if we ask, "Why, O Preacher, has your pencil laboured to depict the terrors of a tempest?" he replies, "Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners pace up and down the street" (ver. 5). He leaves us in no doubt as to the moral of the fable, the theme and motive of his picture. While painting it, while adding touch to touch, he has been thinking of "the long home"—or, as the Hebrew has it, "the house of eternity;" a phrase still used by the Jews as a synonym for "the grave"—which is appointed for all living, and of the mercenary professional mourners who loiter under the windows of the dying man in the hope that they may be hired to lament him. To the expiring sinner death is simply dreadful. It puts an end to all his activities and enjoyments, just as the tempest brings all the labours and recreations of a city to a pause. He has nothing before him but the grave, and none to mourn him but the harpies who already pace the street, longing for the moment when he will be gone, and who value their fee far above his life. If we would have death shorn of its terrors for us, we must "remember our Creator" before death comes; we must seek by charity, by a faithful discharge of duty, by a wise use and a wise enjoyment of the life that now is, to prepare ourselves for the life which is to come. Death itself, as Coheleth proceeds to remind us (ver. 6), cannot be escaped. Some day the cord *will* break and the lamp fall; some day the jar or pitcher must be broken, and the wheel, shattered, fall into the well. Death is the common event. It befalls not only the sinful and injurious, but also the useful and the good. Our life may have been like a "golden" lamp suspended by a silver chain, fit for the palace of a king, and may have shed a welcome and cheerful light on every side and held out every promise of endurance; but, none the less, the costly durable chain will be snapped at last, and the fair costly bowl be broken. Or our life may have been like the "pitcher" dipped, by village maidens, into the village fountain; or, again, like "the wheel" by which water is drawn, by a thousand hands, from the city well; it may have conveyed a vital refreshment to the few or to

for hours before dinner, drinking wine, and eating dried fruits, such as filberts, almonds, pistachio-nuts, melon-seeds, etc. A party, indeed, often sits down at seven o'clock, and the dinner is not brought in till eleven. The dessert dishes, intermingled as they are with highly seasoned delicacies, are supposed to have the effect of stimulating the appetite."—Notes to Rawlinson's "Herodotus," vol. i. p. 274.

*It should be borne in mind that the comparative rarity of thunderstorms in Syria and the adjacent lands makes them much more dreadful to the inhabitants of those countries. Throughout the Old Testament, and especially in the Psalms, we find many traces of the dread which such storms inspired—a dread almost unaccountable to our accustomed nerves.

*Sir Henry Rawlinson says: "At the present day, among the *bous vivants* of Persia, it is usual to sit down

the many around us: but, none the less, the day must come when the pitcher will be shattered on the edge of the fountain, and the time-worn wheel fall from its rotten supports. There is no escape from death. And, therefore, as we must all die, let us all live as cheerfully and helpfully as we can; let us all prepare for the better life beyond the grave, by serving our Creator before "the body is cast into the earth from whence it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (ver. 7).

This, then, according to the Hebrew Preacher, is the ideal man, the man who achieves the Quest of the Chief Good:—Charitable, dutiful, cheerful, he prepares for death by a useful and happy life, for future judgment by a constant reference to the present judgment, for meeting God hereafter by walking with Him here.

Has he not achieved the Quest? Can we hope to find a more solid and enduring Good? What to him are the shocks of Change, the blows of Circumstance, the mutations of Time, the fluctuations of Fortune? These cannot touch the Good which he holds to be Chief. If they bring trouble, he can bear trouble and profit by it: if they bring prosperity, success, mirth, he can bear even these, and neither value them beyond their worth nor abuse them to his hurt; for his Good, and therefore his peace and blessedness, are founded on a Rock over which the changeful waves may wash, but against which they cannot prevail. Let the sun shine never so hotly, let the storm beat never so furiously, the Rock stands firm, and the house which he has built for himself upon the Rock. Whatever may befall, he can be doing his main work, enjoying his supreme satisfaction, since he can meet all changes with a dutiful and loving heart; since, through all, he may be forming a noble character and helping his neighbours to form a character as noble as his own. Because he has a gracious God always with him, and because a bright future stretches before him in endless and widening vistas of hope, he can carry to all the wrongs and afflictions of time a cheerful spirit which shines through them with transfiguring rays,—a spirit before which even the thick darkness of death will grow light, and the solemnities of the Judgment be turned into holiday festivity and triumph. Ah, foolish and miserable that we are who, with so noble a life, and so bright a prospect, and a Good so enduring open to us—and with such helps to them in the Gospel of Christ as Coheleth could not know—nevertheless creep about the earth the slaves of every accident, the very fools of Time!

THE EPILOGUE.

IN WHICH THE PROBLEM OF THE BOOK IS CONCLUSIVELY SOLVED.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 8-14.

"STUDENTS," says the Talmud, "are of four kinds; they are like a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve: like a sponge that sucketh all up; like a funnel which receiveth at one end and dischargeth at the other; like a strainer which letteth the wine pass but retaineth the

lees; and like a sieve which dischargeth the bran but retaineth the corn." Coheleth is like the sieve. He is the good student who has sifted all the schemes and ways and aims of men, separating the wheat from the bran, teaching us to know the bran as bran, the wheat as wheat. It is a true "corn of heaven" which he offers us, and not any of the husks to obtain which reckless and prodigal man has often wasted his whole living—husks which, though they have the form and hue of wheat, have not its nutriment, and cannot therefore satisfy the keen hunger of the soul.

We have now followed the sifting process to its close; much bran lies about our feet, but a little corn is in our hands, and from this little there may grow "a harvest unto life." Starting in quest of that Chief Good in which, when once it is attained, we can rest with an unbroken and measureless content, we have learned that it is not to be found in Wisdom, in Pleasure, in Devotion to Business or Public Affairs, in a modest Competence or in boundless Wealth. We have learned that only he achieves this supreme Quest who is "charitable, dutiful, cheerful;" only he who "by a wise use and a wise enjoyment of the present life prepares himself for the life which is to come." We have learned that the best incentive to this life of virtue, and its best safeguards, are a constant remembrance of our Creator and of His perpetual presence with us, and a constant hope of that future judgment in which all the wrongs of time are to be redressed. And here we might think our task was ended. We might suppose that the Preacher would dismiss us from the School in which he has so long held us by his sage maxims, his vivid illustrations, his gracious warnings and encouragements. But even yet he will not suffer us to depart. He has still "words to utter for God," words which it will be well for us to ponder. As in the Prologue he had stated the problem he was about to take in hand, so now he subjoins an Epilogue in which he re-states the solution of it at which he has arrived. His last words are, as we should expect them to be, heavily weighted with thought. So closely packed are his thoughts and allusions, indeed, as to give a disconnected and illogical tone to his words. Every saying seems to stand alone, complete in itself; and hence our main difficulty in dealing with this Epilogue is to trace the links of sequence which bind saying to saying and thought to thought, and so to get "the best part" of his work. Every verse supplies a text for patient meditation, or a theme which needs to be illustrated by historic facts that lie beyond the general reach; and the danger is lest, while dwelling on these separate themes and texts, we should fail to collect their connected meaning, and to grasp the large conclusion to which they all conduct.*

Coheleth commences (ver. 8) by once more striking the keynote to which all his work is set: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity!" We are not, however, to take these words as announcing his deliberate verdict on the sum of human endeavours and affairs; for he has now discovered the true abiding Good

* As the main ethical, literary, and historical interest of the whole Book is gathered up into this brief Epilogue, I offer no apology for the comparative length of my treatment of it.

which underlies all the vanities of earth and time. His repetition of this familiar phrase is simply a touch of art by which the Poet reminds us of what the main theme of his Poem has been, of the pain and weariness and disappointment which have attended his long Quest. As it falls once more, and for the last time, on our ear, we cannot but remember how often, and in what connections, we have heard it before. Memory and imagination are set to work. The whole course of the sacred drama passes swiftly before us, with its mournful pauses of defeated hope, as we listen to this echo of the despair with which the baffled Preacher has so often returned from seeking the true Good in this or that province of human life in which it was not to be found.

Having thus reminded us of the several stages of his Quest, and of the verdict which he had been compelled to pronounce at the close of each but the last, Coheleth proceeds (ver. 9) to set forth his qualifications for undertaking this sore task: "Not only was the Preacher a wise man, he also taught the people wisdom, and composed, collected, and arranged many proverbs" or parables, the proverb being a condensed parable and the parable an expanded proverb. His claims are that he is a sage, and a public teacher, who has both made many proverbs of his own, collected the wise sayings of other sages, and has so arranged them as to convey a connected and definite teaching to his disciples; and his motive in setting forth these claims is, no doubt, that he may the more deeply impress upon us the conclusion to which he has come, and which it has cost him so much to reach.

Now during the Captivity there was a singular outbreak of literary activity in the Hebrew race. Even yet this crisis in their history is little studied and understood; but we shall only follow the Preacher's meaning through vv. 9-12 as we read them in the light of this striking event. That a change of the most radical and extraordinary kind passed upon the Hebrews of this period, that they were by some means drawn to a study of their Sacred Writings much more thorough and intense than any which went before it, we know; but of the causes of this change we are not so well informed.* A great, and perhaps the greatest, authority† on this subject writes: "One of the most mysterious and momentous periods in the history of

* In the Introduction, however, I have tried to give what is known of the history of this period. Roughly speaking, I believe the Jews owed their literary advance mainly to contact with the inquisitive and learned Babylonians, and their religious advance mainly to the sorrows of the Captivity and their contact with the pure faith of the primitive Persians.

† Emmanuel Deutsch, whose premature death is still lamented by many as an irreparable loss. The passage will be found in his celebrated article on "The Talmud" in *The Quarterly* of October, 1867. "The Quest of the Chief Good" was published at the close of that year. And at this point in it, while Deutsch was still alive, but before I knew him personally, I gently complained of the loss he had unwittingly inflicted on me. I had for ten years been collecting the gnomic sayings of the Talmud from any quarter open to one to whom the Talmud itself was a sealed book, and had indeed printed some two score of them in the *Christian Spectator* for 1866. And here came one who "out of his profuse wealth carelessly flung down most of my special treasures." Only half a dozen of the sayings I had collected now had any stamp of novelty on them to the thousands who had revelled in the wit and learning of that famous article in *The Quarterly*. And of these I ventured to call special attention to four which seemed to me of special value and beauty; viz., those on the four kinds of students, on new and old flasks, on not serving God for the sake of reward, and on doing God's

humanity is that brief space of the Exile. What were the influences brought to bear on the captives during that time, we know not. But this we know, that from a reckless, lawless, godless populace, they returned transformed into a band of Puritans. The religion of Zerdusht (Zoroaster), though it has left its traces in Judaism, fails to account for that change. . . . Yet the change is there, palpable, unmistakable—a change which we may regard as almost miraculous. Scarcely aware before of their glorious national literature, the people now began to press round these brands plucked from the fire—the scanty records of their faith and history with a fierce and passionate love, a love stronger even than that of wife and child. These same documents, as they were gradually formed into a canon, became the immediate centre of their lives, their actions, their thoughts, their very dreams. From that time forth, with scarcely any intermission, the keenest as well as the most poetical minds of the nation remained fixed upon them."

The more we think of this change, the more the wonder grows. Good kings and inspired prophets had desired to see the nation devoted to the Word of the Lord, had spent their lives in vain endeavours to recall the thought and affection of their race to the Sacred Records in which the will of God was revealed. But what they failed to do was done when the inspiration of the Almighty was withdrawn and the voice of Prophecy had grown mute. In their Captivity, under the strange wrongs and miseries of their exile, the Jews remembered God their Maker, Giver of songs in the night. They betook themselves to the study of the Sacred Oracles. They began to acquaint themselves with all wisdom that they might define and illustrate whatever was obscure in the Scriptures of their fathers. They commenced that elaborate systematic commentary of which many noble fragments are still extant. They drew new truths from the old letter, or from the collocation of scattered passages,—as, for instance, the truths of the immortality of the soul and of the resurrection of the body. They laid the hidden foundations of the Synagogues and Schools which afterwards covered the land. Ezra and Nehemiah, who, by grace of the Persian conquerors, led them back from Babylonia to Jerusalem, are still claimed as the founders of the Great Synagogue, *i. e.*, as the leaders of that great race of jurists, sages, authors, whose utterances are still a law in Israel, and of whom the lawyers and the scribes of the New Testament were the modern successors. Before the Captivity there was not a term for "school" in their language; there were at least a dozen in common use within two or three centuries after the accession of Cyrus. Education had become compulsory. Its immense value in the popular estimation is marked in innumerable sayings such as these: "Jerusalem was destroyed because the education of the young was neglected;" "Even for the rebuilding of the Temple the schools must not be interrupted;" "Study is more meritorious than sacrifice;" "A scholar is greater than a prophet;" "You should revere

will as if it were our will: they will all be found in this Section. But if I lost something, I also gained much by the appearance of that article, as those who read what follows will discover, although it only came into my hands as I was correcting the proofs of the final pages in my Book.

the teacher even more than your father; the latter only brought you into this world, the former shews you the way into the next." To meet the national craving indicated in these and similar proverbs, innumerable copies of the Sacred Books, of commentaries, traditions, and the gnostic utterances of the Wise, were written and circulated, of which, in the Canon, in some of the Apocryphal Scriptures, in the works of Philo, and in the legal and legendary sections of the Talmud, many specimens have come down to us. In fine, whatever was the cause of this marvellous outburst, there can be no doubt that the whole Rabbinical period was characterised by devotion to learning, a mental and literary activity, much more general and vital than it is easy for us to conceive.

In such an age the words of a professed and acknowledged Sage would carry great weight. If, besides being "a wise man," he was a recognised "teacher," a man whose wisdom was stamped by public and official approval, whatever fell from his lips would command public attention: for these teachers, or rabbis, were the real rulers of the time, and not the Pharisees or the priests, or even the politicians. They might be, they often were, "tent-makers, sandal-makers, weavers, carpenters, tanners, bakers, cooks"; for it is among their highest claims to our respect that these learned rabbis revered labour, however menial or toilsome, that they held mere scholarship and piety of little worth unless conjoined with regular and healthy physical exertion. But, however toilsome their lives or humble their circumstances, these wise men were "masters of the law." It was their special function to interpret the Law of Moses—which, remember, was the law of the land—to explain its bearing on this case or that, if not, as many modern critics maintain, to add to its precepts and codes; and, as members of the local courts, or the metropolitan Sanhedrin, to administer the law they expounded. An immense power, therefore, was in their hands. To obey the Law was to be at once loyal and religious, happy here and hereafter. Hence the rabbis, whose business it was to apply the law to all the details of life, and whose decisions were authoritative and final, could not fail to command universal deference and respect. They were lawyers, judges, schoolmasters, heads of colleges, public orators and lecturers, statesmen and preachers, all in one or all in turn, and therefore consecrated in themselves the esteem which we distribute on many offices and many men.

Such a rabbi was Coheleth. He was of "the Wise"; he was a "master of the law." And, in addition to these claims, he was also a teacher and an author who, besides "composing," had "collected and arranged many proverbs." Than this latter he could hardly have any higher claim to the regard, and even the affection, of the Hebrew public. The passionate fondness of Oriental races for proverbs, fables, stories of any kind, is well known. And the Jews for whom Coheleth wrote took, as was natural at such a time, an extraordinary delight, extraordinary even for the East, in listening to and repeating the wise or witty sayings, the parables and poems, of their national authors. Some of these are still in our hands: as we read them, we cease to wonder at the intense enjoyment with which they were welcomed by a generation not cloyed, as we are, with books. They are

not only charming as works of art: they have also this charm, that they convey lofty ethical instruction. Take a few of these pictorial proverbs, not included in the Canonical Scriptures. "The house that does not open to the poor will open to the physician." "Commit a sin twice, and you will begin to think it quite allowable." "The reward of good works is like dates—sweet, but ripening late." "Even when the gates of prayer are shut in heaven, the gate of tears is open." "When the righteous dies, it is the earth that loses; the lost jewel is still a jewel, but he who has lost it—well may he weep." "Who is wise? He who is willing to learn from all men. Who is strong? He who subdues his passions. Who is rich? He that is satisfied with his lot." These are surely happy expressions of profound moral truths. But the rabbis are capable of putting a keener edge on their words; they can utter witty epigrams as incisive as those of any of our modern satirists, and yet use their wit in the service of good sense and morality. It would not be easy to match, it would be very hard to beat, such sayings as these:—"The sun will go down without *your* help." "When the ox is *down*, many are the butchers." "The soldiers fight, and kings are the heroes." "The camel wanted horns and they took away his ears." "The cock and the owl both wait for morning: the light brings joy to me, says the cock, but what are *you* waiting for?" "When the pitcher falls on the stone, woe to the pitcher; when the stone falls on the pitcher, woe to the pitcher: whatever happens, woe to the pitcher." "Look not at the flask, but at that which is in it: for there are new flasks full of old wine, and old flasks which have not even new wine in them;" ah, of how many of those "old flasks" have some of us had to drink, or seem to drink! When the rabbis draw out their moral at greater length, when they tell a story, their skill does not desert them. Here is one of the briefest, which can hardly fail to remind us of more than one of the parables uttered by the Great Teacher Himself. "There was once a king who bade all his servants to a great repast, but did not name the hour. Some went home and put on their best garments, and came and stood at the door of the palace. Others said, 'There is time enough, the king will let us know beforehand.' But the king summoned them of a sudden; and those that came in their best garments were well received, but the foolish ones, who came in their slovenliness, were turned away in disgrace. *Repent ye to-day, lest ye be summoned to-morrow.*"

Is it any wonder that the Jews, even in the sorrows of their Captivity, liked to hear such proverbs and parables as these? that they had an immense and grateful admiration for the men who spent much thought and care on the composition and arrangement of these wise, beautiful sayings? Should not we ourselves be thankful to hear them when the day's work was done, or even while it was doing? If, then, such an one as Coheleth—a sage, a rabbi, a composer and collector of proverbs and parables—came to them and said, "My children, I have sought what you are all seeking; I have been in quest of that Chief Good which you still pursue; and I will tell you the story of the Quest in the parables and proverbs which you are so fond of hearing;"—we can surely understand that they would be charmed to listen, that they would

hang upon his words, that they would be predisposed to accept his conclusions. As they listened, and found that he was telling them their own story no less than his, that he was trying to lead them away from the vanities which they themselves felt to be vanities, toward an abiding Good in which he had found rest; as they heard him enforce the duties of charity, industry, hilarity—duties which all their rabbis urged upon them, and invite them to that wise use and wise enjoyment of the present life which their own consciences approved: above all, as he unfolded before them the bright hope of a future judgment in which all wrongs should be redressed and all acts of duty receive a great recompense of reward,—would they not hail him as the wisest of their teachers, as the great rabbi who had achieved the supreme Quest? Assuredly few books were, or are, more popular than the book Ecclesiastes. Its presence and influence may be traced on every subsequent age and department of Hebrew literature; it has entered into our English literature hardly less deeply. Many of its verses are familiar to us as household words, *are* household words. Brief as the Book is, I am disposed to think it is better known among us than any other of the Old Testament Books, except Genesis, the Psalter, and the prophesies of Isaiah. Job is an incomparably finer, as it is a much longer poem; but I doubt whether most of us could not quote at least two verses from the shorter for every one that we could repeat from the longer Scripture. We can very easily understand, therefore, that the Wise Preacher, as he himself assures us (ver. 10), bestowed on this work much care and thought; that he had made diligent search for “words of comfort” by which he might solace and strengthen the hearts of his oppressed brethren; and that having found words of comfort and of truth, he wrote them down with a frank sincerity and uprightness.

From this description of the motives which had impelled him to publish the results of his thought and experience, and of the spirit in which he had composed his work, Coheleth passes, in ver. 11, to a description of the twofold function of the Teacher which is really a marvellous little poem in itself, a pastoral cut on a gem. That function is, on the one hand, *progressive*, and, on the other hand, *conservative*. At times the Teacher's words are like “goads” with which the herdsmen prick on their cattle to new pastures, correcting them when they loiter or stray; at other times they are like the “spikes” which the shepherds drive into the ground when they pitch their tents on pastures where they intend to linger: “The words of the *Wise* are like goads,” he says; and “the *Wise*” was a technical term for the sages who interpreted and administered the law; while “those of the *Masters of the Assemblies* are like spikes driven home,” “Masters of Assemblies” being a technical name for the heads of the colleges and schools which, during the Rabbinical period, were to be found in every town, and almost in every hamlet, of Judea. The same man might, and commonly did, wear both titles; and, probably, Coheleth was himself both a Wise Man and a Master. So much as this, indeed, seems implied in the very name by which he introduces himself in the Prologue. For Coheleth means, as we have seen, “one who calls an assembly together and addresses them,” *i. e.*,

precisely such a wise man as was reckoned the “master of an assembly” among the Jews.

What did these Masters teach? Everything almost—at least everything then known. It is true that their main function was to interpret and enforce the law of Moses; but this function demanded all science for its adequate fulfilment. Take a simple illustration. The Law said, “Thou shalt not kill.” Here, if ever, is a plain and simple statute, with no ambiguities, no qualifications, capable neither of misconstruction nor evasion. Anybody may remember it, and know what it means. *May* they? I am not so sure of that. The Law says I am not to kill. What, not in self-defence! not to save honour from outrage! not in a patriotic war! not to save my homestead from the freebooter or my house from the midnight thief! not when my kinsman is slain before my eyes and in my defence! Many similar cases might be mooted, and were mooted, by the Jews. The Master had to consider such cases as these, to study the recorded and traditional verdicts of previous judges, the glosses and comments of other Masters; he had to lay down rules and to apply rules to particular and exceptional cases, just as our English Judges have to define the Common Law or to interpret a Parliamentary Statute. The growing wants of the Commonwealth, the increasing complexity of the relations of life as the people of Israel came into contact with foreign races, or were carried into captivity in strange lands, necessitated new laws, new rules of conduct. And as there was no recognised authority to issue a decree, no Parliament to pass an Act, the wise Masters, learned in the law of God, were compelled to lay down these rules, to extend and qualify the ancient statutes till they covered modern cases and wants. Thus in this very Book, Coheleth gives the rules which should govern a wise and pious Jew in the new relations of Traffic (ch. iv. vv. 4-16), and in the service of foreign despots (ch. x. vv. 1-20). For such contingencies as these the Law made no provision; and hence the rabbis, who sat in Moses' chair, made provision for them by legislating in the spirit of the Law.

Even in the application of known and definite laws there was need for care, and science, and thought. “The Mosaic code,” says Deutsch, “has injunctions about the Sabbatical journey; the distance had to be measured and calculated, and mathematics were called into play. Seeds, plants, and animals had to be studied in connection with many precepts regarding them, and natural history had to be appealed to. Then there were the purely hygienic paragraphs, which necessitated for their precision a knowledge of all the medical science of the time. The ‘seasons’ and the feast-days were regulated by the phases of the moon; and astronomy, if only in its elements, had to be studied.” As the Hebrews came successively into contact with Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, the political and religious systems of these foreign races could not fail to leave some impressions on their minds, and that these impressions might not be erroneous and misleading, it became the Master to acquaint himself with the results of foreign thought. Nay, “not only was science, in its widest sense, required of him, but even an acquaintance with its fantastic shadows, such as astrology, magic, and the rest, in order that, both as lawgiver and judge, he might be able

to enter into the popular feeling about these 'arts,' and wisely control it.

The proofs that this varied knowledge was acquired and patiently applied to the study of the Law by these "masters in Israel" are still with us in many learned sayings and essays of that period; and in all these the *conservative* element or temper is sufficiently prominent. Their leading aim was, obviously, to honour the law of Moses; to preserve its spirit even in the new rules or codes which the changed circumstances of the time imperatively required; to fix their stakes and pitch their tents in the old fields of thought. So obvious is this aim even in the familiar pages of the New Testament, that I need not illustrate it.

But on the other hand, the signs of *progress* are no less decisive, though we may be less familiar with them. Through all this mass of learned and deferential comment on the Mosaic Code, there perpetually crop up sayings which savour of the Gospel rather than of the Law—sayings that denote a great advance in thought. "*Study is better than sacrifice*," for example, must have been a very surprising proverb to the backward-looking Jew. It is only one of many Rabbinical sayings conceived in the same spirit: but would not the whole Levitical family listen to it with the wry, clouded face of grave suspicion? So, when Rabbi Hillel, anticipating the golden rule, said, "*Do not unto another what thou wouldst not have another do unto thee; this is the whole law, the rest is mere commentary*," the lawyers, with all who had trusted in ordinances and observances, could hardly fail to be shocked and alarmed. So, too, when Rabbi Antigonus said, "*Be not as men who serve their master for the sake of reward, but be like men who serve not looking for reward*;" or when Rabbi Gamaliel said, "*Do God's will as if it were thy will, that He may accomplish thy will as if it were His*," there would be many, no doubt, who would feel that these venerable rabbis were bringing in very novel, and possibly very dangerous, doctrine. Nor could they fail to see what new fields of thought were being thrown open to them when Coheleth affirmed the future judgment and the future life of men. Such "words" as these were in very deed "goads," correcting the errors of previous thought, and urging men on to new pastures of truth and godliness.

Sometimes, as I have said, the progressive Sage and the conservative Master would be united in the same person; for there are those, though there are not too many of them, who can "stand on the old ways" and yet "look for the new." But, often, no doubt, the two would be divided and opposed, then as now. For in thought, as in politics, there are always two great parties; the one, looking back with affectionate reverence and regret on the past, and set to "keep invention in a *noted* weed;" the other, looking forward with eager hope and desire to the future, and attached to "new-found methods and to compounds strange;" the one, bent on conserving as much as possible of the large heritage which our fathers have bequeathed us; the other, bent on leaving a larger and less encumbered inheritance to those that shall be after them. The danger of the conservative thinker is that he may hold *the debts* on the estate as part of the estate, that he may set himself against all liquidations, all better methods of management, against improvement in every form. The danger

of the progressive thinker is that, in his generous ambition to improve and enlarge the estate, he may break violently from the past, and cast away many heirlooms and hoarded treasures that would add largely to our wealth. The one is too apt to pitch his tents in familiar fields long after they are barren; the other is too apt to drive men on from old pastures to new before the old are exhausted or the new ripe. And, surely, there never was a larger or a more tolerant heart than that of the Preacher who has taught us that both these classes of men and teachers, both the conservative thinker and the progressive thinker, are of God and have each a useful function to discharge; that both the shepherd who loves his tent and the herdsman who wields the goad, both the sage who urges us forward and the sage who holds us back, are servants of the one Great Pastor, and owe whether goad or tent-spike to Him. Simply to entertain the conception widens and raises our minds; to have conceived it and thrown it into this perfect form proves the Sacred Preacher to have been all he claims and more—not only Sage, Teacher, Master, Author, but also a true Poet and a true man of God.

It is to be observed, however, that our accomplished Sage limits the field of mental activity on either hand (ver. 12). His children, his disciples—"my son" was the rabbi's customary term for his pupils, as "rabbi," *i. e.*, "my father," was the title by which the pupil addressed his master—are to beware both of the "many books" of the making of which there was even then "no end," and of that over-addiction to study which was a "weariness to the flesh." The latter caution, the warning against "*much study*," was a logical result of that sense of the sanitary value of physical labour by which, as we have seen, the masters in Israel were profoundly impressed. They held bodily exercise to be good for the soul as well as for the body, a safeguard against the dreamy abstract moods and the vague fruitless reveries which relax rather than brace the intellectual fibre, and which tend to a moral languor all the more perilous because its approaches are masked under the semblance of mental occupation. They knew that those who attempt or affect to be "creatures too bright and good for human nature's daily food" are apt to sink below the common level rather than to rise above it. They did not want their disciples to resemble many of the young men who lounged through the philosophical schools of Greece and Rome, and who, though always ready to discuss the "first true, first perfect, first fair," did nothing to raise the tone of common life whether by their example or their words; young men, as Epictetus bitterly remarked of some of his disciples, whose philosophy lay in their cloaks and their beards rather than in any wise conduct of their daily lives or any endeavour to better the world. It was their aim to develop the whole man—body, soul, and spirit; to train up useful citizens as well as accomplished scholars, to spread the love and pursuit of wisdom through the whole nation rather than to produce a separate and learned class. And, in the prosecution of this aim, they enjoyed neither the exercises of the ancient palæstra, nor athletic sports like those in vogue at our English seats of learning, which are often a mere waste of good muscle, but useful and productive toils. With Ruskin, they believed, not in "the gospel of the cricket-

bat," or of the gymnasium, but in the gospel of the plough and the spade, the saw and the axe, the hammer and the trowel; and saved their disciples from the weariness of overtaxed brains by requiring them to become skilled artisans, and to labour heartily in their vocations.

Nor is the caution against "many books," at which some critics have taken grave offence, the illiberal sentiment it has often been pronounced. For, no doubt, Coheleth, like other wise Hebrews, was fully prepared to study whatever science would throw light on the Divine Law, or teach men how to live. Mathematics, astronomy, natural history, medicine, casuistry, the ethical and religious systems of the East and the West, —some knowledge of all these various branches of learning was necessary, as has been shown, to those who had to interpret and administer the statutes of the Mosaic code, and to supplement them with rules appropriate to the new conditions of the time. In these and kindred studies the rabbis were "masters"; and what they knew they taught. That which distinguished them from other men of equal learning was that they did not "love knowledge for its own sake" merely, but for its bearing on practice, on conduct. Like Socrates, they were not content with a purely intellectual culture, but sought a wisdom that would mingle with the blood of men and mend their ways, a wisdom that would hold their baser passions in check, infuse new energy into the higher moods and attitudes of the soul, and make duty their supreme aim and delight. To secure this great end, they knew no method so likely to prove effectual as an earnest, or even an exclusive, study of the Sacred Scriptures in which they thought they had "eternal life," *i. e.*, the true life of man, the life which is independent of the chances and changes of time. Whatever studies would illuminate and illustrate these Scriptures they pursued and encouraged; whatever might divert attention from them, they discouraged and condemned. Many of them, as we learn from the Talmud, refused to write down the discourses they delivered in School or Synagogue lest, by making books of their own, they should withdraw attention from the Inspired Writings. It was better, they thought, to read the Scriptures than any commentary on the Scriptures, and hence they confined themselves to oral instruction: even their profoundest and most characteristic sayings would have perished if "fond tradition" had not "babbled" of them for many an age to come.

If the sentiment which dictated this course was in part a mistaken sentiment, it sprang from a noble motive. For no ordinance could be more self-denying to a learned and literary class than one which forbade them to put on record the results of their researches, the conclusions of their wisdom, and thus to win name and fame and use in after generations. But was their course, after all, one which calls for censure? Has the world ever produced a literature so noble, so pure, so lofty and heroic in its animating spirit, as that of the Hebrew historians and poets? "The world is forwarded by having its attention fixed on the best things," says Matthew Arnold in his Preface to his selection of Wordsworth's poems, and proceeds to define the best things as those works of the great masters of song which have won the approval "of the whole group of civilised nations." But even those whom the civilised world has acclaimed as its highest and best have

confessed that in the Bible, viewed simply as literature, their noblest work is far excelled; and what sane man will deny that "Faust," for example, would cut a sorry figure if compared with "Job," which our own greatest living poet has pronounced "the finest poem whether of ancient or of modern times," or Wordsworth himself if placed side by side with Isaiah? Who can doubt, then, that the world would have been "forwarded" if its attention had been fixed on this "best"? Who can doubt that it would be infinitely sweeter and better than it is if these ancient Scriptures had been studied before and above all other writings, if they had been brooded over and wrought into the minds of men till "the life" in them had been assimilated and reproduced? The man who has had a classical or scientific education, and profited by it, must be an ingrate indeed, unless he be the slave of some dominant crotchet, if he do not hold in grateful reverence the great masters at whose feet he has sat; but the man who has really found "life" in the Scriptures must be worse than an ingrate if he does not feel that a merely mental culture is a small good when compared with the treasures of an eternal life, if he does not admit that the main object of all education should be to conduct men through a course of intellectual training which shall culminate in a moral and spiritual discipline. To be wise is much; but how much more is it to be good! Better be a child in the kingdom of heaven than a philosopher or a poet hanging vaguely about its outskirts.

If any of us still suspect the Preacher's words of illiberality, and say, "There was no need to oppose the one Book to the many, and to depreciate these in order to magnify that," we have only to consider the historical circumstances in which he wrote in order to acquit him of the charge. For generations the Holy Scriptures had been neglected by the Jews; copies had grown scarce, and were hidden away in obscure nooks in which they were hard to find; some of the inspired writings had been lost, and have not been recovered to this day. The people were ignorant of their own history, and law, and hope. Suddenly they were awakened from the slumber of indifference, to find themselves in a night of ignorance. During the miseries of the Captivity a longing for the Divine Word was quickened within them. They were eager to acquaint themselves with the Revelation which they had neglected and forgotten. And their teachers, the few men who knew and loved the Word, set themselves to deepen and to satisfy the craving. They multiplied copies of the Scriptures, circulated them, explained them in the Schools, exhorted from them in the Synagogues. And, till the people were familiar with the Scriptures, the wiser rabbis would not write books of their own, and looked with a jealous eye on the "many books" bred by the literary activity of the time. It was the very feeling which preceded and accompanied the English Reformation. Then the newly-discovered Bible threw all other books into the shade. The people thirsted for the pure Word of God; and the leaders of the Reformation were very well content that they should read nothing else till they had read *that*; that they should leave all other fountains to drink of "the river of life." The translation and circulation of the Scripture were the one work, almost the exclusive work, to

which they bent their energies. Like the Jewish rabbis, Tyndale and his fellow-labourers did not care to write books themselves, nor wish the people to read the books they were compelled to write in self-defence. There is a remarkable passage in Fryth's "Scripture Doctrine of the Sacrament," in which replying to Sir Thomas More, the Reformer says: "This hath been offered you, is offered, and shall be offered. Grant that the Word of God, I mean the text of Scripture, may go abroad in our English tongue . . . and my brother Tyndale and I have done, and will promise you to write no more. If you will not grant this condition, then will we be doing while we have breath, and show in few words that the Scripture doth in many, and so at the least save some." The Hebrew Reformers of the school of Coheleth were animated by precisely the same lofty and generous spirit. They were content to be nothing, that the Word of God might be all in all. "The Bible, and the Bible only," they conceived to be the want of their age and race; and hence they were content to forego the honours of authorship, and the study of many branches of learning which under other conditions they would have been glad to pursue, and besought their disciples to concentrate all their thoughts on the one Book which was able to make them wise unto salvation. Learned themselves, and often profoundly learned, it was no contempt for learning which actuated them, but a devout godliness and the fervours of a most self-denying piety.

So far the Epilogue may seem a mere digression, not without interest and value indeed, but having no vital connection with the main theme of the Poem. It tells us that the Preacher was a sage, a recognised official teacher, the master of an assembly, a doctor of laws, an author who had expended much labour on many proverbs, a conservative shepherd pitching his tent on familiar fields of thought, a progressive herdsman goading men on to new pastures—not Solomon therefore, by the way, for who would have described *him* in such terms as these? If we are glad to know so much of him, we cannot but ask, What has all this to do with the quest of the Chief Good? It has this to do with it. Coheleth has achieved the quest; he has solved his problem, and has given us his solution of it. He is about to repeat that solution. To give emphasis and force to the repetition, that he may carry his readers more fully with him, he dwells on his claims to their respect, their confidence, their affection. He is all that they most admire; he carries the very authority to which they most willingly defer. If they know this—and, scattered as they were through many cities and provinces, how should they know it unless he told them?—they cannot refuse him a hearing; they will be predisposed to accept his conclusion; they will be sure not to reject it without consideration. It is not out of any personal conceit, therefore, nor any pride of learning, nor even that he may grant himself the relief of lifting his mask from his face for a moment, that he recounts his titles to their regard. He is simply gathering force from the willing respect and deference of his readers, in order that he may plant his final conclusion more strongly and more deeply in their hearts.

And what is the conclusion which he is at such pains to enforce? "The conclusion of the matter is this; that God taketh cognisance of all things:

fear Him, therefore, and keep his commandments, for this it behoveth every man to do; since God will bring every deed to the judgment appointed for every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be bad" (vv. 13, 14).

Now that this "conclusion" is simply a repetition, in part expanded and in part condensed, of that with which the Preacher closes the previous Section, is obvious. *There* he incites men to a life of virtue with two leading motives: first, by the fact of the present constant judgment of God; and, secondly, by the prospect of a future, a more searching and decisive, judgment. *Here* he appeals to precisely the same motives, though now instead of implying a present judgment under the injunction "Remember thy Creator," he broadly affirms that "God takes note of all things;" and, instead of simply reminding the young that God will bring "the ways of their heart" into judgment, he defines that future judgment at once more largely and more exactly as "appointed for every secret thing" and extending to "every deed," both good and bad. In dealing with the motives of a virtuous life, therefore, he goes a little beyond his former lines of thought, gives them a wider scope, makes them more sharp and definite. On the other hand, in speaking of the forms which the virtuous or ideal life assumes, he is very curt and brief. All he has to say on that point now is, "Fear God and keep his commandments;" whereas, in his previous treatment of it, he had much to say, bidding us, for instance, "cast our bread upon the waters," and "give a portion to seven, and even to eight;" bidding us "sow our seed morning and evening," though "the clouds" should be "full of rain," and whatever "the course of the wind;" bidding us "rejoice" in all our labours, and carry to all our self-denials the merry heart that physics pain. As we studied the meaning of the beautiful metaphors of chapter xi., sought to gather up their several meanings into an orderly connection, and to express them in a more literal logical form—to translate them, in short, from the Eastern to the Western mode—we found that the main virtues enjoined by the Preacher were charity, industry, cheerfulness; the charity which does good hoping for nothing again, the industry which bends itself to the present duty in scorn of omen or consequence; and the cheerfulness which springs from a consciousness of the Divine presence, from the conviction that, however men may misjudge us, God knows us altogether and will do us justice. This was our summary of the Preacher's argument, of his solution of the supreme moral problem of human life. Here, in the Epilogue, he gives us his own summary in the words, "Fear God, and keep his commandments."

If we compare these two summaries, there seems at first rather difference than resemblance between them: the one appears, if more indefinite, much more comprehensive, than the other. Yet there is one point of resemblance which soon strikes us. For we know by this time that on the Preacher's lips "Fear God" does not mean "Be afraid of God;" that it indicates and demands just that reverent sense of the Divine Presence, that strong inward conviction of the constant judgment He passes on all our ways and motives and thoughts, which Coheleth has already affirmed to be a prime safeguard of virtue. It is the phrase "and keep his command-

ments" that sounds so much larger than anything we have heard from him before, so much more comprehensive. For the commandments of God are many and very broad. He reveals his will in the natural universe and the laws which govern it; laws which, as we are part of the universe, we need to know and to obey. He reveals his will in the social and political forces which govern the history and development of the various races of mankind, which therefore meet and affect us at every turn. He reveals his will in the ethical intuitions and codes which govern the formation of character, which enter into and give shape to all in us that is most spiritual, profound, and enduring. To keep all the commandments revealed in these immense fields of Divine activity with an intelligent and invariable obedience is simply impossible to us; it is the perfection which flows round our imperfection, and towards which it is our one great task to be ever reaching forth. Is it as inciting us to this impossible perfection that the Preacher bids us "fear God and keep his commandments"?

Yes and No. It is not as having this large perfect ideal distinctly before his mind that he utters the injunction, although in the course of this Book he has glanced at every element of it; nor even as having so much of it in his mind as is expressed in the law that came by Moses, although that too includes precepts for the physical and the political as well as for the moral and religious provinces of human life. What he meant by bidding us "keep the commandments" was, I apprehend, that we should take the counsels he has already given us, and follow after charity, industry, cheerfulness. Every other phrase in this final "conclusion" is, as we have seen, a repetition of the truths announced at the close of the previous Section, and therefore we may fairly assume this phrase to contain a truth—the truth of duty—which he there illustrates. Throughout the whole Book there is not a single technical allusion, no allusion to the Temple, to the feasts, to the sacrifices, rites, ceremonies of the Law; and therefore we can hardly take this reference to the "commandments" as an allusion to the Mosaic table. By the rules of fair interpretation we are bound to take these commandments as previously defined by the Preacher himself, to understand him as once more enforcing the virtues which, for him, comprised the whole duty of man.

Do we thus limit and degrade the moral ideal, or represent him as degrading and limiting it? By no means: for to love our neighbour, to discharge the present duty whatever rain may fall and whatever storm may blow, to carry a bright hopeful spirit through all our toils and charities; to do this in the fear of God, as in his Presence, because He is judging and will judge us—this, surely, includes all that is essential even in the loftiest ideal of moral duty and perfection. For how are we to be cheerful and dutiful and kind except as we obey the commandments of God in whatever form they may have been revealed? The diseases which result from a violation of sanitary laws, as also the ignorance or the wilfulness or the impotence which lead us to violate social or ethical laws, of necessity and by natural consequence impair our cheerfulness, our strength for laborious duties, our neighbourly serviceableness and good-will. To live the life which the Preacher enjoins, on the inspiration of

the motives which he supplies, is therefore, in the largest and broadest sense, to keep the commandments of God.

What advantage, then, is there in saying, "Be kind, be dutiful, be cheerful," over saying, "Obey the laws of God"? There is this great practical advantage that, while in the last resort the one rule of life is as comprehensive as the other, and just as difficult, it is more definite, more portable, and does not sound so difficult. It is the very advantage which our Lord's memorable summary, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself," has over the Law and the Prophets. Bid a man keep the whole Mosaic code as interpreted by the prophets of a thousand years, and you set him a task so heavy, so hopeless, that he may well decline it; only to understand the bearing and harmony of the Mosaic statutes, and to gather the sense in which the prophets—to say nothing of the rabbis—interpreted them, is the labour of a lifetime, a labour for which even the whole life of a trained scholar is insufficient. But bid him "love God and man," and you give him a principle which his own conscience at once accepts and confirms, a golden rule or principle which, if he be of a good heart and a willing mind, he will be able to apply to the details and problems of life as they arise. In like manner if you say: "The true ideal of life is to be reached only by the man who comprehends and obeys all the laws of God revealed in the physical universe, in the history of humanity, in the moral intuitions and discoveries of the race," you set men a task so stupendous as that no man ever has or will be able to accomplish it. Say, on the other hand, "Do the duty of every hour as it passes, without fretting about future issues; help your neighbour to do his duty or to bear his burden, even though he may never have helped you; be blithe and cheerful even when your work is hard and your neighbour is ungrateful or unkind," and you speak straight to a man's heart, to his sense of what is right and good; you summon every noble and generous instinct of his nature to his aid. He can begin to practise this rule of life without preliminary and exhausting study of its meaning; and if he finds it *work*, as assuredly he will, he will be encouraged to make it his rule. He will soon discover, indeed, that it means more than he thought, that it is not so easy to apply to the complexities of human affairs, that it is very much harder to keep than he supposed: but its depth and difficulty will open on him gradually, as he is able to bear them. If his heart now and then faint, if hand and foot falter, still God is with him, with him to help and reward as well as to judge; and *that* conviction once in his mind is there for ever, a constant spur to thought, to obedience, to patience.

In nothing, indeed, does the wisdom of the Hebrew sages show its superiority over that of the other sages of antiquity more decisively than in its adaptation to the practical needs of men busied in the common affairs of life, and with no learning and no leisure for the study of large intricate problems. It comes straight down into the beaten ways of men. If you read Confucius, for example, and still more if you read Plato, you cannot fail to be struck with their immense grasp of thought, or their profound learning, or even their moral enthusiasm; as you read, you will often meet with wise rules of life expressed

in beautiful forms. And yet your main feeling will be that they give you, and men like you, if at least you be of the common build, as most of us are, little help; that unless you had their rare endowments, or could give yourself largely and long to the study of their works, you could hardly hope to learn what they have to teach, or order your life by their plan. And that this feeling is just is proved by the histories of China and Greece, different as they are. In China only students, only literati, are so much as supposed to understand the Confucian system of thought and ethics; the great bulk of the people have to be content with a few rules and forms and rites which are imposed on them by authority. In ancient Greece, the wisdom to which her great masters attained was only taught in the Schools to men addicted to philosophical studies; even the natural and moral truths on which the popular mythology was based were hidden in "mysteries" open only to the initiated few; while the great mass of the people were amused with fables which they misapprehended, and with rites which they soon degraded into licentious orgies. No man cared for *their* souls; their errors were not corrected, their license was not rebuked. Their wise men made no effort to lift them to a height from which they might see that the whole of morality lay in the love of God and man, in charity, diligent devotion to duty, cheerfulness. But it was far otherwise with the Hebrews and their sages. Men such as the Preacher confined themselves to no school or class, but carried their wisdom to the synagogue, to the market-place, to the popular assemblies. They invented no "mysteries," but brought down the mysteries of Heaven to the understanding of the simple. Instead of engaging in lofty abstract speculations in which only the learned could follow them, they compressed the loftiest wisdom into plain moral rules which the unlettered could apprehend, and urged them to obedience by motives and promises which went home to the popular heart. And they had their reward. The truths they taught became familiar to all sorts and conditions of Hebrew men; they became a factor, and the most influential factor, in the national life. Fishermen, carpenters, tent-makers, sandal-makers, shepherds, husbandmen, grew studious of the Divine Will and learned the secrets of righteousness and peace. During the wonderful revival of literary and religious activity which followed the exile in Babylon—a revival mainly owing to these Sages—every child was compelled to attend a common school in which the sacred Scriptures were taught by the ablest and most learned rabbis; in which, as we learn from the Talmud, the duty of leading a religious life in all outward conditions, even to the poorest, was impressed upon them, and the virtues of charity, industry, and cheerfulness were enforced as the very soul of religion. Here, for example, is a legend from the Talmud, and it is only one of many, which illustrates and confirms all that has just been said.—"A sage, while walking in a crowded market-place suddenly encountered the prophet Elijah, and asked him who, out of that vast multitude, would be saved. Whereupon the Prophet first pointed out a weird-looking creature, a turnkey, 'because he was merciful to his prisoners,' and next two common-looking tradesmen who were walking through the crowd, pleasantly chatting together. The sage instantly rushed after them, and asked them what were

their saving works. But they, much puzzled, replied: 'We are but poor working-men who live by our trade. All that can be said for us is that we are always cheerful and good-natured. When we meet anybody who seems sad, we join him, and we talk to him and cheer him up, that he may forget his grief. And if we know of two people who have quarrelled, we talk to them, and persuade them till we have made them friends again. This is our whole life.'" It is impossible that such a legend should have sprung up on any but Hebrew soil. Had Confucius been asked to point out the man whom Heaven most approved, he would probably have replied, "The superior man is catholic, not sectarian; he is observant of the rules of propriety and decorum; and he does not do to others what he would not have done to himself;"* and he would certainly have looked for him in some state official distinguished by his wise administration. Had any of the Greek sages been asked the same question, they would have found their perfect man in the philosopher who, raised above the common passions and aims of men, gave himself to the pursuit of an abstract and speculative wisdom. Only a Hebrew would have looked for him in that low estate in which the one truly Perfect Man dwelt among us. And yet how that Hebrew legend charms and touches and satisfies us! What a hope for humanity there is in the thought that the poor weird-looking jailer who was merciful to his prisoners, and the kindly, industrious, cheerful working-men, living by their craft, and incapable of regarding their diligence and good-nature as "saving works," stood higher than priest or rabbi, ruler or philosopher! How welcome and ennobling is the conviction that there are last who yet are first—last with men, first with God; that turnkeys and artisans, publicans and sinners even, may draw nearer to Heaven than sophist or flamen, sage or prince! Who so poor but that he has a little "bread" to cast on the thankless unreturning waters? who so faint of heart but that he may sow a little "seed" even when the winds rave and the sky is full of clouds? who so solitary and forlorn but that he may say a word of comfort to a weeping neighbour, or seek to make "two people who have quarrelled friends again"? And this is all that the Preacher, all that God through the Preacher, asks of us.

All—yet even this is much; even for this we shall need the pressure of constant and weighty motives: for it is not only occasional acts which are required of us, but settled tempers and habits of goodwill, industry, and cheerfulness; and to love all men, to rejoice always, to do our duty in all weathers and all moods, is very hard work to our feeble, selfish, and easily-dejected natures. Does the Preacher supply us with such motives as we need? He offers us two motives; one in the present judgment, another in the future judgment of God. "God is with you," he says, "taking cognisance of all you do; and you will soon be with God, to give Him an account of every secret and every deed." But that is an

* This partial anticipation of the Golden Rule will be found in the Confucian "Analects," book xv. chap. xxiii. "Tsze-kung asked, saying, 'Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?' The Master said, 'Is not *reciprocity* such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.'" The same rule is given in another form in book v. chap. 1 of the "Analects." The other phrases I have put into the sage's mouth are quoted from Dr. Legge's translation of this work.

appeal to fear—is it not? It is, rather, an appeal to love and hope. He has no thought of frightening us into obedience—for the obedience of fear is not worth having, is *not* obedience in the true sense; but he is trying to win and allure us to obedience. For whatever terrors God's judgment or the future world may have for us, it is very certain that these terrors were in large measure unknown to the Jews. The Talmud knows nothing of "hell," nothing of an everlasting torture. Even the "Sheol" of the Old Testament is simply the "under-world" in which the Jews believed the spirits of both good men and bad to be gathered after death. And, to the Jews for whom Coheleth wrote, the judgment of God, whether here or hereafter, would have singular and powerful attractions. They were in captivity to merciless and capricious despots who took no pains to understand their character or to deal with them according to their works, who had no sense of justice, no kindness, no ruth for slaves. For men thus oppressed and hopeless there would be an infinite comfort in the thought that God, the Great Ruler and Disposer, knew them altogether, saw all their struggles to maintain his worship and to acquaint themselves with his will, took note of every wrong they suffered, "was afflicted in all their afflictions," and would one day call both them and their oppressors to the bar at which all wrongs are at once righted and avenged. Would it affright *them* to hear that "God taketh cognisance of all things," and has "appointed a judgment for every secret and every deed"? Would not this be, rather, their strongest consolation, their brightest hope? Would they not do their duty with better heart if they knew that God saw how hard it was to do? Would they not show a more constant kindness to their neighbours, if they knew that God would openly reward every alms done in secret? Would they not carry a blither and more patient spirit to all their labours and afflictions if they knew that a day of recompenses was at hand? The Preacher thought they would; and hence he bids them "rejoice," bids them "banish care and sadness," *because* God will bring them into judgment, and incites them to "keep the commandments" *because* God's eye is upon them, and because, in the judgment, He will not forget the work of their obedience, the labour of their love.

This, to some of us, may be a novel view whether of the present or of the future judgment of God. For the most part, I fear, we speak of the Divine judgments as terrible and well-nigh unendurable. We would escape them even here, if we could; but, above all, we dread them when we shall stand before the bar at which the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed. Now we need not, and we must not, lose aught of the awe and reverence for Him who is our God and Father, which, so far from impairing, deepens our love. But we need to remember that fear is base, that it is the enemy of love; that so long as we anticipate the Divine judgments only or mainly with dread, we are far from the love which gives value and charm to obedience; and that, if we are to be good and at peace, we must "shut out fear with all the strength of hope." What is it that we fear? Suffering! But why should we fear that, if it will make us perfect? Death! But why should we fear that if it will take us home to our Father? God's anger! But God is not angry with us if we love Him and

try to do his will; He loves us even when we sin against Him, and shows his love in making the way of sin so hard to us that we are constrained to leave it. Ought we, then, to dread, ought we not rather to desire, the judgments by which we are corrected, purified, saved?

"But the future judgment—that is so dreadful!" Is it? God knows us as we are already: is it so very much worse that we should know ourselves, and that our neighbours should know us? If among our "secrets" there be many things evil, are there not at least some that are good? Do we not find ourselves perpetually thwarted or hindered in our endeavours to give form and scope to our purest emotions, our tenderest sympathies, our loftiest resolves? Do we not perpetually complain that, when we would do good, even if evil is not present to overcome the good, it is present to mar it, to make our goodness poor, scanty, ungraceful? Well, these obstructed purposes and intentions and resolves, all the good in us that has been frustrated or deformed, or limited, by our social conditions, by our lack of power, culture, expression, by the clogging flesh or the flagging brain,—all these are among "the secret things" which God will bring to light; and we may be sure that He will not think less of these, his own work in us, than of the manifold sins by which we have marred his work. We are in some danger of regarding "the judgment" as a revelation of our trespasses only, instead of every deed, and every secret, whether good or bad. Once conceive of it aright, as the revelation of the whole man, as the unveiling of *all* that is in us, and mere honesty might lead us to desire rather than to dread it. One of the finest and most devout spirits of modern France* has said: "It seems to me intolerable to appear to men other than we appear to God. My worst torture at this moment is the over-estimate which generous friends form of me. We are told that at the last judgment the secret of all consciences will be laid bare to the universe: *would that mine were so this day, and that every passer-by could read me as I am!*" To seem what we are, to be known for what we are, to be treated as we are, this is the judgment of God. And, though this judgment must bring even the best of us much shame and much sorrow, who that sincerely loves God and truth will not rejoice to have done at last with all masks and veils, to wear his natural colours, and to take his true place, even though it be the lowest?

"In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In its true nature, and we ourselves compell'd
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence."

To have got out of "the corrupted currents" of which audacious and strong injustice so often avails itself to our hurt; to be quit of all the shuffling equivocations by which we often pervert the true character of our actions, and persuade ourselves that we are other and better than we are; to be compelled to look our faults straight and fairly in the face; to have all the latent goodness of our natures developed, and their fettered and obstructed virtue liberated from every bond; to see our every "secret" good as

* Maurice de Guérin in his "Journal."

well as bad, and our every "deed" good as well as bad, exposed in their true colours: is there no hope, no comfort for us, in such a prospect as this? It is a prospect full of comfort, full of hope, if at least we have any real trust in the grace and goodness of God; and if, through his grace, we have set ourselves to do our duty, to love our neighbour, and to bear the changes and burdens of life with a patient cheerful heart.

Now that we have once more heard the Preacher's final conclusion, we shall have no difficulty in fitting into its place, or valuing at its worth, the partial and provisional conclusion to which he rises at the close of the previous Sections of the Book. In the First Section he describes his Quest of the Chief Good in Wisdom and in Mirth; he declares that, though both wisdom and mirth are good, neither of them is the supreme good of life, nor both combined; and, in despair of reaching any higher mark, he closes with the admission (ch. ii. vv. 24-26) that even for the man who is both wise and good "there is nothing better than to eat and to drink, and to let his soul take pleasure in all his labour." In the Second Section he pursues his Quest in Devotion to Business and to Public Affairs, only to find his former conclusion confirmed (ch. v. vv. 18-20): "Behold, that which I have said holds good; it is well for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy all the good of his labour through the brief day of his life; this is his portion; and he should take his portion and rejoice in his labour, remembering that the days of his life are not many, and that God meant him to work for the enjoyment of his heart." In the Third Section, his Quest in Wealth and in the Golden Mean conducts him by another road to the same bright resting-place which, however, for all so bright as it looks, he seems to enter every time with a more rueful and dejected gait (ch. viii. ver. 15): more and more sadly he "commends mirth, because there is nothing better for man than to eat and to drink and to rejoice, and because *this* will go with him to his work through the days of his life which God giveth him under the sun." To my mind there is a strange pathos in the mournful tones in which the Preacher commends mirth, in the plaintive minors of a voice from which we should naturally expect the clear ringing majors of joy. As we listen to these recurring notes, we feel that he has been baffled in his Quest; that, starting every day in a fresh direction and travelling till he is weary and spent, he finds himself night after night at the very spot he had left in the morning, and can only alleviate the unwelcome surprise of finding himself no farther and no higher by muttering, "As well here perhaps as elsewhere!" No votary of mirth and jollity surely ever wore such a woe-begone countenance, or sang their praises with more trembling and uncertain lips. What can be more hopeless than his "*there is nothing better*, so you must even be content with this," or than the way in which he harps on the brevity of life! You feel that the man has been passionately seeking for something better, for a good which would be a good not only through the brief hours of time but for ever; that it is with a heart saddened by the sense of wasted endeavour and cravings unsatisfied that he falls back on pleasures as brief as his day, as wearisome as his toils. Yet all the while he feels, and makes you feel, that there

is a certain measure of truth in his conclusion; that mirth is a great good, though not the greatest; that if he could but find that "something better" of which he is in quest, he would learn the secret of a deeper mirth than that which springs from eating and drinking and sensuous delights, a mirth which would not set with the setting sun of his brief day.

This feeling is justified by the issue. Now that the Preacher has completed his circle of thought, we can see that it is well for a man to rejoice and take pleasure in his labours, that God did mean him to work for the enjoyment of his heart, that there is a mirth purer and more enduring than that which springs from knowledge, or from the gratification of the senses, or from success in affairs, or from the possession of much goods,—a mirth for this life which expands and deepens into an everlasting joy. Throughout his Quest he has held fast to the conviction that "it is a comely fashion to be glad," though he could allege no better reason for his conviction than the transitoriness of life and the impossibility of reaching any higher good. Before he could justify this conviction, he must achieve his Quest. It is only when he has learned to regard our life—

"as a harp,
A gracious instrument on whose fair strings
We learn those airs we shall be set to play
When mortal hours are ended,"

that his plaintive minors pass into the frank, jocund tones appropriate to a sincere and well-grounded mirth. Now he can cease to "trouble heaven with his bootless cries" on the indiscrimination of death and the vanity of life. He can now say to his soul,

"What hast thou to do with sorrow
Or the injuries of to-morrow?"

for he has discovered that no morrow can any more injure him, no sorrow rob him of his true joy. God is with him, observing all the postures and moods of his soul, and adapting all his circumstances to the correction of what is evil in him or the cultivation of what is good. There is no dark impassable gulf between this world and the next; life does not cease at death, but grows more intense and full; death is but a second birth into a second and better life, a life of ampler and happier conditions, and yet a life which is the continuation and consummation of that we now live in the flesh. All that he has to do, therefore, is to "fear God and keep His commandments," leaving the issues of his labour in the Hands which bend all things to a final goal of good. What though the clouds drop rain or the winds blow bitterly, what though his diligence and charity meet no present recognition or reward? All that is no business of his. He has only to do the duty of the passing hour, and to help his neighbors do their duty. So long as he can do this, why should he not be bright and gay? In this lies his Chief Good: why should he not enjoy *that*, even though other and lesser goods be taken from him for a time—be lent to the Lord that they may hereafter be repaid with usury? He is no longer "a pipe for fortune's finger to sound what stop she please:" he has a tune of his own, "a cheerful tune," to play, and *will* play it, let fortune be in what mood she please. He is not "passion's slave," but the servant and friend of God; and

because God is with him and for him, and because he will soon be with God, he is

"As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,"

and can take "fortune's buffets and rewards with equal thanks." His cheerful content does not lie at the mercy of accident; the winds and waves of vicissitude cannot prevail against it; for he has two broad and solid foundations; one on earth, and the other in heaven. On the one hand, it springs from a faithful discharge of personal duty and the neighbourly charity which hopeth all things and endureth all things; on the other hand, it springs from the conviction that God takes note of all things, and will bring every secret and every deed into a judgment perfectly just and perfectly kind. The fair structure which rises on these sure foundations is not to be shaken by aught that does not sap the foundations on which it rests. Convince him that God is not with him, or that God does not so care for him as to judge and correct him; or convict him of gross and constant failures in duty and in charity; and then, indeed, you touch, you endanger, his peace. But no external loss, no breath of change, no cloud in the sky of his fortunes, no loss, no infirmity that does not impede him in the discharge of duty, can do more than cast a passing shadow on his heart. Whatever happens, into whatever new conditions or new worlds he may pass, his chief good, and therefore his supreme joy, is with him.

"This man is freed from servile bands
Of hope to rise or fear to fall:
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And, having nothing, yet hath all."

Now, too, without fear or favour, without any prejudice for or against his conclusion because we find it in Holy Writ, we may ask ourselves, Has the Preacher satisfactorily solved the problem which he took in hand? has he really achieved his Quest and attained the Chief Good? One thing is quite clear; he has not lost himself in speculations foreign to our experience and remote from it; he has dealt with the common facts of life such as they were in his time, such as they remain in ours: for now, as then, men are restless and craving, and seek the satisfactions of rest in science or in pleasure, in successful public careers or in the fortunate conduct of affairs, by securing wealth or by laying up a modest provision for present and future wants. Now, as then,

"The common problem, yours, mine, everyone's,
Is not to fancy what were fair in life
Providing it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means—a very different thing."

That the Preacher should have attacked this common problem, and should have handled it with the practical good sense which characterises his Poem is a point, and a large point, in his favour.

Nor is the conclusion at which he arrives, in its substance, peculiar to him, or even to the Scriptures. He says: The perfect man, the ideal man; is he who addresses himself to the present duty untroubled by adverse clouds and currents, who so loves his neighbour that he can do good even to the evil and the unthankful, and who carries a brave cheerful temper to the unrewarded toils and sacrifices of his life, because God is with him, taking note of all he does, and be-

cause there is a future life for which this course of duty, charity, and magnanimity, is the best preparative. He affirms that the man who has risen to the discovery and practice of this ideal has attained the Chief Good, that he has found a duty from which no accident can divert him, a pure and tranquil joy which will sustain him under all change and loss. And, on his behalf, I am bold to assert that, allowing for inevitable differences of conception and utterance, his conclusion is the conclusion of all the great teachers of morality. Take any of the ancient systems of morality and religion—Hindu, Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Greek, or Latin; select those elements of it in virtue of which it has lived and ruled over myriads of men; reduce those elements to their simplest forms, express them in the plainest words; and, as I believe, you will find that in every case they are only different and modified versions of the final conclusion of the Preacher. "Do your duty patiently; Be kind and helpful one to another; Shew a cheerful content with your lot; Heaven is with you and will judge you:"—these brief maxims seem to be the ethical epitome of all the creeds and systems that have had their day, as also of those which have not ceased to be. It is very true that the motive to obedience which Coheleth draws from the future life of man has been of a varying force and influence, rising perhaps to its greatest clearness among the Egyptians and the Persians, sinking to its dimmest among the Greeks and Romans, although we cannot say it did not shine even upon these; for, though the secret of their "mysteries" has been kept with a rare fidelity, yet the general impression of Antiquity concerning them was that, besides disclosing to the initiated the natural and moral truths on which the popular mythology was based, they "opened to man a comforting prospect of a future state." I am not careful to show how the Word of Inspiration surpasses all other "scriptures" in the precision with which it enunciates the elementary truths of all morality, in its freedom from admixture with baser matter, in its application of those truths to all sorts and conditions of men, and the power of the motives by which it enforces them. That is no part of my present duty. The one point to which I ask attention is this: With what an enormous weight of authority, drawn from all creeds and systems, from the whole ethical experience of humanity, the conclusion of the Preacher is clothed; how we stand rebuked by the wisdom of all past ages if, after duly testing it, we have not adopted his solution of the master-problem of life, and are not working it out. Out of every land, in all the different languages of the divided earth, from the lips of all the ancient sages whom we reverence for their excellence or for their wisdom no less than from the mouths of prophet and psalmist, preacher and apostle, there come to us voices which with one consent bid us "fear God and keep His commandments;"—a sacred chorus which paces down the long-drawn aisles of Time, chanting the praise of the man who does his duty even though he lose by it, who loves his neighbour even though he win no love in return, who breasts the blows of circumstance with a tranquil heart, who by a wise use and a wise enjoyment of the life that now is qualifies himself for the better life that is to be.

This, then, is the Hebrew solution of "the

common problem." It is also the Christian solution. For when "the Fellow of the Lord of hosts," instead of "clutching at His equality with God," humbled Himself and took on Him the form of a servant, the very ideal of perfect manhood became incarnate in this "man from heaven." Does the Hebrew Preacher, backed by the consentient voices of the great sages of Antiquity, demand that the ideal man, moved thereto by his sense of a constant Divine Presence and the hope of God's future judgment, should cast the bread of his charity on the thankless waters of neighbourly ingratitude, give himself with all diligence to the discharge of duty whatever clouds may darken his sky, whatever unkindly wind may nip his harvest, and maintain a calm and cheerful temper in all weathers, and through all the changing scenes and seasons of life? His demand is met, and surpassed, by the Man Christ Jesus. *He* loved all men with a love which the many waters of their hostility and unthankfulness could not quench. Always about His Father's business, when He laid aside the glory He had with the Father before the world was, He put off the robes of a king to don the weeds of the husbandman, and went forth to sow in all weathers, beside all waters, undaunted by any wind of opposition or any threatening cloud. In all the shock of hostile circumstance, in the abiding agony and passion of a life "short in years indeed, but in sorrows above all measure long," He carried Himself with a cheerful patience and serenity which never wavered, for the joy set before Him enduring, and even despising, the bitter cross. In fine, the very virtues inculcated by the Preacher were the very substance of "the highest, holiest manhood." And, if we ask, What were the motives which inspired this life of consummate and unparalleled excellence? we find among them the very motives suggested by Coheleth. The strong Son of Man and of God was never alone, because the

Father was with Him, as truly with Him while He was on earth as when He was in the heaven from which He "came down." He never bated heart nor hope because He knew that He would soon be with God once more, to be judged of Him and recompensed according to the deeds done in the body of his humiliation. Men might misjudge Him, but the Judge of all the earth would do Him right. Men might award Him only a crown of thorns; but God would touch the thorns and, at His quickening touch, they would flower into a garland of immortal beauty and honour.

Nor did the Lord Jesus help us in our quest of the Chief Good only by becoming a Pattern of all virtue and excellence. The work of His Redemption is a still more sovereign help. By the sacrifice of the Cross He took away the sins which had rendered the pursuit of excellence a wellnigh hopeless task. By the impartation of His Spirit, no less than by the inspiration of His Example, He seeks to win us to the love of our neighbour, to fidelity in the discharge of our daily duty, and to that cheerful and constant trust in the providence of God by which we are redeemed from the bondage of care and fear. He the Immanuel, by taking our flesh and dwelling among us, has *proved* that "God is with us," that He will in very deed dwell with men upon the earth. He, the Victor over death, by His resurrection from the grave, has *proved* the truth of a future life and a future judgment with arguments of a force and quality unknown to our Hebrew fathers.

So that now, as of old, now even more demonstrably than of old, the conclusion of the whole matter is that we "fear God and keep His commandments." This is still the one solution of "the common problem" and "the whole duty of man." He who accepts this solution and discharges this duty has achieved the Supreme Quest; to him it has been given to find the Chief Good.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

AND THE

LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

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THE SONG OF SOLOMON

AND

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

BY THE REV. WALTER F. ADENEY, M. A.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK.

THE Song of Solomon is a puzzle to the commentator. Quite apart from the wilderness of mystical interpretations with which it has been overgrown in the course of the ages,* its literary form and motives are subjects of endless controversy. There are indications that it is a continuous poem; and yet it is characterised by startling kaleidoscopic changes that seem to break it up into incongruous fragments. If it is a single work the various sections of it succeed one another in the most abrupt manner, without any connecting links or explanatory clauses.

The simplest way out of the difficulty presented by the many curious turns and changes of the poem is to deny it any structural unity, and treat it as a string of independent lyrics. That is to cut the knot in a rather disappointing fashion. Nevertheless the suggestion to do so met with some favour when it was put forth at the close of the last century by Herder, a writer who seemed better able to enter into the spirit of Hebrew poetry than any of his contemporaries. While accepting the traditional view of the authorship of the book, this critic described its contents as "Solomon's songs of love, the oldest and sweetest of the East;" and Goethe in the world of letters, as well as biblical students, endorsed his judgment. Subsequently it fell into disfavour, and scholars, who differed among themselves with respect to their own theories, agreed in rejecting this particular hypothesis. But quite recently it has appeared in an altered form. The book, it is now suggested, is just a chance collection of folk songs from northern Palestine, an anthology of rustic love-poems. These songs are denied any connection with Solomon or the court. The references to royalty are accounted for by a custom said to be kept up among the Syrian peasants in the present day, according to which the week of wedding festivities is called "The king's week," because the newly-married pair then play the part of king and queen, and are playfully treated by their friends with the honours of a court. The bridegroom is supposed to be named Solomon in acknowledgment of his regal splendour—as an English villager might be so named for his conspicuous wisdom; while perhaps the bride is called the Shulammite, with an allusion to the famous beauty Abishag, the Shunammite of David's time.†

Such a theory as this is only admissible on condition that the unity of the poem has been disproved. But whether we can unravel it or not, there is much that goes to show that one thread runs through the whole book. The style is the same throughout, and it has no parallel in the whole of Hebrew literature. Everywhere

we meet with the same rich, luxurious language, the same abundance of imagery, the same picturesque habit of alluding to a number of plants and animals by name, the same vivacity of movement, the same pleading tone, the same suffused glow as of the light of morning. Then there are more peculiar features that continually recur, such as the form of the dialogue, certain recognisable characters, the part of chorus taken by the daughters of Jerusalem, in particular the gentle, graceful portrait of the Shulammite, the consistency of which is well preserved. But the principal reason for believing in the unity of the work is to be found in an examination of its plot. The difficulty of making this out has encouraged the temptation to discredit its existence. But while there are various ideas about the details, there is enough in common to all the proposed schemes of the story to indicate the fact that the book is one composition.

The question whether the work is a drama or an idyl has been discussed with much critical acumen. But is it not rather pedantic? The sharply divided orders of European poetry were not observed or even known in Israel. It was natural, therefore, that Hebrew imaginative work should partake of the characteristics of several orders, while too naïve to trouble itself with the rules of any one. The drama designed for acting was not cultivated by the ancient Jews. It was introduced as an exotic only as late as the Roman period, when Herod built the first theatre known to have existed in the Holy Land. Previous to his time we have no mention of the art of play-acting among the Jews. Nevertheless the dialogues in the Song of Solomon are certainly dramatic in character; and we cannot call the poem an idyl when it is rendered entirely in the form of speeches by different persons without any connecting narrative. The Book of Job is also dramatic in form, though, like Browning's dramatic poetry, not designed for acting; but in that work each of the several speakers is introduced by a sentence that indicates who he is, while in our poem no such indication is given. Here we only get evidence of a change of speakers in the form and contents of the utterances, and the transition from the masculine to the feminine gender and from the singular number to the plural. Even the chorus takes an active part in the movement of the dialogue, instead of simply commenting on the proceedings of the principal characters as in a Greek play. We seem to want a key to the story, and the absence of anything of the kind is the occasion of the bewildering variety of conjectures that confronts the reader. But the difficulty thus occasioned is no reason for denying that there is any continuity in the book, especially in view of numerous signs of unity that cannot be evaded.

Among those who accept the dramatic integrity of the poem there are two distinct lines of interpretation, each of them admitting some differences in the treatment of detail. According to

* To be considered later. See chap. iv.

† 1 Kings i. 3.

one scheme Solomon is the only lover; according to the other, while the king is seeking to win the affections of the country maiden, he has been forestalled by the shepherd, fidelity to whom is shewn by the Shulamite in spite of the fascinations of the court.

There is no denying the rural simplicity of much of the scenery; evidently this is designed to be in contrast to the sensuous luxury and splendour of the court. Those who take Solomon to be the one lover throughout, not only admit this fact; they bring it into their version of the story so as to heighten the effect. The king is out holiday-making, perhaps on a hunting expedition, when he first meets the country maiden. In her childlike simplicity she takes him for a rustic swain; or perhaps, though she knows who he is, she sportively addresses him as she would address one of her village companions. Subsequently she shews no liking for the pomp of royalty. She cannot make herself at home with the women of the harem. She longs to be back in her mother's cottage among the woods and fields where she spent her child days. But she loves the king and he dotes on her. So she would take him with her away from the follies and temptations of the court down to her quiet country retreat. Under the influence of the Shulamite Solomon is induced to give up his unworthy habits and live a healthier, purer life. Her love is strong enough to retain the king wholly to herself. Thus the poem is said to describe a reformation in the character of Solomon. In particular it is thought to celebrate the triumph of true love over the degradation of polygamy.

It is impossible to find any time in the life of David's successor when this great conversion might have taken place; and the occurrence itself is highly improbable. Those however are not fatal objections to the proposed scheme, because the poem may be entirely ideal; it may even be written *at* the king. Historical considerations need not trouble us in dealing with an imaginative work such as this. It must be judged entirely on internal grounds. But when it is so judged it refuses to come into line with the interpretation suggested. Regarding the matter only from a literary point of view, we must confess that it is most improbable that Solomon would be introduced as a simple peasant without any hint of the reason of his appearing in this novel guise. Then we may detect a difference between the manner in which the king addresses the Shulamite and that in which, on the second hypothesis, the shepherd speaks to her. Solomon's compliments are frigid and stilted; they describe the object of his admiration in the most extravagant terms, but they exhibit no trace of feeling. The heart of the voluptuary is withered, the fires of passion have burnt themselves out and only the cold ashes remain, the sacred word "love" has been so long desecrated that it has ceased to convey any meaning. On the other hand, frequent practice has outstripped the clumsy wooing of inexperienced lovers and developed the art of courtship to a high degree. The royal bird-catcher knows how to lay his lines, though fortunately for once even his consummate skill fails. How different is the bearing of the true lover, a village lad who has won the maiden's heart! He has no need to resort to the vocabulary of flattery, because his own heart speaks. The English translations give an unwarrantable appearance of warmth to the king's language

where he is represented as calling the Shulamite "My love." * The word in the Hebrew means no more than *my friend*. When Solomon first appears he addresses the Shulamite with this title, and then immediately tries to tempt her by promising her presents of jewelry. Take another instance. In the beginning of the fourth chapter Solomon enters on an elaborate series of compliments describing the beauty of the Shulamite, without a single word of affection. As she persists in withstanding his advances her persecutor becomes more abashed. He shrinks from her pure, cold gaze, calls her terrible as an army with banners, prays her to turn away her eyes from him. On the theory that Solomon is the accepted lover, the beloved bridegroom, this position is quite unintelligible. Now turn to the language of the true lover: "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; thou hast ravished my heart with one look of thine eyes." †

A corresponding difference is to be detected in the bearing of the maiden towards the rivals. Towards the king she is cool and repellent; but no dream of poetry can equal the tenderness and sweetness of her musing on her absent lover or the warmth of love with which she speaks to him. These distinctions will be more apparent in detail as we proceed with the story of the poem. It may be noticed here, that this story is not at all consistent with the story that Solomon is the only lover. According to that hypothesis we have the highly improbable situation of a separation of the newly married couple on their wedding day. Besides, as the climax is supposed to be reached at the middle of the book, there is no apparent motive for the second half. The modern novel, which has its wedding at the middle of its plot, or even at the very beginning, and then sets itself to develop the comedy or perhaps the tragedy of married life, is not at all parallel to this old love story. Time must be allowed for the development of matrimonial complications; but here the scenes are all in close connection.

If we are thus led to accept what has been called "the shepherd hypothesis" the value of the book will be considerably enhanced. This is more than a mere love poem; it is not to be classed with erotics, although a careless reading of some of its passages might incline us to place it in the same category with a purely sensuous style of poetry. We have here something more than Sappho's fire. If we are tempted to compare it with Herrick's "Hesperides" or Shakespeare's "Sonnets," we must recognise an element that it is not didactic in form. It is not only in and maidens. Even on the "Solomon theory" pure love and simple living are exalted in opposition to the luxury and vices of the royal seraglio. A poem that sets forth the beauty of a simple country life as the scene of the true love of husband and wife in contrast to the degradation of a corrupt court is distinctly elevating in tone and influence, and the more so for the fact that it is not didactic in form. It is not only in kings' palaces and amid scenes of Oriental voluptuousness that the influence of such ideas as are here presented is needed. Christian civilisation has not progressed beyond the condition in which the consideration of them may be resorted to as a wholesome corrective. But if we are to agree to the "shepherd hypothesis" as on the whole the more probable, another idea of highest

importance emerges. It is not love, now, but fidelity, that claims our attention. The simple girl, protected only by her virtue, who is proof against all the fascinations of the most splendid court, and who prefers to be the wife of a poor man whom she loves, and to whom she has plighted troth, to accepting a queen's crown at the cost of deserting her humble lover, is the type and example of a loyalty which is the more admirable because it appears where we should little expect to find it. It has been said that such a story as is here depicted would be impossible in real life; that a girl once enticed into the harem of an Oriental despot would never have a chance of escape. The eunuchs who guarded the doors would lose their heads if they allowed her to run away; the king would never give up the prey that had fallen into his trap; the shepherd lover who was mad enough to pursue his lost sweetheart into her captor's palace would never come out alive. Are we so sure of all these points? Most improbable things do happen. It is at least conceivable that even a cruel tyrant might be seized with a fit of generosity, and why should we regard Solomon as a cruel tyrant? His fame implies that there were noble traits in his character. But these questions are beside the mark. The situation is wholly ideal. Then the more improbable the events described would be in real life, the more impressive do the lessons they suggest become.

Who wrote the book? The only answer that can be given to this question is negative. Assuredly, Solomon could not have been the author of this lovely poem in praise of the love and fidelity of a country lass and her swain, and the simplicity of their rustic life. It would be difficult to find a man in all history who more conspicuously illustrated the exact opposites of these ideas. The exquisite eulogy of love—perhaps the finest in any literature—which occurs towards the end of the book, the passage beginning, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart," etc.,* is not the work of this master of a huge seraglio, with his "seven hundred wives" and his "three hundred concubines."† It is impossible to find the source of this poetry in the palace of the Israelite "Grand Monarch"; we might as soon light on a bank of wild flowers in a Paris dancing saloon. There is quite a library of Solomon literature, a very small part of which can be traced to the king whose name it bears, the greatness of this name having attracted attention and led to the ascription of various works to the royal author, whose wisdom was as proverbial as his splendour. It is difficult to resist the impression that in the present case there is some irony in the singular inappropriateness of the title.

The date of the poem can be conjectured with some degree of assurance, although the language does not help us much in the determination of this point. There are archaisms, and there are also terms that seem to indicate a late date—Aramaic words and possibly even words of Greek extraction. The few foreign terms may have crept in under the influence of revisers. On the other hand the style and contents of the book speak for the days of the Augustan age of Hebrew history. The notoriety of Solomon's court and memories of its magnificence and luxury seem to be fresh in the minds of the people. These things are treated in detail and with an

amount of freedom that supposes knowledge on the part of the readers as well as the writer. There is one expression that helps to fix the date with more definiteness. Tirzah is associated with Jerusalem as though the two cities were of equal importance. The king says:

"Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,
Comely as Jerusalem."*

Now this city was the northern capital for about fifty years after the death of Solomon—from the time of Jeroboam, who made it his royal residence,† till the reign of Omri, who abandoned the ill-omened place six years after his vanquished predecessor Zimri had burnt the palace over his own head.‡ The way in which the old capital is mentioned here implies that it is still to the north what Jerusalem is to the south. Thus we are brought to the half century after the death of the king whose name the book bears.

The mention of Tirzah as the equal of Jerusalem is also an evidence of the northern origin of the poem; for it is not at all probable that a subject of the mutilated nation of the south would describe the beauty of the rebel headquarters by the side of that of his own idolised city, as something typical and perfect. But the poem throughout gives indications of its origin in the country parts of the north. Shunem, famous as the scene of Elisha's great miracle, seems to be the home of the heroine.§ The poet turns to all points of the compass for images with which to enrich his pictures—Sharon on the western coast,|| Gilead across the Jordan to the east,¶ Engedi by the wilderness of the Dead Sea,** as well as the northern districts. But the north is most frequently mentioned. Lebanon is named over and over again,†† and Hermon is referred to as in the neighbourhood of the shepherd's home.‡‡ In fact the poem is saturated with the fragrant atmosphere of the northern mountains.

Now this has suggested a striking inference. Here we have a picture of Solomon and his court from the not too friendly hand of a citizen of the revolted provinces. The history in the Books of Kings is written from the standpoint of Judah; it is curious to learn how the people of the north thought of Solomon in all his glory. Thus considered the book acquires a secondary and political meaning. It appears as a scornful condemnation of the court at Jerusalem on the part of the poorer and more simple inhabitants of the kingdom of Jeroboam and his successors.§§ But it also stands for all time as a protest against luxury and vice, and as a testimony to the beauty and dignity of pure love, stanch fidelity, and quiet, wholesome, primitive country manners. It breathes the spirit that reappears in Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," and inspires the muse of Wordsworth, as in the poem which contrasts the dove's simple notes with the nightingale's tumultuous song, saying of the homely bird,

"He sang of love with quiet blending;
Slow to begin, and never ending;
Of serious faith and inward glee;
That was the song—the song for me."

* vi. 4.

† 1 Kings xiv. 17.

‡ 2 Kings xvi. 18, 23, 24.

§ vi. 13.

†† iv. 8.

§§ See "Ency. Brit.," Art. "Canticles," by Robertson Smith.

|| ii. 1.

¶ iv. 1.

** i. 14.

†† iii. 9; iv. 8, 15; vii. 4.

* viii. 6, 7.

† 1 Kings xi. 3.

CHAPTER II.

TRUE LOVE TESTED.

SONG OF SOLOMON i. 1.

THE poem opens with a scene in Solomon's palace. A country maiden has just been introduced to the royal harem. The situation is painful enough in itself, for the poor, shy girl is experiencing the miserable loneliness of finding herself in an unsympathetic crowd. But that is not all. She is at once the object of general observation; every eye is turned towards her; and curiosity is only succeeded by ill-concealed disgust. Still the slavish women, presumably acting on command, set themselves to excite the newcomer's admiration for their lord and master. First one speaks some bold amorous words,* and then the whole chorus follows.† All this is distressing and alarming to the captive, who calls on her absent lover to fetch her away from such an uncongenial scene; she longs to run after him; for it is the king who has brought her into his chambers, not her own will.‡ The women of the harem take no notice of this interruption, but finish their ode on the charms of Solomon. All the while they are staring at the rustic maiden, and she now becomes conscious of a growing contempt in their looks. What is she that the attractions of the king before which the dainty ladies of the court prostrate themselves should have no fascination for her? She notices the contrast between the swarthy hue of her sunburnt countenance and the pale complexion of these pampered products of palace seclusion. She is so dark in comparison with them that she likens herself to the black goatshair tents of the Arabs.§ The explanation is that her brothers have made her work in their vineyards. Meanwhile she has not kept her own vineyard.|| She has not guarded her beauty as these idle women, who have nothing else to do, have guarded theirs; but perhaps she has a sadder thought—she could not protect herself when out alone at her task in the country or she would never have been captured and carried off to prison where she now sits disconsolate. Possibly the vineyard she has not kept is the lover whom she has lost.¶ Still she is a woman, and with a touch of piqued pride she reminds her critics that if she is dark—black compared with them—she is comely. They cannot deny that. It is the cause of all her misery; she owes her imprisonment to her beauty. She knows that their secret feeling is one of envy of her, the latest favourite. Then their affected contempt is groundless. But, indeed, she has no desire to stand as their rival. She would gladly make her escape. She speaks in a half soliloquy. Will not somebody tell her where he is whom her soul loveth? Where is her lost shepherd lad? Where is he feeding his flock? Where is he resting it at noon? Such questions only provoke mockery. Addressing the simple girl as the "fairest among women," the court ladies bid her find her lover for herself. Let her go back to her country life and feed her kids by the shepherd's tents. Doubtless if she is bold enough to court her swain in that way she will not miss seeing him.

Hitherto Solomon has not appeared. Now he

comes on the scene, and proceeds to accost his new acquisition in highly complimentary language, with the ease of an expert in the art of courtship. At this point we encounter the most serious difficulty for the theory of a shepherd lover. To all appearances a dialogue between the king and the Shulammite here ensues.* But if this were the case, the country girl would be addressing Solomon in terms of the utmost endearment—conduct utterly incompatible with the "shepherd hypothesis." The only alternative is to suppose that the hard-pressed girl takes refuge from the importunity of her royal flatterer by turning aside to an imaginary, half dream-like conversation with her absent lover. This is not by any means a probable position, it must be allowed; it seems to put a strained interpretation on the text. Undoubtedly if the passage before us stood by itself, there would not be any difference of opinion about it; everybody would take it in its obvious meaning as a conversation between two lovers. But it does not stand by itself—unless, indeed, we are to give up the unity of the book. Therefore it must be interpreted so as not to contradict the whole course of the poem, which shews that another than Solomon is the true lover of the disconsolate maiden.

The king begins with the familiar device by which rich men all the world over try to win the confidence of poor girls when there is no love on either side,—a device which has been only too successful in the case of many a weak Marguerite though her tempter has not always been a handsome Faust; but in the present case innocence is fortified by true love, and the trick is a failure. The king notices that this peasant girl has but simple plaited hair and homely ornaments. She shall have plaits of gold and studs of silver! Splendid as one of Pharaoh's chariot horses, she shall be decorated as magnificently as they are decorated! What is this to our staunch heroine? She treats it with absolute indifference, and begins to soliloquise, with a touch of scorn in her language. She has been loaded with scent after the manner of the luxurious court, and the king while seated feasting at his table has caught the odour of the rich perfumes. That is why he is now by her side. Does he think that she will serve as a new dainty for the great banquet, as a fresh fillip for the jaded appetite of the royal voluptuary? If so he is much mistaken. The king's promises have no attraction for her, and she turns for relief to dear memories of her true love. The thought of him is fragrant as the bundle of myrrh she carries in her bosom, as the henna-flowers that bloom in the vineyards of far-off Engedi.

Clearly Solomon has made a clumsy move. This shy bird is not of the common species with which he is familiar. He must aim higher if he would bring down his quarry. She is not to be classed with the wares of the matrimonial market that are only waiting to be assigned to the richest bidder. She cannot be bought even by the wealth of a king's treasury. But if there is a woman who can resist the charms of finery, is there one who can stand against the admiration of her personal beauty? A man of Solomon's experience would scarcely believe that such was to be found. Nevertheless now the sex he estimates too lightly is to be vindicated, while the king himself is to be taught a wholesome lesson. He may call her fair; he may praise her

* i. 2.
† i. 3.

‡ i. 4.
§ i. 5.

i. 6.
¶ See viii. 12

* i. 9-ii. 6.

dove-like eyes.* His flattery is lost upon her. She only thinks of the beauty of her shepherd lad, and pictures to herself the green bank on which they used to sit, with the cedars and firs for the beams and roof of their trysting-place.† Her language carries us away from the gilded splendour and close, perfumed atmosphere of the royal palace to scenes such as Shakespeare presents in the forest of Arden and the haunts of Titania, and Milton in the Mask of "Comus." Here is a Hebrew lady longing to escape from the clutches of one who for all his glory is not without some of the offensive traits of the monster Comus. She thinks of herself as a wild flower, like the crocus that grows on the plains of Sharon or the lily (literally the anemone) that is sprinkled so freely over the upland valleys.‡ The open country is the natural *habitat* of such a plant, not the stifling court. Solomon catches at her beautiful imagery. Compared with other maidens she is like a lily among thorns.§

And now these scenes of nature carry the persecuted girl away in a sort of reverie. If she is like the tender flower, her lover resembles the apple tree at the foot of which it nestles, a tree the shadow of which is delightful and its fruit sweet.|| She remembers how he brought her to his banqueting house; that rustic bower was a very different place from the grand divan on which she had seen Solomon sitting at his table. No purple hangings like those of the king's palace there screened her from the sun. The only banner her shepherd could spread over her was love, his own love.¶ But what could be a more perfect shelter?

She is fainting. How she longs for her lover to comfort her! She has just compared him to an apple tree; now the refreshment she hungers for is the fruit of this tree; that is to say, his love.** Oh that he would put his arms round her and support her, as in the old happy days before she had been snatched away from him!††

Next follows a verse which is repeated later, and so serves as a sort of refrain.‡‡ The Shulamite adjures the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken love. This verse is misrendered in the Authorised Version, which inserts the pronoun "my" before "love" without any warrant in the Hebrew text. The poor girl has spoken of apples. But the court ladies must not misunderstand her. She wants none of their love apples.§§ no philtre, no charm to turn her affections away from her shepherd lover and pervert them to the importunate royal suitor. The opening words of the poem which celebrated the charms of Solomon had been aimed in that direction. The motive of the work seems to be the Shulamite's resistance to various attempts to move her from loyalty to her true love. It is natural, therefore, that an appeal to desist from all such attempts should come out emphatically.

The poet takes a new turn. In imagination the Shulamite hears the voice of her beloved. She pictures him standing at the foot of the lofty rock on which the harem is built, and crying,—

"Oh, my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the cover of the steep place,
Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice;
For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely."|||

* i. 15.

† i. 16, 17.

‡ ii. 1.

§ ii. 2.

|| ii. 3.

¶ ii. 4.

** ii. 5.

†† ii. 6.

‡‡ ii. 7.

§§ See Gen. xxx. 14.

||| ii. 14.

He is like a troubadour singing to his imprisoned lady-love; and she, in her soliloquies, though not by any means a "high-born maiden," may call to mind the simile in Shelley's "Sky-lark":

"Like a high-born maiden
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour,

With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower."

She remembers how her lover had come to her bounding over the hills "like a roe or a young hart,"* and peeping in at her lattice; and she repeats the song with which he had called her out—one of the sweetest songs of spring that ever was sung.† In our own green island we acknowledge that this is the most beautiful season of all the round year; but in Palestine it stands out in more strongly marked contrast to the three other seasons, and it is in itself exceedingly lovely. While summer and autumn are there parched with drought, barren and desolate, and while winter is often dreary with snow-storms and floods of rain, in spring the whole land is one lovely garden, ablaze with richest hues, hill and dale, wilderness and farm-land vying in the luxuriance of their wild flowers, from the red anemone that fires the steep sides of the mountains to the purple and white cyclamen that nestles among the rocks at their feet. Much of the beauty of this poem is found in the fact that it is pervaded by the spirit of an eastern spring. This makes it possible to introduce a wealth of beautiful imagery which would not have been appropriate if any other season had been chosen. Even more lovely in March than England is in May, Palestine comes nearest to the appearance of our country in the former month; so that this poem, that is so completely bathed in the atmosphere of early spring, calls up echoes of the exquisite English garden pictures in Shelley's "Sensitive Plant" and Tennyson's "Maud." But it is not only beauty of imagery that our poet gains by setting his work in this lovely season. His ideas are all in harmony with the period of the year he describes so charmingly. It is the time of youth and hope, of joy and love—especially of love, for,

"In the spring a young man's fancy
Lightly turns to thoughts of love."

There is even a deeper association between the ideas of the poem and the season in which it is set. None of the freshness of spring is to be found about Solomon and his harem, but it is all present in the Shulamite and her shepherd; and spring scenes and thoughts powerfully aid the motive of the poem in accentuating the contrast between the tawdry magnificence of the court and the pure, simple beauty of the country life to which the heroine of the poem clings so faithfully.

The Shulamite answers her lover in an old ditty about "the little foxes that spoil the vineyards."‡ He would recognise that, and so discover her presence. We are reminded of the legend of Richard's page finding his master by singing a familiar ballad outside the walls of the castle in the Tyrol where the captive crusader was imprisoned. This is all imaginary. And yet the faithful girl knows in her heart that her beloved is hers and that she is his, although in sober reality he is now feeding his flocks in the far-off

* ii. 9.

† ii. 11-13.

‡ ii. 15.

flowery fields of her old home.* There he must remain till the cool of the evening, till the shadows melt into the darkness of night, when she would fain he returned to her, coming over the rugged mountains "like a roe or a young hart."†

Now the Shulammite tells a painful dream.‡ She dreamed that she had lost her lover, and that she rose up at night and went out into the streets seeking him. At first she failed to find him. She asked the watchmen whom she met on their round, if they had seen him whom her soul loved. They could not help her quest. But a little while after leaving them she discovered her missing lover, and brought him safely into her mother's house.

After a repetition of the warning to the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken love,§ we are introduced to a new scene.|| It is by one of the gates of Jerusalem, where the country maiden has been brought in order that she may be impressed by the gorgeous spectacle of Solomon returning from a royal progress. The king comes up from the wilderness in clouds of perfume, guarded by sixty men-at-arms, and borne in a magnificent palanquin of cedar-wood, with silver posts, a floor of gold, and purple cushions, wearing on his head the crown with which his mother had crowned him. Is the mention of the mother of Solomon intended to be specially significant? Remember—she was Bathsheba! The allusion to such a woman would not be likely to conciliate the pure young girl, who was not in the least degree moved by this attempt to charm her with a scene of exceptional magnificence.

Solomon now appears again, praising his captive in extravagant language of courtly flattery. He praises her dove-like eyes, her voluminous black hair, her rosy lips, her noble brow (not even disguised by her veil), her towering neck, her tender bosom—lovely as twin gazelles that feed among the lilies. Like her lover, who is necessarily away with his flock, Solomon will leave her till the cool of the evening, till the shadows melt into night; but he has no pastoral duties to attend to, and though the delicate balancing and assimilation of phrase and idea is gracefully manipulated, there is a change. The king will go to "mountains of myrrh" and "hills of frankincense,"¶ to make his person more fragrant, and so, as he hopes, more welcome.

If we adopt the "shepherd hypothesis" the next section of the poem must be assigned to the rustic lover.** It is difficult to believe that this peasant would be allowed to speak to a lady in the royal harem. We might suppose that here and perhaps also in the earlier scene the shepherd is represented as actually present at the foot of the rock on which the palace stands. Otherwise this also must be taken as an imaginary scene, or as a reminiscence of the dreamy girl. Although a thread of unity runs through the whole poem, Goethe was clearly correct in calling it "a medley." Scenes real and imaginary melting one into another cannot take their places in a regular drama. But when we grant full liberty to the imaginary element there is less necessity to ask what is subjective and what objective, what only fancied by the Shulammite and what intended to be taken as an actual occurrence. Strictly speaking, nothing is actual; the whole poem is a highly imaginative series of fancy pic-

tures illustrating the development of its leading ideas.

Next—whether we take it as in imagination or in fact—the shepherd lover calls his bride to follow him from the most remote regions. His language is entirely different from that of the magnificent monarch. He does not waste his breath in formal compliments, high-flown imagery, wearisome lists of the charms of the girl he loves. That was the clumsy method of the king; clumsy, though reflecting the finished manners of the court, in comparison with the genuine outpourings of the heart of a country lad. The shepherd is eloquent with the inspiration of true love; his words throb and glow with genuine emotion; there is a fine, wholesome passion in them. The love of his bride has ravished his heart. How beautiful is her love! He is intoxicated with it more than with wine. How sweet are her words of tender affection, like milk and honey! She is so pure, there is something sisterly in her love with all its warmth. And she is so near to him that she is almost like a part of himself, as his own sister. This holy and close relationship is in startling contrast to the only thing known as love in the royal harem. It is as much more lofty and noble as it is more strong and deep than the jaded emotions of the court. The sweet pure maiden is to the shepherd like a garden the gate of which is barred against trespassers, like a spring shut off from casual access, like a sealed fountain—sealed to all but one, and, happy man, he is that one. To him she belongs, to him alone. She is a garden, yes, a most fragrant garden, an orchard of pomegranates full of rich fruit, crowded with sweet-scented plants—henna and spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon and all kinds of frankincense, myrrh and aloes and the best of spices. She is a fountain in the garden, sealed to all others, but not stinted towards the one she loves. To him she is as a well of living waters, like the full-fed streams that flow from Lebanon.

The maiden is supposed to hear the song of love. She replies in fearless words of welcome, bidding the north wind awake, and the south wind too, that the fragrance of which her lover has spoken so enthusiastically may flow out more richly than ever. For his sake she would be more sweet and loving. All she possesses is for him. Let him come and take possession of his own.*

What lover could turn aside from such a rapacious invitation? The shepherd takes his bride; he enters his garden, gathers his myrrh and spice, eats his honey and drinks his wine and milk, and calls on his friends to feast and drink with him.† This seems to point to the marriage of the couple and their wedding feast; a view of the passage which interpreters who regard Solomon as the lover throughout for the most part take, but one which has this fatal objection, that it leaves the second half of the poem without a motive. On the hypothesis of the shepherd lover it is still more difficult to suppose the wedding to have occurred at the point we have now reached, for the distraction of the royal courtship still proceeds in subsequent passages of the poem. It would seem, then, that we must regard this as quite an ideal scene. It may, however, be taken as a reminiscence of an earlier passage in the lives of the two lovers. It is not impossible that it refers

* ii. 16. † ii. 17. ‡ iii. 1-4. § iii. 5.
|| iii. 6-11. ¶ iv. 6. ** iv. 8-15.

* iv. 16.

† v. 1.

to their wedding, and that they had been married before the action of the whole story began. In that case we should suppose that Solomon's officers had carried off a young bride to the royal harem. The intensity of the love and the bitterness of the separation apparent throughout the poem would be the more intelligible if this were the situation. It is to be remembered that Shakespeare ascribes the climax of the love and grief of Romeo and Juliet to a time after their marriage. But the difficulty of accepting this view lies in the improbability that so outrageous a crime would be attributed to Solomon, although it must be admitted that the guilty conduct of his father and mother had gone a long way in setting an example for the violation of the marriage tie. In dealing with vague and dreamy poetry such as that of the Song of Solomon, it is not possible to determine a point like this with precision; nor is it necessary to do so. The beauty and force of the passage now before us centre in the perfect mutual love of the two young hearts that here show themselves to be knit together as one, whether already actually married or not yet thus externally united.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE UNQUENCHABLE.

SONG OF SOLOMON V. 1-viii.

WE have seen how this strange poem mingles fact and fancy, memory and reverie, in what would be hopeless confusion if we could not detect a common prevailing sentiment and one aim towards which the whole is tending, with all its rapidly shifting scenes and all its perplexing varying movements. The middle of the poem attains a perfect climax of love and rapture. Then we are suddenly transported to an entirely different scene. The Shulammitte recites a second dream, which somewhat resembles her former dream, but is more vivid and intense, and ends very painfully.* The circumstances of it will agree most readily with the idea that she is already married to the shepherd. Again it is a dream of the loss of her lover, and of her search for him by night in the streets of Jerusalem. But in the present case he was first close to her, and then he deserted her most unaccountably; and when she went to look for him this time she failed to find him, and met with cruel ill-treatment. In her dream she fancies she hears the bridegroom knocking at her chamber door and calling upon her as his sister, his love, his dove, his undefiled, to open for him. He has just returned from tending his flock in the night, and his hair is wet with the dew. The bride coyly excuses herself, on the plea that she has laid aside her mantle and washed her feet; as though it would vex her to put her feet to the ground again. This is but the playful reluctance of love; for no sooner is her beloved really lost than she undertakes the greatest trouble in the search for him. When he puts in his hand to lift the latch, her heart is moved towards him, and she rises to open the door. On touching the lock she finds it covered with liquid myrrh. It has been ingeniously suggested that we have here a reference to the construction of an eastern lock, with a wooden pin dropped into the bolt,

which is intended to be lifted by a key, but which may be raised by a man's finger if he is provided with some viscid substance, such as the ointment here mentioned, to adhere to the pin. The little detail shews that the lover or bridegroom had come with the deliberate intention of entering. How strange, then, that when the bride opens the door he is not to be seen! Why has he fled? The shock of this surprise quite overwhelms the poor girl, and she is on the point of fainting. She looks about for her vanished lover, and calls him by name; but there is no answer. She goes out to seek for him in the streets, and there the watchmen cuff and bruise her, and the sentries on the city walls rudely tear off her veil.

Returning from the distressing recollection of her dream to the present condition of affairs, the sorrowful Shulammitte adjures the daughters of Jerusalem to tell her if they have found her love.* They respond by asking, what is her beloved more than any other beloved?† This mocking question of the harem women rouses the Shulammitte, and affords an opportunity for descanting on the beauty of her love.‡ He is both fair and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. For this is what he is like: a head splendid as finest gold; massive, curling, raven locks; eyes like doves by water brooks, and looking as though they had been washed in milk—an elaborate image in which the soft iris and the sparkling light on the pupils suggest the picture of the gentle birds brooding on the bank of a flashing stream, and the pure, healthy eyeballs a thought of the whiteness of milk; cheeks fragrant as spices; lips red as lilies (the blood-red anemones); a body like ivory, with blue veins as of sapphire; legs like marble columns on golden bases. The aspect of him is like great Lebanon, splendid as the far-famed cedars; and when he opens his lips his voice is ravishingly sweet. Yes, he is altogether lovely. Such is her beloved, her dearest one.

The mocking ladies ask their victim where then has this paragon gone?§ She would have them understand that he has not been so cruel as really to desert her. It was only in her dream that he treated her with such unaccountable fickleness. The plain fact is that he is away at his work on his far-off farm, feeding his flock, and perhaps gathering a posy of flowers for his bride.|| He is far away,—that sad truth cannot be denied; and yet he is not really lost, for love laughs at time and distance; the poor lonely girl can say still that she is her beloved's and that he is hers.¶ The reappearance of this phrase suggests that it is intended to serve as a sort of refrain. Thus it comes in with admirable fitness to balance the other refrain to which reference has been made earlier.** In the first refrain the daughters of Jerusalem are besought not to attempt to awaken the Shulammitte's love for Solomon; this is well balanced by the refrain in which she declares the constancy of the mutual love that exists between herself and the shepherd.

Now Solomon reappears on the scene, and resumes his laudation of the Shulammitte's beauty.†† But there is a marked change in his manner. This most recent capture is quite unlike the sort of girls with whom his harem was stocked from time to time. He had no reverence for any of them; they all considered themselves to be highly honoured by his favour, all

* v. 2-7

* v. 8.
† v. 9.‡ v. 10-16.
§ vi. 1.|| vi. 2.
¶ vi. 3.** Page 567.
†† vi. 4-7.

adored him with slavish admiration, like that expressed by one of them in the first line of the poem. But he is positively afraid of the Shulammite. She is "terrible as an army with banners." He cannot bear to look at her eyes; he begs her to turn them away from him, for they have overcome him. What is the meaning of this new attitude on the part of the mighty monarch? There is something awful in the simple peasant girl. The purity, the constancy, the cold scorn with which she regards the king, are as humiliating as they are novel in his experience. Yet it is well for him that he is susceptible to their influence. He is greatly injured and corrupted by the manners of a luxurious Oriental court. But he is not a seared profligate. The vision of goodness startles him; then there is a better nature in him, and its slumbering powers are partly roused by this unexpected apparition.

We have now reached a very important point in the poem. It is almost impossible to reconcile this with the theory that Solomon is the one and only lover referred to throughout. But on the "shepherd hypothesis" the position is most significant. The value of constancy in love is not only seen in the steadfast character of one who is sorely tempted to yield to other influences; it is also apparent in the effects on a spectator of so uncongenial a nature as king Solomon. Thus the poet brings out the great idea of his work most vividly. He could not have done so more forcibly than by choosing the court of Solomon for the scene of the trial, and shewing the startling effect of the noble virtue of constancy on the king himself.

Here we are face to face with one of the rescuing influences of life, which may be met in various forms. A true woman, an innocent child, a pure man, coming across the path of one who has permitted himself to slide down towards murky depths, arrests his attention with a painful shock of surprise. The result is a revelation to him, in the light of which he discovers, to his horror, how far he has fallen. It is a sort of incarnate conscience, warning him of the still lower degradation towards which he is sinking. Perhaps it strikes him as a beacon light, shewing the path up to purity and peace; an angel from heaven sent to help him retrace his steps and return to his better self. Few men are so abandoned as never to be visited by some such gleam from higher regions. To many, alas, it comes but as the temporary rift in the clouds through which for one brief moment the blue sky becomes visible even on a wild and stormy day, soon to be lost in deeper darkness. Happy are they who obey its unexpected message.

The concluding words of the passage which opens with Solomon's praises of the Shulammite present another of the many difficulties with which the poem abounds. Mention is made of Solomon's sixty queens, his eighty concubines, his maidens without number; and then the Shulammite is contrasted with this vast seraglio as "My dove, my undefiled," who is "but one"—"the only one of her mother."* Who is speaking here? If this is a continuation of Solomon's speech, as the flow of the verses would suggest, it must mean that the king would set his newest acquisition quite apart from all the ladies of the harem, as his choice and treasured bride. Those who regard Solomon as the lover, think they see here what they call his conversion, that is to

* vi. 8, 9.

say, his turning away from polygamy to monogamy. History knows of no such conversion; and it is hardly likely that a poet of the northern kingdom would go out of his way to whitewash the matrimonial reputation of a sovereign from whom the house of Judah was descended. Besides, the occurrence here represented bears a very dubious character when we consider that all the existing denizens of the harem were to be put aside in favour of a new beauty. It would have been more like a genuine conversion if Solomon had gone back to the love of his youth, and confined his affections to his neglected first wife.

On the shepherd hypothesis it is most natural to attribute the passage to the shepherd himself. But since it is difficult to imagine him present at this scene between Solomon and the Shulammite, it seems that we must fall back on the idealising character of the poem. In this figurative way the true lover expresses his contempt for the monstrous harem at the palace. He is content with this one ewe lamb; nay, she is more to him than all Solomon's bevy of beauties; even these ladies of the court are now constrained to praise the noble qualities of his bride.

Solomon's expression of awe for the terrible purity and constancy of the Shulammite is repeated,* and then she tells the story of her capture.† She had gone down to the nut garden to look at the fresh green on the plants, and to see whether the vines were budding and the pomegranates putting forth their lovely scarlet blossoms, when suddenly, and all unawares, she was pounced upon by the king's people and whisked away in one of his chariots. It is a vivid scene, and, like other scenes in this poem, the background of it is the lovely aspect of nature in early spring.

The Shulammite now seems to be attempting a retreat, and the ladies of the court bid her return; they would see the performance of a favourite dance, known as "The Dance of Mahanaim."‡ Thereupon we have a description of the performer, as she was seen during the convolutions of the dance, dressed in a transparent garment of red gauze,—perhaps such as is represented in Pompeian frescoes,—so that her person could be compared to pale wheat surrounded by crimson anemones.§ It is quite against the tenor of her conduct to suppose that the modest country girl would degrade herself by ministering to the amusement of a corrupt court in this shameless manner. It is more reasonable to conclude that the entertainment was given by a professional dancer from among the women of the harem. We have a hint that this is the case in the title applied to the performer, in addressing whom Solomon exclaims, "O prince's daughter,"|| an expression never used for the poor Shulammite, and one from which we should gather that she was a captive princess who had been trained as a court dancer. The glimpse of the manners of the palace helps to strengthen the contrast of the innocent, simple country life in which the Shulammite delights.

It has been suggested, with some degree of probability, that the Shulammite is supposed to make her escape while the attention of the king and his court is diverted by this entrancing spectacle. It is to be observed, at all events, that

* vi. 10.

† vi. 13. This is obscured in the Authorised Version.

§ vii. 1-9.

‡ Vers. 11, 12.

|| viii. 1.

from this point onwards to the end of the poem, neither Solomon nor the daughters of Jerusalem take any part in the dialogue, while the scene appears to be shifted to the Shulammite's home in the country, where she and the shepherd are now seen together in happy companionship. The bridegroom has come to fetch his bride. Again she owns that she is his, and delights in the glad thought that his heart goes out to her.* She bids him come with her into the field, and lodge in the villages. They will get them early into the vineyards and see whether the vines are blooming, and whether the pomegranates are in blossom.† It is still early spring. It was early spring when she was snatched away. † Unless she had been a whole year at the palace,—an impossible situation with the king continuing his ineffectual courtship for so long a time,—we have no movement of time. But the series of events from the day when the Shulammite was seized in her nut garden, till she found herself back again in her home in the north country, after the trying episode of her temporary residence in the royal palace, must have occupied some weeks. And yet the conclusion of the story is set in precisely the same stage of spring, the time when people look for the first buds and blossoms, as the opening scenes. It has been proposed to confine the whole action to the northern district, where Solomon might have had a country house adjoining his vineyard.‡ The presence of the "daughters of Jerusalem," and allusions to the streets of the city, its watchmen, and the guard upon the walls, are against this notion. It is better to conclude that we have here another instance of the idealism of the poem. Since early spring is the season that harmonises most perfectly with the spirit of the whole work, the author does not trouble himself with adapting its scenes in a realistic manner to the rapidly changing aspects of nature.

The shepherd has addressed the Shulammite as his sister;§ she now reciprocates the title by expressing her longing that he had been as her brother.|| This singular mode of courtship between two lovers who are so passionately devoted to one another that we might call them the Hebrew Romeo and Juliet, is not without significance. Its recurrence, now on the lips of the bride, helps to sharpen still more the contrast between what passes for love in the royal harem, and the true emotion experienced by a pair of innocent young people, unsullied by the corruptions of the court—illustrating, as it does at once, its sweet intimacy and its perfect purity.

The proud bride would now lead her swain to her mother's house.¶ There is no mention of her father; apparently he is not living. But the fond way in which this simple girl speaks of her mother reveals another lovely trait in her character. She has witnessed the wearisome magnificence of Solomon's palace. It was impossible to associate the idea of *home* with such a place. We never hear the daughters of Jerusalem, those poor degraded women of the harem, speaking of their mothers. But to the Shulammite no spot on earth is so dear as her mother's cottage. There her lover shall have spiced wine and pomegranate juice—simple home-made country beverages.** Repeating one of the early refrains of the poem, the happy bride is not afraid to say that there too her husband shall support her in

his strong embrace.* She then repeats another refrain, and for the last time—surely one would say now, quite superfluously—she adjures the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken any love for Solomon in her, but to leave love to its spontaneous course.†

Now the bridegroom is seen coming up from the wilderness with his bride leaning upon him, and telling how he first made love to her when he found her asleep under an apple tree in the garden of the cottage where she was born.‡ As they converse together we reach the richest gem of the poem, the Shulammite's impassioned eulogy of love.§ She bids her husband set her as a seal upon his heart in the inner sanctuary of his being, and as a seal upon his arm—always owning her, always true to her in the outer world. She is to be his closely, his openly, his for ever. She has proved her constancy to him; now she claims his constancy to her. The foundation of this claim rests on the very nature of love. The one essential characteristic here dwelt upon is strength—"Love is strong as death." Who can resist grim death? who escape its iron clutches? Who can resist mighty love, or evade its power? The illustration is startling in the apparent incompatibility of the two things drawn together for comparison. But it is a stern and terrible aspect of love to which our attention is now directed. This is apparent as the Shulammite proceeds to speak of jealousy which is "hard as the grave." If love is treated falsely, it can flash out in a flame of wrath ten times more furious than the raging of hatred—"a most vehement flame of the Lord." This is the only place in which the name of God appears throughout the whole poem. It may be said that even here it only comes in according to a familiar Hebrew idiom, as metaphor for what is very great. But the Shulammite has good reason for claiming God to be on her side in the protection of her love from cruel wrong and outrage. Love as she knows it is both unquenchable and unpurchaseable. She has tested and proved these two attributes in her own experience. At the court of Solomon every effort was made to destroy her love for the shepherd, and all possible means were employed for buying her love for the king. Both utterly failed. All the floods of scorn which the harem ladies poured over her love for the country lad could not quench it; all the wealth of a kingdom could not buy it for Solomon. Where true love exists, no opposition can destroy it; where it is not, no money can purchase it. As for the second idea—the purchasing of love—the Shulammite flings it away with the utmost contempt. Yet this was the too common means employed by a king such as Solomon for replenishing the stock of his harem. Then the monarch was only pursuing a shadow; he was but playing at love-making; he was absolutely ignorant of the reality.

The vigour, one might say the rigour, of this passage distinguishes it from nearly all other poetry devoted to the praises of love. That poetry is usually soft and tender; sometimes it is feeble and sugary. And yet it must be remembered that even the classical Aphrodite could be terribly angry. There is nothing morbid or sentimental in the Shulammite's ideas. She has discovered and proved by experience that love is a mighty force, capable of heroic endurance,

* vii. 10. † vii. 11-13. ‡ viii. 11. § viii. 1.
¶ viii. 1. ** viii. 2.

* viii. 3. † viii. 4. ‡ viii. 5. § viii. 6, 7.

and able, when wronged, to avenge itself with serious effect.

Towards the conclusion of the poem fresh speakers appear in the persons of the Shulammite's brothers, who defend themselves from the charge of negligence in having permitted their little sister to be snatched away from their keeping, explaining how they have done their best to guard her. Or perhaps they mean that they will be more careful in protecting a younger sister. They will build battlements about her. The Shulammite takes up the metaphor. She is safe now, as a wall well embattled; at last she has found peace in the love of her husband. Solomon may have a vineyard in her neighbourhood, and draw great wealth from it with which to buy the wares in which he delights.* It is nothing to her. She has her own vineyard. This reference to the Shulammite's vineyard recalls the mention of it at the beginning of the poem, and suggests the idea that in both cases the image represents the shepherd lover. In the first instance she had not kept her vineyard,† for she had lost her lover. Now she has him, and she is satisfied.‡ He calls to her in the garden, longing to hear her voice there,§ and she replies, bidding him hasten and come to her as she has described him coming before,—

“Like to a roe or a young hart
Upon the mountains of spices,”||

And so the poem sinks to rest in the happy picture of the union of the two young lovers.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTICAL INTERPRETATIONS.

THUS far we have been considering the bare, literal sense of the text. It cannot be denied that, if only to lead up to the metaphorical significance of the words employed, those words must be approached through their primary physical meanings. This is essential even to the understanding of pure allegory such as that of “The Faërie Queene” and “The Pilgrim's Progress”; we must understand the adventures of the Red Cross Knight and the course of Christian's journey before we can learn the moral of Spenser's and Bunyan's elaborate allegories. Similarly it is absolutely necessary for us to have some idea of the movement of the Song of Solomon as a piece of literature, in its external form, even if we are persuaded that beneath this sensuous exterior it contains the most profound ideas, before we can discover any such ideas. In other words, if it is to be considered as a mass of symbolism the symbols must be understood in themselves before their significance can be drawn out of them.

But now we are confronted with the question whether the book has any other meaning than that which meets the eye. The answers to this question are given on three distinct lines:—First, we have the *allegorical* schemes of interpretation, according to which the poem is not to be taken literally at all, but is to be regarded as a purely metaphorical representation of national or Church history, philosophical ideas, or spiritual experiences. In the second place, we meet with various forms of double interpretation, de-

scribed as *typical* or *mystical*, in which a primary meaning is allowed to the book as a sort of drama or idyl, or as a collection of Jewish love-songs, while a secondary signification of an ideal or spiritual character is added. Distinct as these lines of interpretation are in themselves, they tend to blend in practice, because even when two meanings are admitted the symbolical signification is considered to be of so much greater importance than the literal that it virtually occupies the whole field. In the third place there is the *purely literal* interpretation, that which denies the existence of any symbolical or mystical intention in the poem.

Allegorical interpretations of the Song of Solomon are found among the Jews early in the Christian era. The Aramaic Targum, probably originating about the sixth century A. D., takes the first half of the poem as a symbolical picture of the history of Israel previous to the captivity, and the second as a prophetic picture of the subsequent fortunes of the nation. The recurrence of the expression “the congregation of Israel” in this paraphrase wherever the Shulammite appears, and other similar adaptations, entirely destroy the fine poetic flavour of the work, and convert it into a dreary, dry-as-dust composition.

Symbolical interpretations were very popular among Christian Fathers—though not with universal approval, as the protest of Theodore of Mopsuestia testifies. The great Alexandrian Origen is the founder and patron of this method of interpreting the Song of Solomon in the Church. Jerome was of opinion that Origen “surpassed himself” in his commentary on the poem—a commentary to which he devoted ten volumes. According to his view, it was originally an epithalamium celebrating the marriage of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter; but it has secondary mystical meanings descriptive of the relation of the Redeemer to the Church or the individual soul. Thus “the little foxes that spoil the grapes” are evil thoughts in the individual, or heretics in the Church. Gregory the Great contributes a commentary of no lasting interest. Very different is the work of the great mediæval monk St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who threw himself into it with all the passion and rapture of his enthusiastic soul, and in the course of eighty-six homilies only reached the beginning of the third chapter in this to him inexhaustible mine of spiritual wealth, when he died, handing on the task to his faithful disciple Gilbert Porretanus, who continued it on the same portentous scale, and also died before he had finished the fifth chapter. Even while reading the old monkish Latin in this late age we cannot fail to feel the glowing devotion that inspires it. Bernard is addressing his monks, to whom he says he need not give the milk for babes, and whom he exhorts to prepare their throats not for this milk but for bread. As a schoolman he cannot escape from metaphysical subtleties—he takes the kiss of the bridegroom as a symbol of the incarnation. But throughout there burns the perfect rapture of love to Jesus Christ which inspires his well-known hymns. Here we are at the secret of the extraordinary popularity of mystical interpretations of the Song of Solomon. It has seemed to many in all ages of the Christian Church to afford the best expression for the deepest spiritual relations of Christ and His people. Nevertheless, the mystical method has been

* viii. 11. † i. 6. ‡ viii. 12.
§ viii. 13. || viii. 14.

widely disputed since the time of the Reformation. Luther complains of the "many wild and monstrous interpretations" that are attached to the Song of Solomon, though even he understands it as symbolical of Solomon and his state. Still, not a few of the most popular hymns of our own day are saturated with ideas and phrases gathered from this book, and fresh expositions of what are considered to be its spiritual lessons may still be met with.

It is not easy to discover any justification for the rabbinical explanation of the Song of Solomon as a representation of successive events in the history of Israel, an explanation which Jewish scholars have abandoned in favour of simple literalism. But the mystical view, according to which the poem sets forth spiritual ideas, has been urged in its favour that demand some consideration. We are reminded of the analogy of Oriental literature, which delights in parable to an extent unknown in the West. Works of a kindred nature are produced in which an allegorical signification is plainly intended. Thus the Hindoo "Gitagovinda" celebrates the loves of Krishna and Radha in verses that bear a remarkable resemblance to the Song of Solomon. Arabian poets sing of the love of Joseph for Zuleikha, which mystics take as the love of God towards the soul that longs for union with Him. There is a Turkish mystical commentary on the Song of Hafiz.

The Bible itself furnishes us with suggestive analogies. Throughout the Old Testament the idea of a marriage union between God and His people occurs repeatedly, and the most frequent metaphor for religious apostasy is drawn from the crime of adultery.* This symbolism is especially prominent in the writings of Jeremiah † and Hosea.‡ The forty-fifth psalm is an epithalamium commonly read with a Messianic signification. John the Baptist describes the coming Messiah as the Bridegroom,§ and Jesus Christ accepts the title for Himself.¶ Our Lord illustrates the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven in a parable of a wedding feast.¶ With St. Paul the union of husband and wife is an earthly copy of the Union of Christ and His Church.** The marriage of the Lamb is a prominent feature in the Book of the Revelation.††

Further, it may be maintained that the experience of Christians has demonstrated the aptness of the expression of the deepest spiritual truths in the imagery of the Song of Solomon. Sad hearts disappointed in their earthly hopes have found in the religious reading of this poem as a picture of their relation to their Saviour the satisfaction for which they have hungered, and which the world could never give them. Devout Christians have read in it the very echo of their own emotions. Samuel Rutherford's "Letters," for example, are in perfect harmony with the religious interpretation of the Song of Solomon; and these letters stand in the first rank of devotional works. There is certainly some force in the argument that a key which seems to fit the lock so well must have been designed to do so.

On the other hand, the objections to a mystical, religious interpretation are very strong. In

the first place, we can quite account for its appearance apart from any justification of it in the original intention of the author. Allegory was in the air at the time when, as far as we know, secondary meanings were first attached to the ideas of the Song of Solomon. They sprang from Alexandria, the home of allegory. Origen, who was the first Christian writer to work out a mystical explanation of this book, treated other books of the Old Testament in exactly the same way; but we never dream of following him in his fantastical interpretations of those works. There is no indication that the poem was understood allegorically or mystically as early as the first century of the Christian era. Philo is the prince of allegorists; but while he explains the narratives of the Pentateuch according to his favourite method, he never applies that method to this very tempting book, and never even mentions the work or makes any reference to its contents. The Song of Solomon is not once mentioned or even alluded to in the slightest way by any writer of the New Testament. Since it is never noticed by Christ or the Apostles, of course we cannot appeal to their authority for reading it mystically; and yet it was undoubtedly known to them as one of the books in the canon of the sacred Scriptures to which they were in the habit of appealing repeatedly. Consider the grave significance of this fact. All secondary interpretations of which we know anything, and, as far as we can tell, all that ever existed, had their origin in post-apostolic times. If we would justify this method by authority it is to the Fathers that we must go, not to Christ and His apostles, not to the sacred Scriptures. It is a noteworthy fact, too, that the word *Eros*, the Greek name for the love of man and woman, as distinguished from *Agape*, which stands for love in the widest sense of the word, is first applied to our Lord by Ignatius. Here we have the faint beginning of the stream of erotic religious fancies which sometimes manifests itself most objectionably in subsequent Church history. There is not a trace of it in the New Testament.

If the choice spiritual ideas which some people think they see in the Song of Solomon are not imported by the reader, but form part of the genuine contents of the book, how comes it that this fact was not recognised by one of the inspired writers of the New Testament? or, if privately recognised, that it was never utilised? In the hands of the mystical interpreter this work is about the most valuable part of the Old Testament. He finds it to be an inexhaustible mine of the most precious treasures. Why, then, was such a remunerative lode never worked by the first authorities in Christian teaching? It may be replied that we cannot prove much from a bare negative. The apostles may have had their own perfectly sufficient reasons for leaving to the Church of later ages the discovery of this valuable spiritual store. Possibly the converts of their day were not ripe for the comprehension of the mysteries here expounded. Be that as it may, clearly the *onus probandi* rests with those people of a later age who introduce a method of interpretation for which no sanction can be found in Scripture.

Now the analogies that have been referred to are not sufficient to establish any proof. In the case of the other poems mentioned above there are distinct indications of symbolical intentions. Thus in the "Gitagovinda" the hero is a divinity

* E. g., Exod. xxxiv. 15, 16; Numb. xv. 39; Psalm lxxiii. 27; Ezek. xvi. 23, etc.

† E. g., Jer. iii. 1-11.

‡ Hosea ii. 2; iii. 3.

§ John iii. 29.

¶ Mark ii. 19.

¶ Matt. xxii. 1-14.

** Eph. v. 22-33.

†† Rev. xxi. 9.

whose incarnations are acknowledged in Hindoo mythology; and the concluding verse of that poem points the moral by a direct assertion of the religious meaning of the whole composition. This is not the case with the Song of Solomon. We must not be misled by the chapter-headings in our English Bibles, which of course are not to be found in the original Hebrew text. From the first line to the last there is not the slightest hint in the poem itself that it was intended to be read in any mystical sense. This is contrary to the analogy of all allegories. The parable may be difficult to interpret, but at all events it must suggest that it is a parable; otherwise it defeats its own object. If the writer never drops any hint that he has wrapped up spiritual ideas in the sensuous imagery of his poetry, what right has he to expect that anybody will find them there, so long as his poem admits of a perfectly adequate explanation in a literal sense? We need not be so dense as to require the allegorist to say to us in so many words: "This is a parable." But we may justly expect him to furnish us with some hint that his utterance is of such a character. Æsop's fables carry their lessons on the surface of them, so that we can often anticipate the concluding morals that are attached to them. When Tennyson announced that the "Idyls of the King" constituted an allegory most people were taken by surprise; and yet the analogy of "The Faërie Queene," and the lofty ethical ideas with which the poems are inspired, might have prepared us for the revelation. But we have no similar indications in the case of the Song of Solomon. If somebody were to propound a new theory of "The Vicar of Wakefield," which should turn that exquisite tale into a parable of the Fall, it would not be enough for him to exercise his ingenuity in pointing out resemblances between the eighteenth-century romance and the ancient narrative of the serpent's doings in the Garden of Eden. Since he could not shew that Goldsmith had the slightest intention of teaching anything of the kind, his exploit could be regarded as nothing but a piece of literary trifling.

The Biblical analogies already cited, in which the marriage relation between God or Christ and the Church or the soul are referred to, will not bear the strain that is put upon them when they are brought forward in order to justify a mystical interpretation of the Song of Solomon. At best they simply account for the emergence of this view of the book at a later time, or indicate that such a notion might be maintained if there were good reasons for adopting it. They cannot prove that in the present case it should be adopted. Moreover, they differ from it on two important points. *First*, in harmony with all genuine allegories and metaphors, they carry their own evidence of a symbolical meaning, which as we have seen the Song of Solomon fails to do. *Second*, they are not elaborate compositions of a dramatic or idyllic character in which the passion of love is vividly illustrated. Regarded in its entirety, the Song of Solomon is quite without parallel in Scripture. It may be replied that we cannot disprove the allegorical intention of the book. But this is not the question. That intention requires to be proved; and until it is proved, or at least until some very good reasons are urged for adopting it, no statement of bare possibilities counts for anything.

But we may push the case further. There is

a positive improbability of the highest order that the spiritual ideas read into the Song of Solomon by some of its Christian admirers should have been originally there. This would involve the most tremendous anachronism in all literature. The Song of Solomon is dated among the earlier works of the Old Testament. But the religious ideas now associated with it represent what is regarded as the fruit of the most advanced saintliness ever attained in the Christian Church. Here we have a flat contradiction to the growth of revelation manifested throughout the whole course of Scripture history. We might as well ascribe the Sistine Madonna to the fresco-painters of the catacombs; or, what is more to the point, our Lord's discourse with His disciples at the paschal meal to Solomon or some other Jew of his age.

No doubt the devoted follower of the mystical method will not be troubled by considerations such as these. To him the supposed fitness of the poem to convey his religious ideas is the one sufficient proof of an original design that it should serve that end. So long as the question is approached in this way, the absence of clear evidence only delights the prejudiced commentator with the opportunity it affords for the exercise of his ingenuity. To a certain school of readers the very obscurity of a book is its fascination. The less obvious a meaning is, the more eagerly do they set themselves to expound and defend it. We could leave them to what might be considered a very harmless diversion if it were not for other considerations. But we cannot forget that it is just this ingenious way of interpreting the Bible in accordance with preconceived opinions that has encouraged the quotation of the Sacred Volume in favour of absolutely contradictory propositions, an abuse which in its turn has provoked an inevitable reaction leading to contempt for the Bible as an obscure book which speaks with no certain voice.

Still, it may be contended, the analogy between the words of this poem and the spiritual experience of Christians is in itself an indication of intentional connection. Swedenborg has shewn that there are correspondences between the natural and the spiritual, and this truth is illustrated by the metaphorical references to marriage in the Bible which have been adduced for comparison with the Song of Solomon. But their very existence shows that analogies between religious experience and the love story of the Shulammitte may be traced out by the reader without any design on the part of the author to present them. If they are natural they are universal, and any love song will serve our purpose. On this principle, if the Song of Solomon admits of mystical adaptation, so do Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese."

We have no alternative, then, but to conclude that the mystical interpretation of this work is based on a delusion. Moreover, it must be added that the delusion is a mischievous one. No doubt to many it has been as meat and drink. They have found in their reading of the Song of Solomon real spiritual refreshment, or they believe they have found it. But there is another side. The poem has been used to minister to a morbid, sentimental type of religion. More than any other influence, the mystical interpretation of this book has imported an effeminate element into the notion of the love of Christ, not one trace of which can be detected

in the New Testament. The Catholic legend of the marriage of St. Catherine is somewhat redeemed by the high ascetic tone that pervades it; and yet it indicates a decline from the standpoint of the apostles. Not a few unquestionable revelations of immorality in convents have shed a ghastly light on the abuse of erotic religious fervour. Among Protestants it cannot be said that the most wholesome hymns are those which are composed on the model of the Song of Solomon. In some cases the religious use of this book is perfectly nauseous, indicating nothing less than a disease of religion. When—as sometimes happens—frightful excesses of sensuality follow close on seasons of what has been regarded as the revival of religion, the common explanation of these horrors is that in some mysterious way spiritual emotion lies very near to sensual appetite, so that an excitement of the one tends to rouse the other. A more revolting hypothesis, or one more insulting to religion, cannot be imagined. The truth is, the two regions are separate as the poles. The explanation of the phenomena of their apparent conjunction is to be found in quite another direction. It is that their victims have substituted for religion a sensuous excitement which is as little religious as the elation that follows indulgence in alcoholism. There is no more deadly temptation of the devil than that which hoodwinks deluded fanatics into making this terrible mistake. But it can scarcely be denied that the mystical reading of the Song of Solomon by unspiritual persons, or even by any persons who are not completely fortified against the danger, may tend in this fatal direction.

CHAPTER V.

CANONICITY.

It is scarcely to be expected that the view of the Song of Solomon expounded in the foregoing pages will meet with acceptance from every reader. A person who has been accustomed to resort to this book in search of the deepest spiritual ideas cannot but regard the denial of their presence with aversion. While, however, it is distressing to be compelled to give pain to a devout soul, it may be necessary. If there is weight in the considerations that have been engaging our attention, we cannot shut our eyes to them simply because they may be disappointing. The mystical interpreter will be shocked at what he takes for irreverence. But, on the other hand, he should be on his guard against falling into this very fault from the opposite side. Reverence for truth is a primary Christian duty. The iconoclast is certain to be charged with irreverence by the devotee of the popular idol which he feels it his duty to destroy; and yet, if his action is inspired by loyalty to truth, reverence for what he deems highest and best may be its mainspring.

If the Song of Solomon were not one of the books of the Bible, questions such as these would never arise. It is its place in the sacred canon that induces people to resent the consequences of the application of criticism to it. It is simply owing to its being a part of the Bible that it has come to be treated mystically at all. Undoubtedly this is why it was allegorised by the Jews. But, then, the secondary signification thus ac-

quired reacted upon it, and served as a sort of buoy to float it over the rocks of awkward questions. The result was that in the end the book attained to an exceptionally high position in the estimation of the rabbis. Thus the great Rabbi Akiba says: "The course of the ages cannot vie with the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All the 'Kethubim' (*i. e.*, the 'Hagiographa') are holy, but the Song of Songs is a holy of holies."

Such being the case, it is manifest that the rejection of the mystical signification of its contents must revive the question of the canonicity of the book. We have not, however, to deal with the problem of its original insertion in the canon. We find it there. Some doubts as to its right to the place it holds seem to have been raised among the Jews during the first century of the Christian era; but these doubts were effectually borne down. As far as we know, the Song of Solomon has always been a portion of the Hebrew Scriptures from the obscure time when the collection of those Scriptures was completed. It stands as the first of the five "Megilloth," or sacred rolls—the others being Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes. We are not now engaged in the difficult task of constructing a new canon. The only possibility is that of the expulsion of a book already in the old canon. But the attempt to disturb in any way such a volume as the Old Testament, with all its incomparable associations, is not one to be undertaken lightly or without adequate reason.

In order to justify this radical measure it would not be enough to shew that the specific religious meanings that some have attached to the Song of Solomon do not really belong to it. If it is said that the secular tone it acquires under the hands of criticism shews it to be unworthy of a place in the sacred Scriptures, this assertion goes upon an unwarrantable assumption. We have no reason to maintain that all the books of the Old Testament must be of equal value. The Book of Esther does not reach a very high level of moral or religious worth; the pessimism of Ecclesiastes is not inspiring; even the Book of Proverbs contains maxims that cannot be elevated to a first place in ethics. If we could discover no distinctively enlightening or uplifting influence in the Song of Solomon, this would not be a sufficient reason for raising a cry against it; because if it were simply neutral in character, like nitrogen in the atmosphere, it would do no harm, and we could safely let it be. The one justification for a radical treatment of the question would be the discovery that the book was false in doctrine or deleterious in character. As to doctrine, it does not trench on that region at all. It would be as incongruous to associate it with the grave charge of heresy as to bring a similar accusation against the "Essays of Elia" or Keats's poetry. And if the view expressed in these pages is at all correct, it certainly cannot be said that the moral tendency of the book is injurious; the very reverse must be affirmed.

Since there is no reason to believe that the Song of Solomon had received any allegorical interpretation before the commencement of the Christian era, we must conclude that it was not on the ground of some such interpretation that it was originally admitted into the Hebrew collection of Scripture. It was placed in the canon before it was allegorised. It was only allegorised

because it had been placed in the canon. Then why was it set there? The natural conclusion to arrive at under these circumstances is that the scribes who ventured to put it first among the sacred "Megilloth" saw that there was a distinctive value in it. Perhaps, however, it is too much to say this of them. The word "Solomon" being attached to the book would seem to justify its inclusion with other literature which had received the hall-mark of that great name. Still we can learn to appreciate it on its own merits, and in so doing perceive that there is something in it to justify its right to a niche in the glorious temple of scripture.

Assuredly it was much to make clear in the days of royal polygamy among the Jews that this gross imitation of the court life of heathen monarchies was a despicable and degrading thing, and to set over against it an attractive picture of true love and simple manners. The prophets of Israel were continually protesting against a growing dissoluteness of morals: the Song of Solomon is a vivid illustration of the spirit of their protest. If two nations had been content with the rustic delights so beautifully portrayed in this book, they might not have fallen into ruin as they did under the influence of the corruptions of an effete civilisation. If their people had cherished the graces of purity and constancy that shine so conspicuously in the character of the Shulammitte they might not have needed to pass through the purging fires of the captivity.

But while this can be said of the book as it first appeared among the Jews, a similar estimate of its function in later ages may also be made. An ideal representation of fidelity in love under the greatest provocation to surrender at discretion has a message for every age. We need not shrink from reading it in the pages of the Bible. Our Lord teaches us that next to the duty of love to God comes that of love to one's neighbour. But a man's nearest neighbour is his wife. Therefore after his God his wife has the first claim upon him. But the whole conception of matrimonial duty rests on the idea of constancy in the love of man and woman.

If this book had been read in its literal signification and its wholesome lesson absorbed by Christendom in the Middle Ages, the gloomy cloud of asceticism that then hung over the Church would have been somewhat lightened, not to give place to the outburst of licentiousness that accompanied the *Renaissance*, but rather to allow of the better establishment of the Christian home. The absurd legends that follow the names of St. Anthony and St. Dunstan would have lost their motive. Hildebrand would have had no occasion to hurl his thunderbolt. The Church was making the huge mistake of teaching that the remedy for dissoluteness was unnatural celibacy. This book taught the lesson—truer to nature, truer to experience, truer to the God who made us—that it was to be found in the redemption of love.

Can it be denied that the same lesson is needed in our own day? The realism that has made itself a master of a large part of popular litera-

ture reveals a state of society that perpetuates the manners of the court of Solomon, though under a thin veil of decorum. The remedy for the awful dissoluteness of large portions of society can only be found in the cultivation of such lofty ideas on the relation of the sexes that this abomination shall be scouted with horror. It is neither necessary, nor right, nor possible to contradict nature. What has to be shewn is that man's true nature is not bestial, that satyrs and fauns are not men, but degraded caricatures of men. We cannot crush the strongest passion of human nature. The moral of the Song of Solomon is that there is no occasion to attempt to crush it, because the right thing is to elevate it by lofty ideals of love and constancy.

This subject also deserves attention on its positive side. The literature of all ages is a testimony to the fact that nothing in the world is so interesting as love. What is so old as love-making? and what so fresh? At least ninety-nine novels out of a hundred have a love-story for plot; and the hundredth is always regarded as an eccentric experiment. The pedant may plant his heel on the perennial flower; but it will spring up again as vigorous as ever. This is the poetry of the most commonplace existence. When it visits a dingy soul the desert blossoms as the rose. Life may be hard, and its drudgery a grinding yoke; but with love "all tasks are sweet." "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."* That experience of the patriarch is typical of the magic power of true love in every age, in every clime. To the lover it is always "the time of the singing of birds." Who shall tell the value of the boon that God has given so freely to mankind, to sweeten the lot of the toiler and shed music into his heart? But this boon requires to be jealously guarded and sheltered from abuse, or its honey will be turned into gall. It is for the toiler—the shepherd whose locks are wet with the dew that has fallen upon him while guarding his flock by night, the maiden who has been working in the vineyard; it is beyond the reach of the pleasure-seeking monarch and the indolent ladies of his court. This boon is for the pure in heart; it is utterly denied to the sensual and dissolute. Finally, it is reserved for the loyal and true as the peculiar reward of constancy.

But while a poem that contains these principles must be allowed to have an important mission in the world, it does not follow that it is suitable for public or indiscriminate reading. The fact that the key to it is not easily discovered is a warning that it is liable to be misunderstood. When it is read superficially, without any comprehension of its drift and motive, it may be perverted to mischievous ends. The antique Oriental pictures with which it abounds, though natural to the circumstances of its origin, are not in harmony with the more reserved manners of our own conditions of society. As all the books of the Bible are not of the same character, so also they are not all to be used in the same way.

* Gen. xxix. 20.

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

CHAPTER I.

HEBREW ELEGIES.

THE book which is known by the title "The Lamentations of Jeremiah" is a collection of five separate poems, very similar in style, and all treating of the same subject—the desolation of Jerusalem and the sufferings of the Jews after the overthrow of their city by Nebuchadnezzar. In our English Bible it is placed among the prophetic works of the Old Testament, standing next to the acknowledged writings of the man whose name it bears. This arrangement follows the order in the Septuagint, from which it was accepted by Josephus and the Christian Fathers. And yet the natural place for such a book would seem to be in association with the Psalms and other poetical compositions of a kindred character. So thought the Rabbis who compiled the Jewish canon. In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Lamentations is assigned to the third collection, that designated "Hagiographa," not to the part known as the "Prophets."

In form as well as in substance this book is a remarkable specimen of a specific order of poetry. The difficulty of recovering the original pronunciation of the language has left our conception of Hebrew metres in a state of obscurity. It has been generally supposed that the rhythm was more of sight than of sound, but that it consisted essentially in neither, depending mainly on the balance of ideas. The metre, it has been stated, might strike the eye in the external aspect of the sentences; it was designed much more to charm the mind by the harmony and music of the thoughts. But while these general principles are still acknowledged, some further progress has been made in the examination of the structure of the verses, with the result that both more regularity of law and more variety of metre have been discovered. The elegy in particular is found to be shaped on special lines of its own. It has been pointed out that a peculiar metre is reserved for poems of mournful reflection.

The first feature of this metre to be noted is the unusual length of the line. In Hebrew poetry, according to the generally accepted pronunciation, the lines vary from about six syllables to about twelve. In the elegy the line most frequently runs to the extreme limit, and so acquires a slow, solemn movement.

A second feature of elegiac poetry is the breaking of the lengthy line into two unequal parts—the first part being about as long as a whole line in an average Hebrew lyric, and the second much shorter, reading like another line abbreviated, and seeming to suggest that the weary thought is waking up and hurrying to its conclusion. Sometimes this short section is a thin echo of the fuller conception that precedes, sometimes the completion of that conception. In the English version, of course, the effect is frequently lost; still occasionally it is very marked, even after passing through this foreign medium. Take, for example, the lines,

"Her princes are become like harts—that find no pasture,
And they are gone without strength—before the pursuer;"*

* i. 6.

or again the very long line,

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed—because His compassions fail not."*

Now although this is only a structural feature it points to inferences of deeper significance. It shews that the Hebrew poets paid special attention to the elegy as a species of verse to be treated apart, and therefore that they attached a peculiar significance to the ideas and feelings it expresses. The ease with which the transition to the elegiac form of verse is made whenever an occasion for using it occurs is a hint that this must have been familiar to the Jews. Possibly it was in common use at funerals in the dirge. We meet with an early specimen of this verse in Amos, when, just after announcing that he is about to utter a *lamentation* over the house of Israel, the herdsman of Tekoa breaks into elegiacs with the words,

"The virgin daughter of Israel is fallen—she shall no more rise:
She is cast down upon her land—there is none to raise her up."†

Similarly constructed elegiac pieces are scattered over the Old Testament scriptures from the eighth century B. C. onwards. Several illustrations of this peculiar kind of metre are to be found in the Psalms. It is employed ironically with terrible effect in the Book of Isaiah, where the mock lament over the death of the king of Babylon is constructed in the form of a true elegy. When the prophet made a sudden transition from his normal style to sombre funereal measures his purpose would be at once recognised, for his words would sound like the tolling bell and the muffled drums that announce the march of death; and yet it would be known that this solemn pomp was not really a demonstration of mourning or a symbol of respect, but only the pageantry of scorn and hatred and vengeance. The sarcasm would strike home with the more force since it fell on men's ears in the heavy, lingering lines of the elegy, as the exultant patriot exclaimed,

"How hath the oppressor ceased—the golden city ceased!
The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked—the sceptre of the rulers," etc.‡

A special characteristic of the five elegies that make up the Book of Lamentations is their alphabetical arrangement. Each elegy consists of twenty-two verses, the same number as that of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. All but the last are acrostics, the initial letter of each verse following the order of the alphabet. In the third elegy every line in the verse begins with the same letter. According to another way of reckoning, this poem consists of sixty-six verses arranged in triplets, each of which not only follows the order of the alphabet with its first letter, but also has this initial letter repeated at the beginning of each of its three verses. Alphabetical acrostics are not unknown elsewhere in the Old Testament; there are several instances of them in the Psalms.§ The method is generally thought to have been adopted as an expedient to assist the memory. Clearly it is a somewhat artificial arrangement, cramping the imagination of the poet; and it is regarded by some as a sign of literary decadence. Whatever view we may

* iii. 22.

† Amos v. 2.

‡ Isa. xiv. 4 ff.

§ E. g., Psalms ix., x., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxix., cxlv.

take of it from the standpoint of purely artistic criticism, we can derive one important conclusion concerning the mental attitude of the writer from a consideration of the elaborate structure of the verse. Although this poetry is evidently inspired by deep emotion—emotion so profound that it cannot even be restrained by the stiffest vesture—still the author is quite self-possessed; he is not at all over-mastered by his feelings; what he says is the outcome of deliberation and reflection.

Passing from the form to the substance of the elegy, our attention is arrested on the threshold of the more serious enquiry by another link of connection between the two. In accordance with the custom of which we have other instances in the Hebrew Bible, the first word in the text is taken as the title of the book. The haphazard name is more appropriate in this case than it sometimes proves to be, for the first word of the first chapter—the original Hebrew for which is the Jewish title of the book—is “How.” Now this is a characteristic word for the commencement of an elegy. Three out of the five elegies in Lamentations begin with it; so does the mock elegy in Isaiah. Moreover, it is not only suggestive of the form of a certain kind of poetry; it is a hint of the spirit in which that poetry is conceived; it strikes the key-note for all that follows. Therefore it may not be superfluous for us to consider the significance of this little word in the present connection.

In the first place, it is a sort of note of exclamation prefixed to the sentence it introduces. Thus it infuses an emotional element into the statements which follow it. The word is a relic of the most primitive form of language. Judging from the sounds produced by animals and the cries of little children, we should conclude that the first approach to speech would be a simple expression of excitement—a scream of pain, a shout of delight, a yell of rage, a shriek of surprise. Next to the mere venting of feeling comes the utterance of desire—a request, either for the possession of some coveted boon, or for deliverance from something objectionable. Thus the dog barks for his bone, or barks again to be freed from his chain; and the child cries for a toy, or for protection from a terror. If this is correct it will be only at the third stage of speech that we shall reach statements of fact pure and simple. Conversely, it may be argued that as the progress of cultivation develops the perceptive and reasoning faculties and corresponding forms of speech, the primitive emotional and volitional types of language must recede. Our phlegmatic English temperament predisposes us to take this view. It is not easy for us to sympathise with the expressiveness of an excitable Oriental people. What to them is perfectly natural and not at all inconsistent with true manliness strikes us as a childish weakness. Is not this a trifle insular? The emotions constitute as essential a part of human nature as the observing and reasoning faculties, and it cannot be proved that to stifle them beneath a calm exterior is more right and proper than to give them a certain adequate expression. That this expression may be found even among ourselves is apparent from the singular fact that the English, who are the most prosaic people in their conduct, have given the world more good poetry than any other nation of modern times; a fact which, perhaps, may be explained on the principle that the highest

poetry is not the rank outgrowth of irregular passions, but the cultivated fruit of deep-rooted ideas. Still these ideas must be warmed with feeling before they will germinate. Much more, when we are not merely interested in poetic literature, when we are in earnest about practical actions, an artificial restraint of the emotions must be mischievous. No doubt the unimpassioned style has its mission—in allaying a panic, for example. But it will not inspire men to attempt a forlorn hope. Society will never be saved by hysterics; but neither will it ever be saved by statistics. It may be that the exclamation *how* is a feeble survival of the savage *howl*. Nevertheless the emotional expression, when regulated as the taming of the sound suggests, will always play a very real part in the life of mankind, even at the most highly developed stage of civilisation.

In the second place, it is to be observed that this word introduces a tone of vagueness into the sentences which it opens. A description beginning as these elegies begin would not serve the purpose of an inventory of the ruins of Jerusalem such as an insurance society would demand in the present day. The facts are viewed through an atmosphere of feeling, so that their chronological order is confused and their details melt one into another. That is not to say that they are robbed of all value. Pure impressionism may reveal truths which no hard, exact picture can render clear to us. These elegies make us see the desolation of Jerusalem more vividly than the most accurate photographs of the scenes referred to could have done, because they help us to enter into the passion of the event.

With this idea of vagueness, however, there is joined a sense of vastness. The note of exclamation is also a note of admiration. The language is indefinite in part for the very reason that the scene beggars description. The cynical spirit which would reduce all life to the level of a Dutch landscape is here excluded by the overwhelming mass of the troubles bewailed. The cataract of sorrow awes us with the greatness of its volume and the thunder of its fall.

From suggestions thus rising out of a consideration of the opening word of the elegy we may be led on to a perception of similar traits in the body of this poetry. It is emotional in character; it is vague in description; and it sets before us visions of vast woe.

But now it is quite clear that poetry such as this must be something else than the wild expression of grief. It is a product of reflection. The acute stage of suffering is over. The writer is musing upon a sad past; or if at times he is reflecting on a present state of distress, still he is regarding this as the result of more violent scenes, in the midst of which the last thing a man would think of doing would be to sit down and compose a poem. This reflective poetry will give us emotion, still warm, but shot with thought.

The reflectiveness of the elegy does not take the direction of philosophy. It does not speculate on the mystery of suffering. It does not ask such obstinate questions, or engage in such vexatious dialects, as circle about the problem of evil in the Book of Job. Leaving those difficult matters to the theologians who care to wrestle with them, the elegist is satisfied to dwell on his theme in a quiet, meditative mood, and to permit his ideas to flow on spontaneously as in a reverie. Thus it happens that, artificial as is the

form of his verse, the underlying thought seems to be natural and unforced. In this way he represents to us the afterglow of sunset which follows the day of storm and terror.

The afterglow is beautiful—that is what the elegy makes evident. It paints the beauty of sorrow. It is able to do so only because it contemplates the scene indirectly, as portrayed in the mirror of thought. An immediate vision of pain is itself wholly painful. If the agony is intense, and if no relief can be offered, we instinctively turn aside from the sickening sight. Only a brutalised people could find amusement in the ghastly spectacle of the Roman amphitheatre. It is cited as a proof of Domitian's diabolical cruelty that the emperor would have dying slaves brought before him in order that he might watch the facial expression of their last agonies. Such scenes are not fit subjects for art. The famous group of the *Laocoön* is considered by many to have passed the boundaries of legitimate representation in the terror and torment of its subject; and *Ecce Homos* and pictures of the crucifixion can only be defended from a similar condemnation when the profound spiritual significance of the subjects is made to dominate the bare torture. Faced squarely, in the glare of day, pain and death are grim ogres, the ugliness of which no amount of sentiment can disguise. You can no more find poetry in a present Inferno than flowers in the red vomit of a live volcano. Men who have seen war tell us they have discovered nothing attractive in its dreadful scenes of blood and anguish and fury. What could be more revolting to contemplate than the sack of a city,—fire and sword in every street, public buildings razed to the ground, honoured monuments defaced, homes ravaged, children torn from the arms of their parents, young girls dragged away to a horrible fate, lust, robbery, slaughter rampant without shame or restraint, the wild beast in the conquerors let loose, and a whole army, suddenly freed from all rules of discipline, behaving like a swarm of demons just escaped from hell. To think of cultivating art or poetry in the presence of such scenes would be as absurd as to attempt a musical entertainment among the shrieks of lost souls.

The case assumes another aspect when we pass from the region of personal observation to that of reflection. There is no beauty in the sight of a captured castle immediately after the siege which ended in its fall, its battlements shattered, its walls seamed with cracks, here and there a breach, rough and ragged, and strewn with stones and dust. And yet, by slow degrees and in imperceptible ways, time and nature will transform the scene until moss-grown walls and ivy-covered towers acquire a new beauty only seen among ruins. Nature heals and time softens, and between them they throw a mantle of grace over the scars of what were once ugly, gaping wounds. Pain as it recedes into memory is transmuted into pathos; and pathos always fascinates us with some approach to beauty. If it is true that

"Poets learn in sorrow what they teach in song,"

must it not be also the fact that sorrow while inspiring song is itself glorified thereby? To use suffering merely as the food of æstheticism would be to degrade it immeasurably. We should rather put the case the other way. Poetry saves sorrow from becoming sordid by revealing its

beauty, and in epic heroism even its sublimity. It helps us to perceive how much more depth there is in life than was apparent under the glare and glamour of prosperity. Some of us may recollect how shallow and shadowy our own lives were felt to be in the simple days before we had tasted the bitter cup. There was a hunger then for some deeper experience which seemed to lie beyond our reach. While we naturally shrank from entering the *via dolorosa*, we were dimly conscious that the pilgrims who trod its rough stones had discovered a secret that remained hidden from us, and we coveted their attainment, although we did not envy the bitter experience by which it had been acquired. This feeling may have been due in part to the foolish sentimentality that is sometimes indulged in by extreme youth; but that is not the whole explanation of it, for when our path conducts us from the flat, monotonous plain of ease and comfort into a region of chasms and torrents, we do indeed discover an unsuspected depth in life. Now it is the mission of the poetry of sorrow to interpret this discovery to us. At least it should enable us to read the lessons of experience in the purest light. It is not the task of the poet to supply a categorical answer to the riddle of the universe; stupendous as that task would be, it must be regarded as quite a prosaic one. Poetry will not fit exact answers to set questions, for poetry is not science; but poetry will open deaf ears and anoint blind eyes to receive the voices and visions that haunt the depths of experience. Thus it leads on to

"That blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened."

It may not be obvious to the reader of an elegy that this function is discharged by such a poem, for elegiac poetry seems to aim at nothing more than the thoughtful expression of grief. Certainly it is neither didactic nor metaphysical. Nevertheless in weaving a wreath of imagination round the sufferings it bewails it cannot but clothe them with a rich significance. It would seem to be the mission of the five inspired elegies contained in the Book of Lamentations thus to interpret the sorrows of the Jews, and through them the sorrows of mankind.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORIGIN OF THE POEMS.

As we pass out of Jerusalem by the Damascus Gate, and follow the main north road, our attention is immediately arrested by a low hill of grey rock sprinkled with wild flowers, which is now attracting peculiar notice because it has been recently identified with the "Golgotha" on which our Lord was crucified. In the face of this hill a dark recess—faintly suggestive of the eye-socket, if we may suppose the title "Place of a skull" to have arisen from a fancied resemblance to a goat's skull—is popularly known as "Jeremiah's grotto," and held by current tradition to be the retreat where the prophet composed the five elegies that constitute our Book of Lamentations. Clambering with difficulty over the loose stones that mark the passage of winter torrents,

and reaching the floor of the cave, we are at once struck by the suspicious aptness of the "sacred site." In a solitude singularly retired, considering the proximity of a great centre of population, the spectator commands a full view of the whole city, its embattled walls immediately confronting him, with clustered roofs and domes in the rear. What place could have been more suitable for a poetic lament over the ruins of fallen Jerusalem? Moreover, when we take into account the dread associations derived from the later history of the Crucifixion, what could be more fitting than that the mourning patriot's tears for the woes of his city should have been shed so near to the very spot where her rejected Saviour was to suffer? But unfortunately history cannot be constructed on the lines of harmonious sentiments. When we endeavour to trace the legend that attributes the Lamentations to Jeremiah back to its source we lose the stream some centuries before we arrive at the time of the great prophet. No doubt for ages the tradition was undisputed; it is found both in Jewish and in Christian literature—in the Talmud and in the Fathers. Jerome popularised it in the Church by transferring it to the Vulgate, and before this Josephus set it down as an accepted fact. It is pretty evident that each of these parallel currents of opinion may have been derived from the Septuagint, which introduces the book with the sentence, "And it came to pass, after Israel had been carried away captive, and Jerusalem had become desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said," etc. Here our upward progress in tracking the tradition is stayed; no more ancient authority is to be found. Yet we are still three hundred years from the time of Jeremiah! Of course it is only reasonable to suppose that the translators of the Greek version did not make their addition to the Hebrew text at random, or without what they deemed sufficient grounds. Possibly they were following some documentary authority, or, at least, some venerable tradition. Of this we know nothing. Meanwhile, it must be observed that no such statement exists in the Hebrew Bible; and it would never have been omitted if it had been there originally.

One other witness has been adduced, but only to furnish testimony of an obscure and ambiguous character. In 2 Chron. xxxv. 25 we read, "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations, unto this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel; and, behold, they are written in the lamentations." Josephus, and Jerome after him, appear to assume that the chronicler is here referring to our Book of Lamentations. That is very questionable; for the words describe an elegy on Josiah, and our book contains no such elegy. Can we suppose that the chronicler assumed that inasmuch as Jeremiah was believed to have written a lament for the mourners to chant in commemoration of Josiah, this would be one of the poems preserved in the collection of Jerusalem elegies familiar to readers of his day? Be that as it may, the chronicler wrote in the Grecian period, and therefore his statements come some long time after the date of the prophet.

In this dearth of external testimony we turn to the book itself for indications of origin and authorship. The poems make no claim to have

been the utterances of Jeremiah; they do not supply us with their author's name. Therefore there can be no question of genuineness, no room for an ugly charge of "forgery," or a delicate ascription of "pseudonymity." The case is not comparable to that of 2 Peter, or even to that of Ecclesiastes—the one of which directly claims apostolic authority, and the other a "literary" association with the name of Solomon. It is rather to be paralleled with the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, a purely anonymous work. Still there is much which seems to point to Jeremiah as the author of these intensely pathetic elegies. They are not like MacPherson's "Ossian;" nobody can question their antiquity. If they were not quite contemporaneous with the scenes they describe so graphically they cannot have originated much later; for they are like the low wailings with which the storm sinks to rest, reminding us how recently the thunder was rolling and the besom of destruction sweeping over the land. Among the prophets of Israel Jeremiah was the voice crying in the wilderness of national ruin; it is natural to suppose that he too was the poet who poured out sad thoughts of memory in song at a later time when sorrow had leisure for reflection. His prophecies would lead us to conclude that no Jew of those dark days could have experienced keener pangs of grief at the incomparable woes of his nation. He was the very incarnation of patriotic mourning. Who then would be more likely to have produced the national lament? Here we seem to meet again none other than the man who exclaimed, "Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow! my heart is faint within me,"* and again, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."† Many points of resemblance between the known writings of Jeremiah and these poems may be detected. Thus Jeremiah's "Virgin Daughter" of God's people reappears as the "Virgin daughter of Judah." In both the writer is oppressed with fear as well as grief; in both he especially denounces clerical vices, the sins of the two rival lines of religious leaders, the priests and the prophets; in both he appeals to God for retribution. There is a remarkable likeness in tone and temper throughout between the two series of writings. It would be possible to adduce many purely verbal marks of similarity; the commentator on Lamentations most frequently illustrates the meaning of a word by referring to a parallel usage in Jeremiah.

On the other hand, several facts raise difficulties in the way of our accepting of the hypothesis of a common authorship. The verbal argument is precarious at best; it can only be fully appreciated by the specialist, and if accepted by the general reader, it must be taken on faith. Of course this last point is no valid objection to the real worth of the argument in itself; it cannot be maintained that nothing is true which may not be reduced to the level of the "meanest intelligence," or the "differential calculus" would be a baseless fable. But when the specialists disagree, even the uninitiated have some excuse for holding the case to be not proved for either side; and it is thus with the resemblances and the differences between Jeremiah and Lamentations, long lists of phrases used in common

* Jer. viii. 18.

† Jer. ix. 1.

being balanced with equally long lists of peculiarities found in one only of the two books in question. The strongest objection to the theory that Jeremiah was the author of the Lamentations, however, is one that can be more readily grasped. These poems are most elaborately artistic in form, not to say artificial. Now the objection which is roused by that fact is not simply due to the loose and less shapely construction of the prophecies; for it may justly be urged that the literary designs entertained by the prophet in the leisure of his later years may have led him to cultivate a style which would have been quite unsuitable for his practical preaching or for the political pamphlets he used to fling off in the heat of conflict. It originates in deeper psychological contradictions. Is it possible that the man who had shed bitterest tears, as from his very heart, in the dismal reality of misery, could play with his troubles in fanciful acrostics? Can we imagine a leading actor in the tragedy turning the events through which he had passed into materials for æsthetic treatment? Can we credit this of so intense a soul as Jeremiah? The composition of "In Memoriam" may be cited as an instance of the production of highly artistic poetry under the influence of keen personal sorrow. But the case is not parallel; for Tennyson was a passive mourner over the loss of a friend under circumstances with which he had no connection, while Jeremiah had contended strenuously for years on the field of action. Could a man with such a history have set himself to work up its most doleful experiences into the embroidery of a peculiarly artificial form of versification? That is the gravest difficulty. Other objections of minor weight follow. In the third elegy Jeremiah would seem to be giving more prominence to his own personality than we should have expected of the brave, unselfish prophet. In the fourth the writer appears to associate himself with those Jews who were disappointed in expecting deliverance from an Egyptian alliance, when he complains—

"Our eyes do yet fail in looking for our vain help:
In watching we have watched for a nation that could not save."*

Would Jeremiah, who bade the Jews bow to the scourge of Jehovah's chastisement and look for no earthly deliverer, thus confess participation in the worldly policy which he, in common with all the true prophets, had denounced as faithless and disobedient? Then, while sharing Jeremiah's condemnation of the priests and prophets, the writer appears to have only commiseration for the fate of the poor weak king Zedekiah.† This is very different from Jeremiah's treatment of him.‡

It is not a serious objection that our poet says of Zion,

"Yea, her prophets find no vision from the Lord,"§

while we know that Jeremiah had visions after the destruction of Jerusalem.¶ because the general condition may still have been one characterised by the silencing of the many prophets with whose oracles the Jews had been accustomed to solace themselves in view of threatened calamities; nor that he exclaims,

"Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?"¶

although Jeremiah makes no mention of this twofold assassination, because we have no justification for the assumption that he recorded every horror of the great tragedy; nor, again, that the author is evidently familiar with the Book of Deuteronomy, and refers frequently to the "Song of Moses" in particular, for this is just what we might have expected of Jeremiah; and yet these and other similar but even less conclusive points have been brought forward as difficulties. Perhaps it is a more perplexing fact, in view of the traditional hypothesis, that the poet appears to have made use of the writings of Ezekiel. Thus the allusion to the prophets who have "seen visions . . . of vanity and foolishness,"* points to the fuller description of these men in the writings of the prophet of the exile, where the completeness of the picture shews that the priority is with Ezekiel.† Similarly the "perfection of beauty" ascribed to the daughter of Jerusalem in the second elegy,‡ reminds us of the similar phrase that occurs more than once in Ezekiel.§ Still, that prophet wrote before the time to which the Lamentations introduce us, and it cannot be affirmed that Jeremiah could not have seen his writings, or would not have condescended to echo a phrase from them. A difficulty of a broader character must be felt in the fact that the poems themselves give us no hint of Jeremiah. The appearance of the five elegies in the "Hagiographa" without any introductory notice is a grave objection to the theory of a Jeremiah authorship. If so famous a prophet had composed them, would not this have been recorded? Even in the Septuagint, where they are associated with Jeremiah, they are not translated by the same hand as the version of the prophet's acknowledged works. It may be that none of the objections which have been adduced against the later tradition can be called final; nor when regarded in their total force do they absolutely forbid the possibility that Jeremiah was the author of the Lamentations. But then the question is not so much one of possibility as one of probability. We must remember that we are dealing with anonymous poems that make no claim upon any particular author, and that we have no pleas whatever, special or more general, on which to defend the guesses of a much later and quite uncritical age, when people cultivated a habit of attaching every shred of literature that had come down from their ancestors to some famous name.

Failing Jeremiah, it is not possible to hit upon any other known person with the least assurance. Some have followed Bunsen in his conjecture that Baruch the scribe may have been the author of the poems. Others have suggested a member of the family of Shaphan, in which Jeremiah found his most loyal friends.¶

It is much questioned whether the five elegies are the work of one man. The second, the third, and the fourth follow a slightly different alphabetical arrangement from that which is employed in the first—in reversing the order of two letters.¶ while the internal structure of the verses in the third shews another variation—the threefold repetition of the acrostic. Then the personality of the poet emerges more distinctly in the third elegy as the centre of interest—a marked contrast

* ii. 14.

† *E. g.*, Ezek. xii. 24, xiii. 6, 7, xxii. 28.

‡ Lam. ii. 15.

§ Ezek. xxvii. 3, xxviii. 12.

¶ See Jer. xxvi. 24, xxix. 3 ff. xl. 5.

¶ y and d.

* iv. 17.

† Jer. lii. 2, 3.

‡ *E. g.*, Jer. xlii. 7.

† iv. 20.

§ ii. 9.

¶ ii. 20.

to the method of the other poems. Lastly, the fifth differs from its predecessors in several respects. Its lines are shorter; it is not an acrostic; it is chiefly devoted to the insults heaped upon the Jews by their enemies; and it seems to belong to a later time, for while the four previous poems treat of the siege of Jerusalem and its accompanying troubles, this one is concerned with the subsequent state of servitude, and reflects on the ruin of the nation across some interval of time. Thus the poet cries—

“Wherefore doest thou forget us for ever,
And forsake us *so long time?*” *

A recent attempt to assign the last two elegies to the age of the Maccabees has entirely broken down. The points of agreement with that age which have been adduced will fit the Babylonian period equally well, and the most significant marks of the later time are entirely absent. Is it conceivable that a description of the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes would contain no hint of the martyr fidelity of the devout Jews to their law which was so gloriously maintained under the Maccabees? The fourth and fifth elegies are as completely silent on this subject as the earlier elegies.

The evidence that points to any diversity of authorship is very feeble. The fifth elegy may have been written years later than the rest of the book, and yet it may have come from the same source, for the example of Tennyson shews that the gift of poetry is not always confined to but a brief interval in the poet life. The other distinctions are not nearly so marked as some that may be observed in the recognised poems of a single author—for example, the amazing differences between the smooth style of the “*Idylls of the King*” and the quaint dialect of the “*Northern Farmer*.” Though some differences of vocabulary have been discovered, the resemblances between all the five poems are much more striking. In motive and spirit and feeling they are perfectly agreed. While therefore in our ignorance of the origin of the Lamentations, and in recognition of the variations that have been indicated, we cannot deny that they may have been collected from the utterances of two or even three inspired souls, neither are we by any means forced to assent to this opinion; and under these circumstances it will be justifiable as well as convenient to refer to the authorship of Lamentations in terms expressive of a single individual. One thing is fairly certain. The author was a contemporary, an eye-witness of the frightful calamities he bewailed. With all their artificiality of structure these elegies are the outpourings of a heart moved by a near vision of the scenes of the Babylonian invasion. The swift, vivid pictures of the siege and its accompanying miseries force upon our minds the conclusion that the poet must have moved in the thick of the events he narrates so graphically, although, unlike Jeremiah, he does not seem to have been a leading actor in them. Children cry to their mothers for bread, and faint with hunger at every street corner; the ghastly rumour goes forth that a mother has boiled her baby; elders sit on the ground in silence; young maidens hang their heads despairing; princes tremble in their helplessness; the enemy break through the walls, carry havoc into the city, insolently trample the sacred courts of

the temple; even the priest and the prophet do not escape in the indiscriminate carnage; wounded people are seen, with blood upon their garments, wandering aimlessly like blind men; the temple is destroyed, its rich gold bedimmed with smoke, and the city herself left waste and desolate, while the exultant victors pour ridicule over the misery of their prey. A later generation would have blurred the outline of these scenes, regarding them through the shifting mists of rumour, with more or less indistinctness. Besides, the motive for the composition of such elegies would vanish with the lapse of time. Still some few years must be allowed for the patriot's brooding over the scenes he had witnessed, until the memory of them had mellowed sufficiently for them to become the subjects of song. The fifth elegy, at all events, implies a considerable interval. Jerusalem was destroyed in the year B. C. 587; therefore we may safely date the poems from about B. C. 550 onwards—*i. e.*, at some time during the second half of the sixth century. What is of more moment for us to know is that we have here no falsetto notes, such as we may sometimes detect in Virgil's exquisite descriptions of the siege of Troy, for the poet has witnessed the fiery ordeal the recollection of which now inspires his song. Thus out of the unequalled woes of Jerusalem destroyed he has provided for all ages the typical, divinely inspired expression of sorrow—primarily the expression of sorrow—and then associated with this some pregnant hints both of its dark relationship to sin and of its higher connection with the purposes of God.

CHAPTER III.

THE THEME.

No more pathetic subject ever inspired a poet than that which became the theme of the Lamentations. Wave after wave of invasion had swept over Jerusalem, until at length the miserable city had been reduced to a heap of ruins. After the decisive defeat of the Egyptians at the great battle of Carchemish during the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar broke into Jerusalem and carried off some of the sacred vessels from the temple, leaving a disorganised country at the mercy of the wild tribes of Bedouin from beyond the Jordan. Three months after the accession of Jehoiakin, the son of Jehoiakim, the Chaldeans again visited the city, pillaged the temple and the royal palace, and sent the first band of captives, consisting of the very *élite* of the citizens, with Ezekiel among them, into captivity at Babylon. This was only the beginning of troubles. Zedekiah, who was set up as a mere vassal king, intrigued with Pharaoh Hophra, a piece of folly which called down upon himself and his people the savage vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem now suffered all the horrors of a siege, which lasted for a year and a half. Famine and pestilence preyed upon the inhabitants; and yet the Jews were holding out with a stubborn resistance, when the invaders effected an entrance by night, and were encamped in the temple court before the astonished king was aware of their presence. Zedekiah then imitated the secrecy of his enemies. With a band of followers he crept out of the eastern gates, and fled down the defile towards the Jordan; but he

was overtaken near Jericho, and conveyed a prisoner to Riblah; his sons were killed in his very presence, his eyes were burnt out, and the wretched man sent in chains to Babylon. The outrages perpetrated against the citizens at Jerusalem as well as the sufferings of the fugitives were such as are only possible in barbarous warfare. Finally the city was razed to the ground and her famous temple burnt.

The Lamentations bewail the fall of a city. In this respect they are unlike the normal type of elegaic poetry. As a rule, the elegy is personal in character and individualistic, mourning the untimely death of some one beloved friend of the writer. It is the revelation of a private grief, although with a poet's privilege its author calls upon his readers to share his sorrow. In the classic model of this order of verse Milton justifies the intrusion of his distress upon the peace of nature by exclaiming—

"For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
Who would not sing for Lycidas?"

And Shelley, while treating his theme in an ethereal, fantastic way, still represents Alastor, the Spirit of Solitude, in the person of one who has just died, when he cries—

"But thou art fled,
Like some frail exhalation which the dawn
Robes in its golden beams,—ah! thou hast fled!
The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful,
The child of grace and genius."

Gray's well-known elegy, it is true, is not confined to the fate of a single individual; the churchyard suggests the pathetic reflections of the poet on the imaginary lives and characters of many past inhabitants of the village. Nevertheless these cross the stage one by one; the village itself has not been destroyed, like Goldsmith's "Sweet Auburn." Jeremiah's lamentation on the death of Josiah must have been a personal elegy; so was the scornful lament over the king of Babylon in Isaiah. But now we have a different kind of subject in the Book of Lamentations. Here it is the fate of Jerusalem, the fate of the city itself as well as that of its citizens, that is deplored. To rouse the imagination and awaken the sympathy of the reader Zion is personified, and thus the poetry is assimilated in form to the normal elegy. Still it is important for us to take note of this distinguishing trait of the Lamentations; they bewail the ruin of a city.

Poetry inspired with this intention must acquire a certain breadth not found in more personal effusions. Too much indulgence in private grief cannot but produce a narrowing effect upon the mind. Intense pain is as selfish as intense pleasure. We may mourn our dead until we have no room left in our sympathies for the great ocean of troubles among the living that surges round the little island of our personal interests.

This misfortune is escaped in the Lamentations. Close as is the poet's relations with the home of his childhood, there is still some approach to altruism in his lament over the desolation of Jerusalem viewed as a whole, rather than over the death of his immediate friends alone. There is a largeness, too, in it. We find it difficult to recover the ancient feeling for the city. Our more important towns are so huge and shapeless that the inhabitants fail to grasp the unity, the wholeness of the wilderness of

streets and houses; and yet they so effectually overshadow the smaller towns that these places do not venture to assume much civic pride. Besides, the general tendency of modern life is individualistic. Even the more recent attempts to rouse interest in comprehensive social questions are conceived in a spirit of sympathy for the individual rights and needs of the people, and do not spring from any great concern for the prosperity of the corporation as such. No doubt this is an indication of a movement in a right direction. The old civic idea was too abstract; it sacrificed the citizens to the city, beautifying the public buildings in the most costly manner, while the people were crowded in miserable dens to rot and die unseen and unpitied. We substitute sanitation for splendour. This is more sensible, more practical, more humane, if it is more prosaic; for life is something else than poetry. Still it may be worth while asking whether in aiming at a useful, homely object it is so essential to abandon the old ideal altogether, because it cannot be denied that the price we pay is seen in a certain dinginess and commonness of living. Is it necessary that philanthropy should always remain Philistine?

The largeness of view which breaks upon us when we begin to think of the city as a whole rather than only of a number of isolated individuals is more than a perception of mass and magnitude. The city is an organism; and not like an animal of the lower orders, such as the *anelids* or *centipedes*, in which every segment is simply a *replica* of its neighbour, it is an organism maintained in efficiency by means of a great variety of mutual ministries. Thus it is a unit in itself more elaborately differentiated, and therefore in a sense higher in the scale of being than its constituent elements, the individual inhabitants. The destruction of a city constituted in this way is a serious loss to the world. Even if no one inhabitant is killed, and quite apart from the waste of property and the ruin of commerce, the dissolution of the organism leaves a tremendous gap. The scattered people may acquire a new prosperity in the land of their exile, but still the city will have vanished. The Jews survived the destruction of Jerusalem; yet who shall estimate the loss that this destruction of their national capital involved?

Then the city being a definite organic unit has its own history, a history which is immensely more than the sum of the biographies of its inhabitants—stretching down from the remote ages, and joining the distant past with present days. Here, then, time adds to the largeness of the city idea. The brevity of life seems to assign a petty part to the individual. But that brevity vanishes in the long, continuous story of an ancient city. A man may well be proud of his connection with such a record, unless it be one of wickedness and shame; and even in that case his relations to a great city deepen and widen his life, though the result may be, as it was with the devout Jew, to induce grief and humiliation. But Jerusalem had her records of glory as well as her tales of shame. The city of David and Solomon held garnered stores of legend and history, in the rich memories of which each of her children had a heritage. The overthrow of Jerusalem was the dissipation of a great inheritance.

And this is not all. The city has its own peculiar character—a character which is not only

more than a summary of the morals and manners of the men and women who live in it, but also unique when compared with other cities. Every city that can boast of real civic life has its distinctive individuality; and often this is as striking as the individuality of any private person. Birmingham is very unlike Manchester; nobody could mistake Glasgow for Edinburgh. London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Melbourne, New York—each of these cities is unique. The particular city may be said to be the only specimen of its kind. If one is blotted out the type is lost; there is no duplicate. Athens and Sparta, Rome and Carthage, Florence and Venice, were rivals which could never take the place of one another. Most assuredly Jerusalem stood alone, stamped with a character which no other place in the world approached, and charged with a perfectly unique mission. For such a city to vanish off the face of the earth was the impoverishment of the world in the loss of what no nation in all the four continents could ever supply.

In saving this we must be careful to avoid the anachronism of reading into the present situation the after history of the sacred city and the character therein evolved. In the days before the Exile Jerusalem was not the holy place that Ezra and Nehemiah subsequently laboured to make of it. Still looking back across the centuries we can see what perhaps the contemporaries could not discover, that the peculiar destiny of Jerusalem was already shaping itself in history. At the time, to the patriotic devotion of the mourning Jews, she was their old home, the happy dwelling-place of their childhood, the shrine of their fathers' sepulchres—Nehemiah's thought about the city even at a later date; * in a word, the ancient centre of national life and union, strength and glory. But another and a higher meaning was beginning to gather about the word Jerusalem, a meaning which has come in course of time to give this city a place quite solitary and unrivalled in all history. Jerusalem is now revered as the religious centre of the world's life. Even in this early age she was beginning to earn her lofty character. Josiah's reformation had so far succeeded that the Temple of Solomon had been pronounced the centre of the worship of Jehovah. Then these elegies bear witness to the importance of the national festivals, which were all held at the capital, and which were all of a religious nature. It is impossible to conjecture what would have been the course of the religious history of the world if Jerusalem had been blotted out for ever at this period of the life of the city. More than five centuries later Jesus Christ declared that the *time* had come when neither at the Samaritan mountain nor at Jerusalem should men worship the Father, because God is Spirit and can only be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Thus the possibility of this spiritual worship which was independent of the sanctity of any place was a question of time. The time for it had only just arrived when our Lord made His great declaration. Of course the calendar could not rule this matter; it was not essentially a matter of dates. But the world required all those intervening ages to ripen into fitness for the lofty act of purely spiritual worship; and even then the great advance was not made by a process of simple development. It was necessary for Christ to come, both to reveal the higher nature of worship by revealing the

higher nature of Him who was the object of worship, and also to bestow the spiritual grace through which men and women could practise the true worship. Therefore these very words of our Lord which proclaim the absolute spirituality of worship for those who have attained to His teaching most plainly imply that such worship must have been beyond the reach of average people, at all events, in earlier ages. Jerusalem, then, was needed to serve as the cradle of the religion revealed through her prophets. When her wings had grown religion could dispense with the nest; but in her unfledged condition the destruction of the local shelter threatened the death of the brooding.

There is a hopeful side to these reflections. A city with such a character may be said to bear the seeds of her own revival. Her individuality has that within it which fights against extinction. To put it another way, the idea of the city is too marked and too attractive for its privileged custodians to let it fade out of their minds, or to rest satisfied without attempting once more to have it realised in visible form. Carthage might perish; for Carthage had few graces wherewith to stir the enthusiasm of her citizens. Rome, on the other hand, had developed a character and a corresponding destiny of her own; and therefore she could not be blotted out by savage Huns or Vandal hosts. The genius for government, unapproached by any other city, could not be suppressed by the worst ravages of the invader. Even when political supremacy had passed away in consequence of the vices and weakness of the degenerate citizens, the power that had ruled the world simply took another shape and ruled the Church, the supremacy of Rome in the papacy succeeding to the supremacy of Rome in the empire. So was it with Jerusalem. There was immortality in this wonderful city.

We may look at the subject from two points of view. First, faith in God encourages the hope that such a destiny as is here foreshadowed should not be allowed to fail. So felt the prophets who were permitted to read the counsels of God by inspired insight into the eternal principles of His nature. These men were sure that Jerusalem must rise again from her ashes because they knew for a certainty that her Lord would not let His purposes concerning her be frustrated.

Then, even with the limited vision which is all that can be attained from the lower platform of historical criticism, we may see that Jerusalem had acquired such an immortal place in the estimation of the Jews, that the people must have clung to the idea of a restoration till it was realised. To say this is to shew that the realisation could not but be accomplished. Such passionate regrets as those of the Lamentations are seeds of hope.

May we go one step further? Is not every true and deep regret a prophecy of restoration? There is an irrecoverable past, it must be owned. That is to say, the days that are gone cannot return, nor can deeds once done ever be undone; the future will never be an exact repetition of the past. But all this does not forbid the assurance that there may be genuine restoration. Jerusalem restored was very unlike the city whose fate the elegist bewailed; nevertheless she was restored, and that with her essential characteristics more pronounced than ever. Henceforth she was to be most completely what her earlier

* Neh. ii. 3.

history had only faintly adumbrated—the typical seat of religion. Thus, though the Lamentations are not at all cheering or prophetic in tone, or even in intention, but the very reverse, wholly mournful and despondent, we may still detect, in the very intensity and persistence of the sorrow they portray, gleams of hope for better days. There is no hope in stolid indifference; it is in the penitent's tears that we discover the prospect of his amendment. Repentance weeps for the past, but at the same time it looks forward with a changed mind that is the promise of better things to come. Why should not we apply these ideas that spring from a consideration of the five Hebrew elegies to other elegies—to the dirges that mourn the loved and dead? If we could willingly let the departed drop out of thought we might have little ground for believing we should ever see them again. But sorrow for the dead immortalises them in memory. In a materialistic view of the universe that might mean nothing but the perpetuity of a sentiment. But then it may by itself help us to perceive the superficiality, the utter falseness of such a view. Thus Tennyson sees the answer to the crushing doubts of materialism and the assurance of immortality for the departed in the strength of the love with which they are cherished:

“What is it all if we all of us end but in being our own
corpse coffins at last,
Swallowed in Vastness, lost in Silence, drowned in the
depths of a meaningless Past!
What but a murmur of gnats in the gloom, or a
moment's anger of bees in their hive?

Peace, let it be! for I loved him, and love him for ever.
The dead are not dead, but alive.”

CHAPTER IV.

DESOLATION.

LAMENTATIONS i. 1-7.

THE first elegy is devoted to moving pictures of the desolation of Jerusalem and the sufferings of her people. It dwells upon these disasters themselves, with fewer references to the causes of them or the hope of any remedy than are to be found in the subsequent poems, simply to express the misery of the whole story. Thus it is in the truest sense of the word a “Lamentation.” It naturally divides itself into two parts—one with the poet speaking in his own person,* the other representing the deserted city herself appealing to passing strangers and neighbouring nations, and lastly to God, to take note of her woes.†

The poem opens with a very beautiful passage in which we have a comparison of Jerusalem to a widow bereft of her children, sitting solitary in the night, weeping sorely. It would not be just to read into the image of widowhood ideas collected from utterances of the prophets about the wedded union of Israel and her Lord; we have no hint of anything of the sort here. Apparently the image is selected in order to express the more vividly the utter lonesomeness of the city. It is clear that the attribute “solitary” has no bearing on the external relations of Jerusalem—her isolation among the Syrian hills, or the desertion of her allies, mentioned a little

later;* it points to a more ghostly solitude, streets without traffic, tenantless houses. The widow is solitary because she has been robbed of her children. And in this, her desolation, *she sits*. The attitude, so simple and natural and easy under ordinary circumstances, here suggests a settled continuance of wretchedness; it is helpless and hopeless. The first wild agony of the severance of the closest natural ties has passed, and with it the stimulus of conflict; now there has supervened the dull monotony of despair. This is the lowest depth of misery, because it allows leisure when leisure is least welcome, because it gives the reins to the imagination to roam over regions of heart-rending memory or sombre apprehension, above all because there is nothing to be done, so that the whole range of consciousness is abandoned to pain. Many a sufferer has been saved by the healing ministry of active duties, sometimes resented as an intrusion. It is a fearful thing simply to sit in sorrow.

The mourner sits *in the night*, while the world around lies in the peace of sleep. The darkness has fallen, yet she does not stir, for day and night are alike to her—both dark. She is statuesque in sorrow, petrified by pain, and yet unhappily not dead; benumbed, but alive in every sensitive fibre of her being and terribly awake. In this dread night of misery her one occupation is weeping. The mourner knows how the hidden fountains of tears which have been sealed to the world for the day will break out in the silent solitude of night: then the bravest will “wet his couch with his tears.” The forlorn woman “weepeth sore”; to use the expressive Hebraism, “weeping she weepeth.” “Her tears are on her cheeks”; they are continually flowing; she has no thought of drying them; there is no one else to wipe them away. This is not the frantic torrent of youthful tears, soon to be forgotten in sudden sunshine, like a spring shower; it is the dreary winter rain, falling more silently, but from leaden clouds that never break. The Hebrew poet's picture is illustrated with singular aptness by a Roman coin, struck off in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem by the army of Titus, which represents a woman seated under a palm tree with the legend *Judæa capta*. Is it too much to imagine that some Greek artist attached to the court of Vespasian may have borrowed the idea for the coin from the Septuagint version of this very passage?

The woe of Jerusalem is intensified by reason of its contrast with the previous splendour of the proud city. She had not always appeared as a lonely widow. Formerly she had held a high place among the neighbouring nations—for did she not cherish memories of the great days of her shepherd king and Solomon the magnificent? Then she ruled provinces; now she is herself tributary. She had lovers in the old times—a fact which points to faults of character not further pursued at present. How opposite is the utterly deserted state into which she is now sunk! This thought of a tremendous fall gives the greatest force to the portrait. It is Rembrandtesque; the black shadows on the foreground are the deeper because they stand sharply out against the brilliant radiance that streams in from the sunset of the past. The pitiableness of the comfortless present lies in

* i. 1-11.

† i. 12-22.

* i. 2.

this, that there had been lovers whose consolations would now have been a solace; the bitterness of the enmity now experienced is its having been distilled from the dregs of poisoned friendship. Against the protests of her faithful prophets Jerusalem had courted alliance with her heathen neighbours, only to be cruelly deserted in her hour of need. It is the old story of friendship with the world, keenly accentuated in the life of Israel, because this favoured people had already seen glimpses of a rich, rare privilege, the friendship of Heaven. This is the irony of the situation; it is the tragic irony of all Hebrew history. Why were these people so blindly infatuated that they would be perpetually forsaking the living waters, and hewing out to themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water? The question is only surpassed by that of the similar folly on the part of those of us who follow their example in spite of the warning their fate affords, failing to see that true friendship is too exacting for ties spun from mere convenience or superficial pleasantness to bear the strain of its more serious claims.

Passing on from the poetic image to a more direct view of the drear facts of the case, the author describes the hardships of the fugitives—people who had fled to Egypt, the retreat of Jeremiah and his companions. This must be the bearing of the passage which our translators render—

"Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude."

For if the topic were the captivity at Babylon it would be difficult to see how "affliction" and "great servitude" could be treated as the *causes* of that disaster; were they not rather its effects? Two solutions of this difficulty have been proposed. It has been suggested that the captivity is here presented as a consequence of the misconduct of the Jews in oppressing peoples subject to them. But the abstract words will not readily bear any such meaning; we should have expected some more explicit charge. Then it has been proposed to read the words "out of affliction," etc., in place of the phrase "because of affliction," etc., as though in escaping from trouble at home the Jews had only passed into a new misfortune abroad. This is not so simple an explanation of the poet's language as that at which we arrive by the perfectly legitimate substitution of the word "exile" for "captivity." It may seem strange that the statement should be affirmed of "Judah," as though the whole nation had escaped to Egypt; but it would be equally inexact to say that "Judah" was carried captive to Babylon, seeing that only a selection from the upper classes was deported, while the majority of the people was probably left in the land. But so many of the Jews, especially those best known to the poet, were in voluntary exile, that it was quite natural for him to regard them as virtually the nation. Now upon these refugees three troubles fall. First, the asylum is a heathen country, abominable to pious Israelites. Second, even here the fugitives have no rest; they are not allowed to settle down; they are perpetually molested. Third, on the way thither they are harassed by the enemy. They are overtaken by pursuers "within the straits," a statement which may be read literally; bands of Chaldeans would hover about the mountains, ready to pounce upon the disorganised groups

of fugitives as they made their way through the narrow defiles that led out of the hill country to the southern plains. But the phrase is a familiar Hebraism for difficulties generally. No doubt it was true of the Jews in this larger sense that their opponents took advantage of their straitened circumstances to vex them in every possible way. This is just in accordance with the common experience of mankind all the world over. But while the fact of the experience is obvious, the inference to which it points like an arrow is obstinately eluded. Thus a commercial man in financial straits loses his credit at the very moment when he most needs it. We cannot say that this is a proof of spite, or even a sign of cynical indifference; because the needy person is really most untrustworthy, though his moral integrity may be unshaken, seeing that his circumstances make it probable that he will be unable to fulfil his obligations. But now it is the deeper significance of this fact that is so persistently ignored. There is perceptible at times in nature a law of compensation by the operation of which misfortune is mitigated; but that merciful law is frequently thwarted by the overbearing influence of the terrible law of the "survival of the fittest," the gospel of the fortunate, but the death-knell for all failures. If this is so in nature, much more does it obtain in human society so long as selfish greed is unchecked by higher principles. Then the world, the Godless world, can be no asylum for the miserable and unfortunate, because it will be hard upon them in exact proportion to the extremity of their necessities. Moreover, the perception that this bitter truth is not a fruit of temporary passions which may be restrained by education, but the outcome of certain persistent principles which cannot be set aside while society retains its present constitution, gives to it the adamantine strength of destiny.

Coming nearer to the city in his mental vision, the poet next bewails deserted roads: "those ways of Zion" up which the holiday folks used to troop, clad in gay garments, with songs of rejoicing, are left so lonely that it seems as though they themselves must be mourning. It is in keeping with the imagery of these poems which personify the city, to endow the very roads with fancied consciousness. This is a natural result of intense emotion, and therefore a witness to its very intensity. It seems as though the very earth must share in the feelings of the man whose heart is stirred to its depths; as though all things must be filled with the passion the waves of which flow out to the horizon of his consciousness, till the very stones cry out.

As he approaches the city, the poet is struck with a strange, sad sight. There are no people about the gates; yet here, if anywhere, we should expect to meet not only travellers passing through, but also groups of men, merchants at their traffic, arbitrators settling disputes, friends exchanging confidences, idlers lounging about and chewing the cud of the latest gossip, beggars whining for alms; for by the gates are markets, *al fresco* tribunals, open spaces for public meetings. Formerly the life of the city was here concentrated; now no trace of life is to be seen even at these social ganglia. The desertion and silence of the gateways gives a shock of distress to the visitor on entering the ruined city. More disappointments await him within the walls. Still keeping in mind the idea of the national

festivals, and accompanying the course of them in imagination, the poet goes up to the temple. No services are proceeding; any priests who may be found still haunting the precincts of the charred ruins can only sigh over their enforced idleness; the girl-choristers whose voices would ring through the porticoes in the old times, are silent and desolate, for their mother, Jerusalem, is herself "in bitterness."

In this part of the elegy our attention is directed to the cessation of the happy national assemblies with their accompaniment of public worship in songs of praise for harvest and vintage and in the awful symbolism of the altar. The name "Zion" was associated with two things, festivity and worship. It was a happy privilege for Israel to have had the inspired insight as well as the courage of faith to realise the conjunction. Even with the fuller light and larger liberty of Christianity it is rarely acknowledged among us. Our services have too much of the funeral dirge about them. The devout Israelite reserved his dirge for the death of his worship. It does not seem to have occurred to the poet that anybody could come to regard worship as an irksome duty from which he would gladly be liberated. Are we, then, to suppose that the Israelites who practised the crude cult that was prevalent before the Exile, even among the true servants of Jehovah, were indeed more devout than Christians who enjoy the privileges of their richer revelation? Scarcely so; for it must be remembered that we are called to a more spiritual and therefore a more difficult worship. Inward sincerity is here of supreme importance; if this is missing there is no worship, and without it the miserable unreality becomes inexpressibly wearisome. No doubt it is the failure to reach the rare altitude of its lofty ideal that makes Christian worship to appear in the eyes of many to be a melancholy performance. But this explanation should not be permitted to obscure the fact that true, living, spiritual worship must be a very delightful exercise of the soul. Perhaps one reason why this truth is not sufficiently appreciated may be found in the very facility with which the outward means of worship are presented to us. People who are seldom out of the sound of church bells are inclined to grow deaf to their significance. The Roman Christian hunted in the catacombs, the Waldensian hiding in his mountain cave, the Covenanter meeting his fellow members of the kirk in a remote highland glen, the backwoodsman walking fifty miles to attend Divine service once in six months, are led by difficulty and deprivation to perceive the value of public worship in a degree which is surprising to people among whom it is merely an incident of every-day life. When Zion was in ashes the memory of her festivals was encircled with a halo of regret.

In accordance with the principle of construction which he follows throughout—the heightening of the effect of the picture by presenting a succession of contrasts—the poet next sets the prosperity of the enemies of Jerusalem in close juxtaposition to the misery of those of her people in whom it is most pitiable and startling, the children and the princes. Men with any heart in them would wish above all things that the innocent young members of their families should be spared; yet the captives carried off to Babylon consisted principally of boys and girls torn from their homes, conveyed hundreds of miles

across the desert, many of them dragged down to hideous degradation by the vices that luxuriated in the corrupt empire of the Euphrates. The other class of victims specially commented on is that of the princes. Not only is the present humiliation of the nobility in sharp contrast to their former elevation of rank, and therefore their sufferings the more acute, but it is also to be observed that their old position of leadership has been completely reversed. The reference must be to Zedekiah and his courtiers.* These proud princes who formerly exercised command over the multitude have become a shameful flock of fugitives. In the expressive image of the poet, they are compared to "harts that find no pasture"; they are like fleet wild deer, so cowed by hunger that they meekly permit themselves to be driven by their enemies just as if they were a herd of tame cattle.

In the middle of this comparison between the success of the conquerors and the fate of their victims the poet inserts a pregnant sentence which suddenly carries us off to regions of far more profound reflection, touching upon the two sources of the ruin of Jerusalem that lie behind the visible hand of Nebuchadnezzar and his hosts, her own sin and the consequent wrath of her God. It flashes out as a momentary thought, and then retires with equal suddenness, permitting the previous current of reflections to be resumed as though unaffected by the startling interruption. This thought will reappear, however, with increasing fulness, shewing that it is always present to the mind of the poet and ready to come to the surface at any moment, even when it would seem to be inappropriate, although it can never be really inappropriate, because it is the key to the mystery of the whole tragedy.

Lastly, while the sense of a strong contrast is excited objectively by a comparison of the placid security of the invaders with the degradation of the fugitives, subjectively it is most vividly realised by the sufferers themselves when they call to mind their former happiness. Jerusalem is supposed to fall into a reverie in which she follows the recollection of the whole series of her pleasant experiences from far-off bygone times through all the succeeding ages down to the present era of calamities. This is to indulge in the pains of memory—pains which are decidedly more acute than the corresponding pleasures celebrated by Samuel Rogers. These pains are doubly intense owing to the inevitable fact that the contrast is unnaturally strained. Viewed in the softened lights of memory, the past is strangely simplified, its mixed character is forgotten, and many of its unpleasant features are smoothed out, so that an idyllic charm hovers over the dream, and lends it an unearthly beauty. This is why so many people foolishly damp the hopes of children, who, if they are healthily constituted, ought to be anticipating the future with eagerness, by solemnly exhorting them to make hay while the sun shines, with the gloomy warning that the sunny season must soon pass. Their application of the motto *carpe diem* is not only pagan in spirit; it is founded on an illusion. Happily there is some unreality about most of our yearning regrets for the days that have gone. That sweet, fair past was not so radiant as its effigy in the dreamland of memory now appears to be; nor is the hard present

* Jer. xxxix. 4, 5.

so free from mitigating circumstances as we suppose. And yet, when all is said, we cannot find the consolation we hunger after in hours of darkness among bare conclusions of common-sense. The grave is not an illusion, at least when only viewed in the light of the past—though even this chill, earthly reality begins to melt into a shadow immediately the light of the eternal future falls upon it. The melancholy that laments the lost past can only be perfectly mastered by that Christian grace, the hope which presses forward to a better future.

CHAPTER V.

SIN AND SUFFERING.

LAMENTATIONS i. 8-II.

THE doctrinaire rigour of Judaism in its uncompromising association of moral and physical evils has led to an unreasonable disregard for the solid truth which lies behind this mistake. It can scarcely be said that men are now perplexed by the problem that inspired the Book of Job. The fall of the tower of Siloam or the blindness of a man from his birth would not start among us the vexatious questions which were raised in the days of our Lord. We have not accepted the Jewish theory that the punishment of sin always overtakes the sinner in this life, much less have we assented to the by no means necessary corollary that all calamities are the direct penalties of the misconduct of the sufferers, and therefore sure signs of guilt. The modern tendency is in the opposite direction; it goes to ignore the existence of any connection whatever between the course of the universe and human conduct. No interference with the uniformity of the laws of nature for retributive or disciplinary purposes can be admitted. The machinery runs on in its grooves never deflected by any regard for our good or bad deserts. If we dash ourselves against its wheels they will tear us to pieces, grind us to powder; and we may reasonably consider this treatment to be the natural punishment of our folly. But here we are not beyond physical causation, and the drift of thought is towards holding the belief in anything more to be a simple survival from primitive anthropomorphic ideas of nature, a pure superstition. Is it a pure superstition? It is time we turned to another side of the question.

Every strong conviction that has obtained wide recognition, however erroneous and mischievous it may be, can be traced back to the abuse of some solid truth. It is not the case that the universe is constructed without any regard for moral laws. Even the natural punishment of the violation of natural laws contains a certain ethical element. Other considerations apart, clearly it is wrong to injure one's health or endanger one's life by rushing headlong against the constituted order of the universe; therefore the consequences of such conduct may be taken as signs of its condemnation. In the case of the sufferings of the Jews lamented by our poet the calamities were not primarily of a physical origin; they grew out of human acts—the accompaniments of the Chaldean invasion. When we come to the evolution of history we are introduced to a whole world of moral forces that are not at work in the material universe.

Nebuchadnezzar did not know that he was the instrument of a Higher Power for the chastisement of Israel; but the corruptions of the Jews, so ruthlessly exposed by their prophets, had undermined the national vigour which is the chief safeguard of a state, as surely as at a later time the corruptions of Rome opened her gates to devastating hosts of Goths and Huns. May we not go further, and, passing beyond the region of common observation, discover richer indications of the ethical meanings of events in the application to them of a real faith in God? It was his profound theism that lay at the base of the Jew's conception of temporal retribution, crude, hard, and narrow as this was. If we believe that God is supreme over nature and history as well as over individual lives, we must conclude that He will use every province of His vast dominion so as to further His righteous purposes. If the same Spirit reigns throughout there must be a certain harmony between all parts of His government. The mistake of the Jew was his claim to interpret the details of this Divine administration with a sole regard for the minute fraction of the universe that came under his own eyes, with blank indifference to the vast realm of facts and principles of which he could know nothing. His idea of Providence was too shortsighted, too parochial, in every respect too small; yet it was true in so far as it registered the conviction that there must be an ethical character in the government of the world by a righteous God, that the divinely ordered course of events cannot be out of all relation to conduct.

It does not fall in with the plan of the Lamentations for this subject to be treated so fully in these poems as it is in the stirring exhortations of the great prophets. Yet it comes to the surface repeatedly. In the fifth verse of the first elegy the poet attributes the affliction of Zion to "the multitude of her transgressions"; and he introduces the eighth verse with the clear declaration—

"Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she has become an unclean thing."

The powerful Hebrew idiom according to which the cognate substantive follows the verb is here employed. Rendered literally, the opening phrase is, "sinned sin." The experience of the chastisement leads to a keen perception of the guilt that precedes it. This is more than a consequence of the application of the accepted doctrine of the connection of sin with suffering to a particular case. No intellectual theory is strong enough by itself to awaken a slumbering conscience. The logic may be faultless; and yet even though the point of the syllogism is not evaded it will be coolly ignored. Trouble arouses a torpid conscience in a much more direct and effectual way. In the first place, it shatters the pride which is the chief hindrance to the confession of sin. Then it compels reflection; it calls a halt, and makes us look back over the path we may have been following too heedlessly. Sometimes it seems to exercise a distinctly illuminating influence. It is as though scales had fallen from the sufferer's eyes; he sees all things in a new light, and some ugly facts which had been lying at his side for years disregarded suddenly glare upon him as horrible discoveries. Thus the "Prodigal Son" perceives that he has sinned both against Heaven and against his father when he is in the lowest

depths of misery, not so much because he recognises a penal character in his troubles, but more on account of the fact that he has *come to himself*. This subjective, psychological connection between suffering and sin is independent of any dogma of retribution; for the ends of practical discipline it is the most important connection. We may waive all discussion of the ancient Jewish problem, and still be thankful to recognise the Elijah-like ministry of adversity. The immediate effect of this vision of sin is that a new colour is given to the picture of the desolation of Jerusalem. The image of a miserable woman is preserved, but the dignity of the earlier scene is missing here. Pathos and poetry gather round the picture of the forlorn widow weeping for the loss of her children. Neglected and humbled as she is in worldly estate, the tragic vastness of her sorrow has exalted her to an altitude of moral sublimity. Such suffering breaks through those barriers of conventional experience which make many lives look mean and trivial. It is so awful that we cannot but regard it with reverence. But all this is altered in the aspect of Jerusalem which follows the confession of her great sin. In the freedom of ancient language the poet ventures on an illustration that would be regarded as too gross for modern literature. The limits of our art exclude subjects which excite a sensation of disgust; but this is just the sensation the author of the elegy deliberately aims at producing. He paints a picture which is simply intended to sicken his readers. The utter humiliation of Jerusalem is exhibited in the unavoidable exposure of a condition which natural modesty would conceal at any cost. Another contrast between the reserve of our modern style and the rude bluntness of antiquity is here apparent. It is not only that we have grown more refined in language—a very superficial change which might be no better than the whitewashing of sepulchres; over and above this civilising of mere manners, the effect of Teutonic habits, strengthened by Christian sentiments, has been to develop a respect for woman undreamed of in the old Eastern world. It may be added that the scientific temper of recent times has taught us that there is nothing really dishonouring in purely natural processes. The ancient world could not distinguish between delicacy and shame. We should regard a poor suffering woman whose modesty had been grievously wounded with simple commiseration; the ancient Jews treated such a person with disgust as an unclean creature, quite unable to see that their conduct was simply brutal.

The new aspect of the misery of Jerusalem is thus set forth as one of degradation and ignominy. The vision of sin is immediately followed by a scene of shame. Commentators have been divided over the question whether this picture of the humiliated woman is intended to apply to the sin of the city or only to her misfortunes. In favour of the former view, it may be remarked that uncleanness is distinctly associated with moral corruption: the connection is the more appropriate here inasmuch as a confession of sin immediately precedes. On the other hand, the attendant circumstances point to the second interpretation. It is the humiliation of the condition of the sufferer, rather than that condition itself, which is dwelt upon. Jerusalem is despised, "she sigheth," "is come

down wonderfully," "hath no comforter," and is generally afflicted and oppressed by her enemies. But while we are led to regard the pitiable picture as a representation of the woful plight into which the proud city has fallen, we cannot conclude it to be an accident that this particular phase of her misery succeeds the mention of her great guilt. After all, it is only the underlying guilt that can justify a verdict which carries disgrace as well as suffering for its penalty. Even when the judgments of men are too confused to recognise this truth with regard to other people, it should be apparent to the conscience of the humiliated person himself. The humiliation which follows nothing worse than a fall into external misfortunes is but a superficial trouble, and the consciousness of innocence can enable one to submit to it without any sense of inward shame. The sting of contempt lies in the miserable consciousness that it is deserved.

Thus we see the punishment of sin consisting in exposure. The exposure which simply hurts natural modesty is acutely painful to a refined, sensitive spirit; and yet the very dignity which it outrages is a shield against the point of the insult. But where the exposure follows sin this shield is absent. In that case the degradation of it is without any mitigation. Nothing more may be necessary to constitute a very severe punishment. When the secrets of all hearts are revealed the very revelation will be a penal process. To lay bare the quivering nerves of memory to the searching sunlight must be to torture the guilty soul with inconceivable horrors. Nevertheless it is a matter for profound thankfulness that there is no question of a surprising revelation of the sinner's guilt being made to God at some future time, some shocking discovery which might turn His lovingkindness into wrath or contempt. We cannot have a firmer ground of joy and hope than the fact that God knows everything about us, and yet loves us at our worst, patiently waiting for repentance with His offer of unlimited forgiveness. Exposure before God is like a surgical examination; the hope of a cure, if it does not dispel the sense of humiliation—and that is impossible in the case of guilt, the disgrace of which to a healthy conscience is more intense before the holiness of God than before the eyes of fellow-sinners—still encourages confidence.

The recognition of a moral lapse at the root of the shame of Jerusalem, though not perhaps in the shame itself, is confirmed by a phrase which reflects on the culpable heedlessness of the Jews. The elegy deplores how the city has "come down wonderfully" on account of the fact that "she remembered not her latter end." It is quite confusing and incorrect to render this expression in the present tense as it stands in the Authorised English Version. The poet cannot mean that the Jews in exile and captivity have already forgotten the recent horrors of the siege of Jerusalem. This would be flatly contrary to the motive of the elegy, which is to give tongue to the sufferings of the Jews flowing out of that disaster. It would be impossible to say that the calamity that inspired the elegy was no longer even remembered by its victims. What an anti-climax this would be! Clearly the poet is bewailing the culpable folly of the people in not giving a thought to the certain consequences of such a course as they were following; a course that had been denounced by the faithful prophets

of Jehovah, who, alas! had been but voices crying in the wilderness, unnoted, or even scouted and suppressed, like the stormy petrels hated by sailors as birds of ill-omen. In her ease and prosperity, her self-indulgence and sin, the doomed city had failed to recollect what must be the end of such things. The idea of remembrance is peculiarly apt and forcible in this connection, although it has a relation to the future, because the Jews had been through experiences which should have served as warnings if they had duly reflected on them. This was not a matter for wild guesses or vague apprehensions. Not only were there the distinct utterances of Jeremiah and his predecessors to rouse the thoughtless; events had been speaking louder than words. Jerusalem was already a city with a history, and that history had even by this time accumulated some tragic lessons. These were subjects for memory. Thus memory can become prophecy, because the laws which are revealed in the past will govern the future. We are none of us so wholly inexperienced but that in the knowledge of what we have already been through we may gain wisdom to anticipate the consequences of our present actions. The heedless person is one who forgets, or at all events one who will not attend to his own memories. Such recklessness is its own condemnation; it cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.

But now it may be objected that this reference to the mere thought of consequences suggests considerations that are too low to furnish the reasons for the ruin of Jerusalem. Would the city have been spared if only her inhabitants had been a little more foreseeing? It should be observed that though mere prudence is never a very lofty virtue, imprudence is sometimes a very serious fault. It cannot be right to be simply reckless, to ignore all lessons of the past and fling oneself blindly into the future. The hero who is sure that he is inspired by a lofty motive may walk straight into the very jaws of death, and be all the stronger for his noble indifference to his fate; but he who is no hero, he who is not influenced by any great or unselfish ideas, has no excuse for neglecting the warnings of common prudence. All wise actions must be more or less guided with a view to their issues in the future, although in the case of the best of them the aims will be pure and unselfish. It is our prerogative to "look before and after"; and just in proportion as we take long views do our deeds acquire gravity and depth. Our Lord characterised the two ways by their ends. While the example of the careless Jews is followed on all sides—and who of us can deny that he has ever fallen into the negligence?—is it not a little superfluous to discuss abstract, unpractical problems about a remote altruism?

Intermingled with his painful picture of the humiliation and shame of the fallen city, the poet supplies indications of the effect of all this on the suffering citizens. Despised by all who had formerly honoured her, Jerusalem sighs and longs to retire into obscurity, away from the rude gaze of her oppressors.

In particular, two further signs of her distress are here given.

The first is *spoliation*. Her enemies have laid hands on "all her pleasant things." It may strike us that, after the miseries just narrated, this is but a minor trouble. Job's calamities began with the loss of his property, and rose from

this by degrees to the climax of agony. If his first trouble had been the sudden death of all his children, stunned by that awful blow, he would have cared little about the fate of his flocks and herds. It is not according to the method of the Lamentations, however, to move on to any climax. The thoughts are set forth as they well up in the mind of the poet, now passionate and intense, then again of a milder cast, yet altogether combining to colour one picture of intolerable woe. But there is an aspect of this idea of the robbery of the "pleasant things" which heightens the sense of misery. It is another instance of the force of contrast so often manifested in these elegies. Jerusalem had been a home of wealth and luxury in the merry old days. But hoarded money, precious jewellery, family heirlooms, products of art and skill, accumulated during generations of prosperity and treated as necessities of life—all had been swept away in the sack of the city, and scattered among strangers who could not prize them as they had been prized by their owners; and now these victims of spoliation, stripped of everything, were in want of daily bread. Even what little could be saved from the wreck they had to give up in exchange for common food, bought dearly in the market of necessity.

The second sign of the great distress here noted is *desecration*. Gentiles invade the sacred precincts of the temple. Considering that the sanctuary had been already much more effectually desecrated by the blood-stained hands and lustful hearts of impious worshippers, such as those "rulers of Sodom" denounced by Isaiah for "trampling" the courts of Jehovah with their "vain oblations,"* we do not find it easy to sympathise with this horror of a supposed defilement from the mere presence of heathen persons. Yet it would be unjust to accuse the shocked Israelites of hypocrisy. They ought to have been more conscious of the one real corruption of sin; but we cannot add that therefore their notions of external uncleanness were altogether foolish and wrong. To judge the Jews of the age of the Captivity by a standard of spirituality which few Christians have yet attained to would be a cruel anachronism. The Syrian invasion of the temple in the time of the Maccabees was called by a very late prophet an "abomination of desolation,"† and a similar insult to be offered to the sacred place by the Romans is described by our Lord in the same terms.‡ All of us must be conscious at times of the sacredness of associations. To botanise on his mother's grave may be a proof of a man's freedom from superstition, but it cannot be taken as an indication of the fineness of his feelings. The Israelite exclusiveness which shunned the intrusion of foreigners simply because they were foreigners was combined both with a patriotic anxiety to preserve the integrity of the nation, and in some cases with a religious dread of idolatry. It is true the nominal contamination of the mere presence of Gentiles was generally more dreaded than the real contagion of their corrupt examples. Still the very idea of desecration, even when it is superficial, together with a sense of pain at its presence, is higher than the materialism which despises it not because this materialism has the grace to sanctify everything, but for the opposite reason, because it

* Isa. i. 10-17.

† Dan. xi. 31.

‡ Mark xiii. 14.

counts nothing holy, because to it all things are common and unclean.

Before we pass from this portion of the elegy there is one curious characteristic of it which calls for notice. The poet suddenly drops the construction in the third person and writes in the first person. This he does twice—at the end of the ninth verse, and again at the end of the eleventh. He might be speaking in his own person, but the language points to the personified city. Yet in each case the outburst is quite abrupt, sprung upon us without any introductory formula. Possibly the explanation of this anomaly must be sought in the liturgical use for which the poem was designed. If it was to be sung antiphonally we may conjecture that at these places a second chorus would break in. The result would be a startling dramatic effect—as though the city had sat listening to the lament over her woes until the piteous tale had compelled her to break her silence and cry aloud. In each case the cry is directed to heaven. It is an appeal to God; and it simply prays for His attention—"Behold, O Lord," "See, O Lord, and behold." In the first case the Divine attention is called to the insolence of the enemy, in the second to the degradation of Jerusalem. Still it is only an appeal for notice. Will God but look upon all this misery? That is sufficient.

CHAPTER VI.

ZION'S APPEAL.

LAMENTATIONS i. 12-22.

IN the latter part of the second elegy Jerusalem appears as the speaker, appealing for sympathy, first to stray, passing travellers, then to the larger circle of the surrounding nations, and lastly to her God. Already the suffering city has spoken once or twice in brief interruptions of the poet's descriptions of her miseries, and now she seems to be too impatient to permit herself to be represented any longer even by this friendly advocate; she must come forward in person and present her case in her own words.

There is much difference of opinion among commentators about the rendering of the phrase with which the appeal begins. The Revisers have followed the Authorised Version in taking it as a question—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"* But it may be treated as a direct negative—"It is nothing," etc., or, by a slightly different reading of the Hebrew text, as a simple call for attention—"O all ye that pass by," etc., as in the Vulgate "*O vos*," etc. The usual rendering is the finest in literary feeling, and it is in accordance with a common usage. Although the sign of an interrogation, which would set this meaning beyond dispute, is absent, there does not seem to be sufficient reason for rejecting it in favour of one of the proposed alternatives. But in any case the whole passage evidently expresses a deep yearning for sympathy. Mere strangers, roving Bedouin, any people who may chance to be passing by Jerusalem, are implored to behold her incomparable woes. The wounded animal creeps into a corner to suffer and die in secret, perhaps on account of the habit of herds, in tormenting a suffering mate.

* i. 12.

But among mankind the instinct of a sufferer is to crave sympathy, from a friend, if possible; but if such be not available, then even from a stranger. Now although where it is possible to give effectual aid, merely to cast a pitying look and pass by on the other side, like the priest and the Levite in the parable, is a mockery and a cruelty, although unpretentious indifference is better than that hypocrisy, it would be a great mistake to suppose that in those cases for which no direct relief can be given sympathy is of no value. This sympathy, if it is real, would help if it could; and under all circumstances it is the reality of the sympathy that is most prized, not its issues.

It should be remembered, further, that the first condition of active aid is a genuine sense of compassion, which can only be awakened by means of knowledge and the impressions which a contemplation of suffering produces. Evil is wrought not only from want of thought, but also from lack of knowledge; and good-doing is withheld for the same reason. Therefore the first requisite is to arrest attention. A royal commission is the reasonable precursor of a state remedy for some public wrong. Misery is permitted to flourish in the dark because people are too indolent to search it out. No doubt the knowledge of sufferings which we might remedy implies a grave responsibility; but we cannot escape our obligations by simply closing our eyes to what we do not wish to see. We are responsible for our ignorance and its consequences wherever the opportunity of knowledge is within our reach.

The appeal to all who pass by is most familiar to us in its later association with our Lord's sufferings on the cross. But this is not in any sense a Messianic passage; it is confined in its purpose to the miseries of Jerusalem. Of course there can be no objection to illustrating the grief and pain of the Man of Sorrows by using the classic language of an ancient lament if we note that this is only an illustration. There is a kinship in all suffering, and it is right to consider that He who was tried in all points as we are tried passed through sorrows which absorbed all the bitterness even of such a cup of woe as that which was drunk by Jerusalem in the extremity of her misfortunes. If never before there had been sorrow like unto her sorrow, at length that was matched, nay, surpassed at Gethsemane and Golgotha. Still it would be a mistake to confine these words to their secondary application—not only an exegetical mistake, but one of deeper significance. Jesus Christ restrained the wailing of the women who offered Him their compassion on His way to the cross, bidding them weep not for Him, but for themselves and their children.* Much more when His passion is long past and He is reigning in glory must it be displeasing to Him for His friends to be wasting idle tears over the sufferings of His earthly life. The morbid sentimentality which broods over the ancient wounds of Christ, the nail prints and the spear thrust, but ignores the present wounds of society—the wounds of the world for which He bled and died, or the wounds of the Church which is His body now, must be wrong in His sight. He would rather we gave a cup of cold water to one of His brethren than an ocean of tears to the memory of Calvary. If then we would make

* Luke xxiii. 28.

use of the ruined city's appeal for sympathy by applying it to some later object it would be more in agreement with the mind of Christ to think of the miseries of mankind in our own day, and to consider how a sympathetic regard for them may point to some ministry of alleviation.

In order to impress the magnitude of her miseries on the minds of the strangers whose attention she would arrest, the city, now personified as a suppliant, describes her dreadful condition in a series of brief, pointed metaphors. Thus the imagination is excited; and the imagination is one of the roads to the heart. It is not enough that people know the bald facts of a calamity as these may be scheduled in an inspector's report. Although this preliminary information is most important, if we go no further the report will be replaced in its pigeon-hole, and lie there till it is forgotten. If it is to do something better than gather the dust of years it must be used as a foundation for the imagination to work upon. This does not imply any departure from truth, any false colouring or exaggeration; on the contrary, the process only brings out the truth which is not really seen until it is imagined. Let us look at the various images under which the distress of Jerusalem is here presented.

It is like a fire in the bones.* It burns, consumes, pains with intolerable torment; it is no skin-deep trouble, it penetrates to the very marrow. This fire is overmastering; it is not to be quenched, neither does it die out; it "prevail-eth" against the bones. There is no getting such a fire under.

It is like a net.† The image is changed. We see a wild creature caught in the bush, or perhaps a fugitive arrested in his flight and flung down by hidden snares at his feet. Here is the shock of surprise, the humiliation of deceit, the vexation of being thwarted. The result is a baffled, bewildered, helpless condition.

It is like faintness.‡ The desolate sufferer is ill. It is bad enough to have to bear calamities in the strength of health. Jerusalem is made sick and kept faint "all the day"—with a faintness that is not a momentary collapse, but a continuous condition of failure.

It is like a yoke§ which is wreathed upon the neck—fixed on, as with twisted withes. The poet is here more definite. The yoke is made out of the transgressions of Jerusalem. The sense of guilt does not lighten its weight; the band that holds it most closely is the feeling that it is deserved. It is natural that the sinful sufferer should exclaim that God, who has bound this terrible yoke upon her, has made her strength to fail. As there is nothing so invigorating as the assurance that one is suffering for a righteous cause, so there is nothing so wretchedly depressing as the consciousness of guilt.

Lastly, it is like a winepress.|| This image is elaborated with more detail, although at the expense of unity of design. God is said to have called a "solemn assembly" to oppress the Jews, by an ironical reversal of the common notion of such an assembly. The language recalls the idea of one of the great national festivals of Israel. But now instead of the favoured people their enemies are summoned, and the object is not the glad praise of God for His bounties in harvest or vintage, but the crushing of the Jews. They are to be victims, not guests as of old.

They are themselves the harvest of judgment, the vintage of wrath. The wine is to be made, but the grapes crushed to produce it are the people who were accustomed to feast and drink of the fruits of God's bounty in the happy days of their prosperity. So the mighty men are set at nought, their prowess counting as nothing against the brutal rush of the enemy; and the young men are crushed, their spirit and vigour failing them in the great destruction.

The most terrible trait in these pictures, one that is common to all of them, is the Divine origin of the troubles. It was God who sent fire into the bones, spread the net, made the sufferer desolate and faint. The yoke was bound by His hands. It was He who set at nought the mighty men, and summoned the assembly of foes to crush His people. The poet even goes so far as to make the daring statement that it was the Lord Himself who trod the virgin daughter of Judah as in a winepress. It is a ghastly picture—a dainty maiden trampled to death by Jehovah as grapes are trampled to squeeze out their juice! This horrible thing is ascribed to God! Yet there is no complaint of barbarity, no idea that the Judge of all the earth is not doing right. The miserable city does not bring any railing accusation against her Lord; she takes all the blame upon herself. We must be careful to bear in mind the distinction between poetic imagery and prosaic narrative. Still it remains true that Jerusalem here attributes her troubles to the will and action of God. This is vital to the Hebrew faith. To explain it away is to impoverish the religion of Israel, and with it the Old Testament revelation. That revelation shews us the absolute sovereignty of God, and at the same time it brings out the guilt of man, so that no room is allowed for complaints against the Divine justice. The grief is all the greater because there is no thought of rebellion. The daring doubts that struggle into expression in Job never obtrude themselves here to check the even flow of tears. The melancholy is profound, but comparatively calm, since it does not once give place to anger. It is natural that the succession of images of misery conceived in this spirit should be followed by a burst of tears. Zion weeps because the comforter who should refresh her soul is far away, and she is left utterly desolate.*

Here the supposed utterance of Jerusalem is broken for the poet to insert a description of the suppliant making her piteous appeal.† He shews us Zion spreading out her hands, that is to say, in the well-known attitude of prayer. She is comfortless, oppressed by her neighbours in accordance with the will of her God, and treated as an unclean thing; she who had despised the idolatrous Gentiles in her pride of superior sanctity has now become foul and despicable in their eyes!

The semi-dramatic form of the elegy is seen in the reappearance of Jerusalem as speaker without any formula of introduction. After the poet's brief interjection describing the suppliant, the personified city continues her plaintive appeal, but with a considerable enlargement of its scope. She makes the most distinct acknowledgment of the two vital elements of the case—God's righteousness and her own rebellion.‡ These carry us beneath the visible scenes of trouble so graphically illustrated earlier, and fix

* i. 13.

† *Ibid.*‡ *Ibid.*

§ i. 14.

|| i. 15.

* i. 16.

† i. 17.

‡ i. 18.

our attention on deep-seated principles. It cannot be supposed that the faith and penitence unreservedly confessed in the elegy were truly experienced by all the fugitive citizens of Jerusalem, though they were found in the devout "remnant" among whom the author of the poem must be reckoned. But the reasonable interpretation of these utterances is that which accepts them as the inspired expressions of the thoughts and feelings which Jerusalem ought to possess, as ideal expressions, suitable to those who rightly appreciate the whole situation. This fact gives them a wide applicability. The ideal approaches the universal. Although it cannot be said that all trouble is the direct punishment of sin, and although it is manifestly insincere to make confession of guilt one does not inwardly admit, to be firmly settled in the conviction that God is right in what He does even when it all looks most wrong, that if there is a fault it must be on man's side, is to have reached the centre of truth. This is very different from the admission that God has the right of an absolute sovereign to do whatever He chooses, like mad Caligula when intoxicated with his own divinity; it even implies a denial of that supposed right, for it asserts that He acts in accordance with something other than His will, viz., righteousness.

Enlarging the area of her appeal, no longer content to snatch at the casual pity of individual travellers on the road, Jerusalem now calls upon all the "peoples"—i. e., all neighbouring tribes—to hear the tale of her woes.* This is too huge a tragedy to be confined to private spectators; it is of national proportions, and it claims the attention of whole nations. It is curious to observe that foreigners, whom the strict Jews sternly exclude from their privileges, are nevertheless besought to compassionate their distresses. These uncircumcised heathen are not now thrust contemptuously aside; they are even appealed to as sympathisers. Perhaps this is meant to indicate the vastness of the misery of Jerusalem by the suggestion that even aliens should be affected by it; when the waves spread far in all directions there must have been a most terrible storm at the centre of disturbance. Still it is possible to find in this widening outlook of the poet a sign of the softening and enlarging effects of trouble. The very need of much sympathy breaks down the barriers of proud exclusiveness, and prepares one to look for gracious qualities among people who have been previously treated with churlish indifference or positive animosity. Floods and earthquakes tame savage beasts. On the battlefield wounded men gratefully accept relief from their mortal enemies. Conduct of this sort may be self-regarding, perhaps weak and cowardly; still it is an outcome of the natural brotherhood of all mankind, any confession of which, however reluctant, is a welcome thing.

The appeal to the nations contains three particulars. It deplors the captivity of the virgins and young men; the treachery of allies—"lovers" who have been called upon for assistance, but in vain; and the awful fact that men of such consequence as the elders and priests, the very aristocracy of Jerusalem, had died of starvation after an ineffectual search for food—a lurid picture of the horrors of the siege.† The details repeat themselves with but very slight variations.

It is natural for a great sufferer to revolve his bitter morsel continuously. The action is a sign of its bitterness. The monotony of the dirge is a sure indication of the depth of the trouble that occasions it. The theme is only too interesting to the mourner, however wearisome it may become to the listener.

In drawing to a close the appeal goes further, and, rising altogether above man, seeks the attention of God.* It is not enough that every passing traveller is arrested, nor even that the notice of all the neighbouring nations is sought; this trouble is too great for human shoulders to bear. It will absorb the largest mass of sympathy, and yet thirst for more. Twice before in the first part of the elegy the language of the poet speaking in his own person was interrupted by an outcry of Jerusalem to God.† Now the elegy closes with a fuller appeal to Heaven. This is an utterance of faith where faith is tried to the uttermost. It is distinctly recognised that the calamities bewailed have been sent by God; and yet the stricken city turns to God for consolation. And the appeal is not at all in the form of a cry to a tormentor for mercy; it seeks friendly sympathy and avenging actions. Nothing could more clearly prove the consciousness that God is not doing any wrong to His people. Not only is there no complaint against the justice of His acts; in spite of them all He is still regarded as the greatest Friend and Helper of the victims of His wrath.

This apparently paradoxical position issues in what might otherwise be a contradiction of thought. The ruin of Jerusalem is attributed to the righteous judgment of God, against which no shadow of complaint is raised; and yet God is asked to pour vengeance on the heads of the human agents of His wrath! These people have been acting from their own evil, or at all events their own inimical motives. Therefore it is not held that they deserve punishment for their conduct any the less on account of the fact that they have been the unconscious instruments of Providence. The vengeance here sought for cannot be brought into line with Christian principles; but the poet had never heard the Sermon on the Mount. It would not have occurred to him that the spirit of revenge was not right, any more than it occurred to the writers of maledictory Psalms.

There is one more point in this final appeal to God which should be noticed, because it is very characteristic of the elegy throughout. Zion bewails her friendless condition, declaring, "there is none to comfort me."‡ This is the fifth reference to the absence of a comforter.§ The idea may be merely introduced in order to accentuate the description of utter desolation. And yet when we compare the several allusions to it, the conclusion seems to be forced upon us that the poet has a more specific intention. In some cases, at least, he seems to have one particular comforter in mind, as, for example, when he says, "The comforter that should refresh my soul is far from me."|| Our thoughts instinctively turn to the Paraclete of St. John's Gospel. It would not be reasonable to suppose that the elegist had attained to any definite conception of the Holy Spirit such as that of the ripe Christian revelation. But we have his own words to witness that God is to him the supreme Com-

* i. 18.

† i. 18, 19.

* i. 20-2.

† i. 9, 11.

‡ i. 21.

§ See i. 2, 9, 16, 17, 21.

|| i. 16.

forter, is the Lord and Giver of life who refreshes his soul. It would seem, then, that the poet's thought is like that of the author of the twenty-second Psalm, which was echoed in our Lord's cry of despair on the cross.* When God our Comforter hides the light of His countenance the night is most dark. Yet the darkness is not always perceived, or its cause recognised. Then to miss the consolations of God consciously, with pain, is the first step towards recovering them.

CHAPTER VII.

GOD AS AN ENEMY.

LAMENTATIONS ii. 1-9.

THE elegist, as we have seen, attributes the troubles of the Jews to the will and action of God. In the second poem he even ventures further, and with daring logic presses this idea to its ultimate issues. If God is tormenting His people in fierce anger it must be because He is their enemy—so the sad-hearted patriot reasons. The course of Providence does not shape itself to him as a merciful chastisement, as a veiled blessing; its motive seems to be distinctly unfriendly. He drives his dreadful conclusion home with great amplitude of details. In order to appreciate the force of it let us look at the illustrative passage in two ways—first, in view of the calamities inflicted on Jerusalem, all of which are here ascribed to God, and then with regard to those thoughts and purposes of their Divine Author which appear to be revealed in them.

First, then, we have the earthly side of the process. The daughter of Zion is covered with a cloud.† The metaphor would be more striking in the brilliant East than it is to us in our habitually sombre climate. There it would suggest unwonted gloom—the loss of the customary light of heaven, rare distress, and excessive melancholy. It is a general, comprehensive image intended to overshadow all that follows. Terrible disasters cover the aspect of all things from zenith to horizon. The physical darkness that accompanied the horrors of Golgotha is here anticipated, not indeed by any actual prophecy, but in idea.

But there is more than gloom. A mere cloud may lift, and discover everything unaltered by the passing shadow. The distress that has fallen on Jerusalem is not thus superficial and transient. She herself has suffered a fatal fall. The beauty of Israel has been cast down from heaven to earth. The language is now varied; instead of "the daughter of Zion" we have "the beauty of Israel."‡ The use of the larger title, "Israel," is not a little significant. It shews that the elegist is alive to the idea of the fundamental unity of his race, a unity which could not be destroyed by centuries of inter-tribal warfare. Although in the ungracious region of politics Israel stood aloof from Judah, the two peoples were frequently treated as one by poets and prophets when religious ideas were in mind. Here apparently the vastness of the calamities of Jerusalem has obliterated the memory of jealous distinctions. Similarly we may see the great Eng-

lish race—British and American—forgetting national divisions in pursuit of its higher religious aims, as in Christian missions; and we may be sure that this blood-unity would be felt most keenly under the shadow of a great trouble on either side of the Atlantic. By the time of the destruction of Jerusalem the northern tribes had been scattered, but the use of the distinctive name of these people is a sign that the ancient oneness of all who traced back their pedigree to the patriarch Jacob was still recognised. It is some compensation for the endurance of trouble to find it thus breaking down the middle wall of partition between estranged brethren.

It has been suggested with probability that by the expression "the beauty of Israel" the elegist intended to indicate the temple. This magnificent pile of buildings, crowning one of the hills of Jerusalem, and shining with gold in "barbaric splendour," was the central object of beauty among all the people who revered the worship it enshrined. Its situation would naturally suggest the language here employed. Jerusalem rises among the hills of Judah, some two thousand feet above the sea-level; and when viewed from the wilderness in the south she looks indeed like a city built in the heavens. But the physical exaltation of Jerusalem and her temple was surpassed by exaltation in privilege, and prosperity, and pride. Capernaum, the vain city of the lake that would raise herself to heaven, is warned by Jesus that she shall be cast down to Hades.* Now not only Jerusalem, but the glory of the race of Israel, symbolised by the central shrine of the national religion, is thus humiliated.

Still keeping in mind the temple, the poet tells us that God has forgotten His footstool. He seems to be thinking of the Mercy-Seat over the ark, the spot at which God was thought to shew Himself propitious to Israel on the great Day of Atonement, and which was looked upon as the very centre of the Divine presence. In the destruction of the temple the holiest places were outraged, and the ark itself carried off or broken up, and never more heard of. How different was this from the story of the loss of the ark in the days of Eli, when the Philistines were constrained to send it home of their own accord! Now no miracle intervenes to punish the heathen for their sacrilege. Yes, surely God must have forgotten His footstool! So it seems to the sorrowful Jew, perplexed at the impunity with which this crime has been committed.

But the mischief is not confined to the central shrine. It has extended to remote country regions and simple rustic folk. The shepherd's hut has shared the fate of the temple of the Lord. All the habitations of Jacob—a phrase which in the original points to country cottages—have been swallowed up.† The holiest is not spared on account of its sanctity, neither is the lowliest on account of its obscurity. The calamity extends to all districts, to all things, to all classes.

If the shepherd's cot is contrasted with the temple and the ark because of its simplicity, the fortress may be contrasted with this defenceless hut because of its strength. Yet even the strongholds have been thrown down. More than this, the action of the Jews' army has been paralysed by the God who had been its strength and support in the glorious olden time. It is

* Mark xv. 34.

† ii. 1.

‡ ii. 1.

* Matt. xi 23.

† ii. 2.

as though the right hand of the warrior had been seized from behind and drawn back at the moment when it was raised to strike a blow for deliverance. The consequence is that the flower of the army, "all that were pleasant to the eye,"* are slain. Israel herself is swallowed up, while her palaces and fortresses are demolished.

The climax of this mystery of Divine destruction is reached when God destroys His own temple. The elegist returns to the dreadful subject as though fascinated by the terror of it. God has violently taken away His tabernacle.† The old historic name of the sanctuary of Israel recurs at this crisis of ruin; and it is particularly appropriate to the image which follows, an image which possibly it suggested. If we are to understand the metaphor of the sixth verse as it is rendered in the English Authorised and Revised Versions, we have to suppose a reference to some such booth of boughs as people were accustomed to put up for their shelter during the vintage, and which would be removed as soon as it had served its temporary purpose. The solid temple buildings had been swept away as easily as though they were just such flimsy structures, as though they had been "of a garden." But we can read the text more literally, and still find good sense in it. According to the strict translation of the original, God is said to have violently taken away His tabernacle "as a garden." At the siege of a city the fruit gardens that encircle it are the first victims of the destroyer's axe. Lying out beyond the walls they are entirely unprotected, while the impediments they offer to the movements of troops and instruments of war induce the commander to order their early demolition. Thus Titus had the trees cleared from the Mount of Olives, so that one of the first incidents in the Roman siege of Jerusalem must have been the destruction of the Garden of Gethsemane. Now the poet compares the ease with which the great massive temple—itsself a powerful fortress, and enclosed within the city walls—was demolished, with the simple process of scouring the outlying gardens. So the place of assembly disappears, and with it the assembly itself, so that even the sacred Sabbath is passed over and forgotten. Then the two heads of the nation—the king, its civil ruler, and the priest, its ecclesiastical chief are both despised in the indignation of God's anger.

The central object of the sacred shrine is the altar, where earth seems to meet heaven in the high mystery of sacrifice. Here men seek to propitiate God; here too God would be expected to shew Himself gracious to men. Yet God has even cast off His altar, abhorring His very sanctuary.‡ Where mercy is most confidently anticipated, there of all places nothing but wrath and rejection are to be found. What prospect could be more hopeless?

The deeper thought that God rejects His sanctuary because His people have first rejected Him is not brought forward just now. Yet this solution of the mystery is prepared by a contemplation of the utter failure of the old ritual of atonement. Evidently that is not always effective, for here it has broken down entirely; then can it ever be inherently efficacious? It cannot be enough to trust to a sanctuary and ceremonies which God Himself destroys. But further, out of this scene which was so per-

plexing to the pious Jew, there flashes to us the clear truth that nothing is so abominable in the sight of God as an attempt to worship Him on the part of people who are living at enmity with Him. We can also perceive that if God shatters our sanctuary, perhaps He does so in order to prevent us from making a fetish of it. Then the loss of shrine and altar and ceremony may be the saving of the superstitious worshipper who is thereby taught to turn to some more stable source of confidence.

This, however, is not the line of reflections followed by the elegist in the present instance. His mind is possessed with one dark, awful, crushing thought. All this is God's work. And why has God done it? The answer to that question is the idea that here dominates the mind of the poet. It is because *God has become an enemy!* There is no attempt to mitigate the force of this daring idea. It is stated in the strongest possible terms, and repeated again and again at every turn—Israel's cloud is the effect of God's anger; it has come in the day of His anger; God is acting with fierce anger, with a flaming fire of wrath. This must mean that God is decidedly inimical. He is behaving as an adversary; He bends His bow; He manifests violence. It is not merely that God permits the adversaries of Israel to commit their ravages with impunity; God commits those ravages; He is Himself the enemy. He shews indignation. He despises, He abhors. And this is all deliberate. The destruction is carried out with the same care and exactitude that characterise the erection of a building. It is as though it were done with a measuring line. God surveys to destroy.

The first thing to be noticed in this unhesitating ascription to God of positive enmity is the striking evidence it contains of faith in the Divine power, presence, and activity. These were no more visible to the mere observer of events in the destruction of Jerusalem than in the shattering of the French empire at Sedan. In the one case as in the other all that the world could see was the crushing military defeat and its fatal consequences. The victorious army of the Babylonians filled the field as completely in the old time as that of the Germans in the modern event. Yet the poet simply ignores its existence. He passes it with sublime indifference, his mind filled with the thought of the unseen Power behind. He has not a word for Nebuchadnezzar, because he is assured that this mighty monarch is nothing but a tool in the hands of the real Enemy of the Jews. A man of smaller faith would not have penetrated sufficiently beneath the surface to have conceived the idea of Divine enmity in connection with a series of occurrences so very mundane as the ravages of war. A heathenish faith would have acknowledged in this defeat of Israel a triumph of the might of Bel or Nebo over the power of Jehovah. But so convinced is the elegist of the absolute supremacy of his God that no such idea is suggested to him even as a temptation of unbelief. He knows that the action of the true God is supreme in everything that happens, whether the event be favourable or unfavourable to His people. Perhaps it is only owing to the dreary materialism of current thought that we should be less likely to discover an indication of the enmity of God in some huge national calamity.

Still, although this idea of the elegist is a

* ii. 4.

† i. 6.

‡ ii. 7.

fruit of his unshaken faith in the universal sway of God, it startles and shocks us, and we shrink from it almost as though it contained some blasphemous suggestion. Is it ever right to think of God as the enemy of any man? It would not be fair to pass judgment on the author of the Lamentations on the ground of a cold consideration of this abstract question. We must remember the terrible situation in which he stood—his beloved city destroyed, the revered temple of his fathers a mass of charred ruins, his people scattered in exile and captivity, tortured, slaughtered; these were not circumstances to encourage a course of calm and measured reflection. We must not expect the sufferer to carry out an exact chemical analysis of his cup of woe before uttering an exclamation on its quality; and if it should be that the burning taste induces him to speak too strongly of its ingredients, we who only see him swallow it without being required to taste a drop ourselves should be slow to examine his language too nicely. He who has never entered Gethsemane is not in a position to understand how dark may be the views of all things seen beneath its sombre shade. If the Divine sufferer on the cross could speak as though His God had actually deserted Him, are we to condemn an Old Testament saint when he ascribes unspeakably great troubles to the enmity of God?

Is this, then, but the rhetoric of misery? If it be no more, while we seek to sympathise with the feelings of a very dramatic situation, we shall not be called upon to go further and discover in the language of the poet any positive teaching about God and His ways with man. But are we at liberty to stop short here? Is the elegist only expressing his own feelings? Have we a right to affirm that there can be no objective truth in the awful idea of the enmity of God.

In considering this question we must be careful to dismiss from our minds the unworthy associations that only too commonly attach themselves to notions of enmity among men. Hatred cannot be ascribed to One whose deepest name is Love. No spite, malignity, or evil passion of any kind can be found in the heart of the Holy God. When due weight is given to these negations very much that we usually see in the practice of enmity disappears. But this is not to say that the idea itself is denied, or the fact shown to be impossible.

In the first place, we have no warrant for asserting that God will never act in direct and intentional opposition to any of His creatures. There is one obvious occasion when He certainly does this. The man who resists the laws of nature finds those laws working against him. He is not merely running his head against a stone wall; the laws are not inert obstructions in the path of the transgressor; they represent forces in action. That is to say, they resist their opponent with vigorous antagonism. In themselves they are blind, and they bear him no ill-will. But the Being who wields the forces is not blind or indifferent. The laws of nature are, as Kingsley said, but the ways of God. If they are opposing a man God is opposing that man. But God does not confine His action to the realm of physical processes. His providence works through the whole course of events in the world's history. What we see evidently operating in nature we may infer to be equally

active in less visible regions. Then if we believe in a God who rules and works in the world, we cannot suppose that His activity is confined to aiding what is good. It is unreasonable to imagine that He stands aside in passive negligence of evil. And if He concerns Himself to thwart evil, what is this but manifesting Himself as the enemy of the evildoer?

It may be contended, on the other side, that there is a world of difference between antagonistic actions and unfriendly feelings, and that the former by no means imply the latter. May not God oppose a man who is doing wrong, not at all because He is his Enemy, but just because He is his truest Friend? Is it not an act of real kindness to save a man from himself when his own will is leading him astray? This of course must be granted, and being granted, it will certainly affect our views of the ultimate issues of what we may be compelled to regard in its present operation as nothing short of Divine antagonism. It may remind us that the motives lying behind the most inimical action on God's part may be merciful and kind in their aims. Still, for the time being, the opposition is a reality, and a reality which to all intents and purposes is one of enmity, since it resists, frustrates, hurts.

Nor is this all. We have no reason to deny that God can have real anger. Is it not right and just that He should be "angry with the wicked every day"?* Would He not be imperfect in holiness, would He not be less than God, if He could behold vile deeds springing from vile hearts with placid indifference? We must believe that Jesus Christ was as truly revealing the Father when He was moved with indignation as when He was moved with compassion. His life shows quite clearly that He was the enemy of oppressors and hypocrites, and He plainly declared that He came to bring a sword.† His mission was a war against all evil, and therefore, though not waged with carnal weapons, a war against evil men. The Jewish authorities were perfectly right in perceiving this fact. They persecuted Him as their enemy; and He was their enemy. This statement is no contradiction to the gracious truth that He desired to save all men, and therefore even these men. If God's enmity to any soul were eternal it would conflict with His love. It cannot be that He wishes the ultimate ruin of one of His own children. But if He is at the present time actively opposing a man, and if He is doing this in anger, in the wrath of righteousness against sin, it is only quibbling with words to deny that for the time being He is a very real enemy to that man.

The current of thought in the present day is not in any sympathy with this idea of God as an Enemy, partly in its revulsion from harsh and un-Christlike conceptions of God, partly also on account of the modern humanitarianism which almost loses sight of sin in its absorbing love of mercy. But the tremendous fact of the Divine enmity towards the sinful man so long as he persists in his sin is not to be lightly brushed aside. It is not wise wholly to forget that "our God is a consuming fire."‡ It is in consideration of this dread truth that the atonement wrought by His Son according to His own will of love is discovered to be an action of vital efficacy, and not a mere scenic display.

* Psalm vii. 11.

† Matt. x. 34.

‡ Heb. xii. 29.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

LAMENTATIONS ii. 10-17.

PASSION and poetry, when they fire the imagination, do more than personify individual material things. By fusing the separate objects in the crucible of a common emotion which in some way appertains to them all, they personify this grand unity, and so lift their theme into the region of the sublime. Thus while in his second elegy the author of the Lamentations first dwells on the desolation of inanimate objects,—the temple, fortresses, country cottages,—these are all of interest to him only because they belong to Jerusalem, the city of his heart's devotion, and it is the city herself that moves his deepest feelings; and when in the second part of the poem he proceeds to describe the miserable condition of living persons—men, women, and children—profoundly pathetic as the picture he now paints appears to us in its piteous details, it is still regarded by its author as a whole, and the people's sufferings are so very terrible in his eyes because they are the woes of Jerusalem.

Some attempt to sympathise with the large and lofty view of the elegist may be a wholesome corrective to the intense individualism of modern habits of thought. The difficulty for us is to see that this view is not merely ideal, that it represents a great, solid truth, the truth that the perfect human unit is not an individual, but a more or less extensive group of persons, mutually harmonised and organised in a common life, a society of some sort—the family, the city, the state, mankind. By bearing this in mind we shall be able to perceive that sufferings which in themselves might seem sordid and degrading can attain to something of epic dignity.

It is in this spirit that the poet deploras the exile of the king and the princes. He is not now concerned with the private troubles of these exalted persons. Judah was a limited monarchy, though not after the pattern of government familiar to us, but rather in the style of the Plantagenet rule, according to which the sovereign shared his authority with a number of powerful barons, each of whom was lord over his own territory. The men described as “the princes of Israel” were not, for the most part, members of the royal family; they were the heads of tribes and families. Therefore the banishment of these persons, together with the king, meant for the Jews who were left behind the loss of their ruling authorities. Then it seems most reasonable to connect the clause which follows the reference to the exile with the sufferings of Jerusalem rather than with the hardships of the captives, because the whole context is concerned with the former subject. This phrase read literally is, “The law is not.”* Our Revisers have followed the Authorised Version in connecting it with the previous expression, “among the nations,” which describes the place of exile, so as to lead us to read it as a statement that the king and the princes were enduring the hardship of residence in a land where their sacred *Torah* was not observed. If, however, we take the words in harmony with the sur-

rounding thoughts, we are reminded by them that the removal of the national rulers involved to the Jews the cessation of the administration of their law. The residents still left in the land were reduced to a condition of anarchy; or, if the conquerors had begun to administer some sort of martial law, this was totally alien to the revered *Torah* of Israel. Josiah had based his reformation on the discovery of the sacred law-book. But the mere possession of this was little consolation if it was not administered, for the Jews had not fallen to the condition of the Samaritans of later times who came to worship the roll of the Pentateuch as an idol. They were not even like the scribes and Talmudists among their own descendants, to whom the law itself was a religion, though only read in the cloister of the student. The loss of good government was to them a very solid evil. In a civilised country, in times of peace and order, we breathe law as we breathe air, unconsciously, too familiar with it to appreciate the immeasurable benefits it confers upon us.

With the banishment of the custodians of law the poet associates the accompanying silence of the voice of prophecy. This, however, is so important and significant a fact, that it must be reserved for separate and fuller treatment.*

Next to the princes come the elders, to whom was intrusted the administration of justice in the minor courts. These were not sent into captivity; for at first only the aristocracy was considered sufficiently important to be carried off to Babylon. But though the elders were left in the land, the country was too disorganised for them to be able to hold their local tribunals. Perhaps these were forbidden by the invaders; perhaps the elders had no heart to decide cases when they saw no means of getting their decisions executed. Accordingly, instead of appearing in dignity as the representatives of law and order among their neighbours, the most respected citizens sit in silence on the ground, girded in sackcloth, and casting dust over their heads, living pictures of national mourning.†

The virgins of Jerusalem are named immediately after the elders. Their position in the city is very different from that of the “grave and reverend signiors”; but we are to see that while the dignity of age and rank affords no immunity from trouble, the gladness of youth and its comparative irresponsibility are equally ineffectual as safeguards. The elders and the virgins have one characteristic in common. They are both silent. These young girls are the choristers whose clear, sweet voices used to ring out in strains of joy at every festival. Now both the grave utterances of magistrates and the blithe singing of maidens are hushed into one gloomy silence. Formerly the girls would dance to the sound of song and cymbal. How changed must things be that the once gay dancers sit with their heads bowed to the ground, as still as the mourning elders!

But now, like Dante when introduced by his guide to some exceptionally agonising spectacle in the infernal regions, the poet bursts into tears, and seems to feel his very being melting away at the contemplation of the most heart-rending scene in the many mournful tableaux of the woes of Jerusalem. Breaking off from his recital of the facts to express his personal distress in view of the next item, he prepares us for

* ii. 9.

* See next chapter.

† ii. 10.

some rare and dreadful exhibition of misery; and the tale that he has to tell is quite enough to account for the start of horror with which it is ushered in. The poet makes us listen to the cry of the children. There are babies at the breast fainting from hunger, and older children, able to speak, but not yet able to comprehend the helpless circumstances in which their miserable parents are placed, calling to their mothers for food and drink—a piercing appeal, enough to drive to the madness of grief and despair. Crying in vain for the first necessities of life, these poor children, like the younger infants, faint in the streets, and cast themselves on their mothers' bosoms to die.* This, then, is the picture in contemplation of which the poet completely breaks down—children swooning in sight of all the people, and dying of hunger in their mothers' arms! He must be recalling scenes of the late siege. Then the fainting little ones, as they sank down pale and ill, resembled the wounded men who crept back from the fight by the walls to fall and die in the streets of the beleaguered city.

This is just the sharpest sting in the sufferings of the children. They share the fearful fate of their seniors, and yet they have had no part in the causes that led to it. We are naturally perplexed as well as distressed at this piteous spectacle of childhood. The beauty, the simplicity, the weakness, the tenderness, the sensitiveness, the helplessness of infancy appeal to our sympathies with peculiar force. But over and above these touching considerations there is a mystery attaching to the whole subject of the presence of pain and sorrow in young lives that baffles all reasoning. It is not only hard to understand why the bud should be blighted before it has had time to open to the sunshine: this haste in the march of misery to meet her victims on the threshold of life is to our minds a very amazing sight. And yet it is not the most perplexing part of the problem raised by the mystery of the suffering of children.

When we turn to the moral elements of the case we encounter its most serious difficulties. Children may not be accounted innocent in the absolute sense of the word. Even unconscious infants come into the world with hereditary tendencies to the evil habits of their ancestors; but then every principle of justice resists the attachment of guilt or responsibility to an unsought and undeserved inheritance. And although children soon commit offences on their own account, it is not the consequences of these youthful follies that here trouble us. The cruel wrongs of childhood that overshadow the world's history with its darkest mystery have travelled on to their victims from quite other regions—regions of which the poor little sufferers are ignorant with the ignorance of perfect innocence. Why do children thus share in evils they had no hand in bringing upon the community?

It is perhaps well that we should acknowledge quite frankly that there are mysteries in life which no ingenuity of thought can fathom. The suffering of childhood is one of the greatest of these apparently insoluble riddles of the universe. We have to learn that in view of such a problem as is here raised we too are but infants crying in the night.

Still there is no occasion for us to aggravate the riddle by adding to it manufactured diffi-

culties; we may even admit such mitigation of its severity as the facts of the case suggest. When little children suffer and die in their innocence they are free at least from those agonies of remorse for the irrecoverable past, and of apprehension concerning the doom of the future, that haunt the minds of guilty men, and frequently far exceed the physical pains endured. Beneath their hardest woes they have a peace of God that is the counterpart of the martyr's serenity.

Nevertheless, when we have said all that can be said in this direction, there remains the sickening fact that children do suffer and pine and die. Still, though this cannot be explained away, there are two truths that we should set beside it before we attempt to form any judgment on the whole subject. The first is that taught so emphatically by our Lord when He declared that the victims of an accident or the sufferers in an indiscriminate slaughter were not to be accounted exceptional sinners.* But if suffering is by no means a sign of sin in the victim we may go further, and deny that it is in all respects an evil. It may be impossible for us to accept the Stoic paradox in the case of little children whom even the greatest pedant would scarcely attempt to console with philosophic maxims. In the endurance of them, the pain and sorrow and death of the young cannot but seem to us most real evils, and it is our plain duty to do all in our power to check and stay everything of the kind. We must beware of the indolence that lays upon Providence the burden of troubles that are really due to our own inconsiderateness. In pursuing the policy that led to the disastrous siege of their city the Jews should have known how many innocent victims would be dragged into the vortex of misery if the course they had chosen were to fail. The blind obstinacy of the men who refused to listen to the warnings so emphatically pronounced by the great prophets of Jehovah, the desperate self-will of these men, pitted against the declared counsel of God, must bear the blame. It is monstrous to charge the providence of God with the consequences of actions that God has forbidden.

A second truth must be added, for there still remains the difficulty that children are placed, by no choice of their own, in circumstances that render them thus liable to the effects of other people's sins and follies. We can never understand human life if we persist in considering each person by himself. That we are members one of another, so that if one member suffers all the members suffer, is the law of human experience as well as the principle of Christian churchmanship. Therefore we must regard the wrongs of children that so disturb us as part of the travail and woe of mankind. Bad as it is in itself that these innocents should be thus involved in the consequences of the misconduct of their elders, it would not be any improvement for them to be cut off from all connection with their predecessors in the great family of mankind. Taken on the whole, the solidarity of man certainly makes more for the welfare of childhood than for its disadvantage. And we must not think of childhood alone, deeply as we are moved at the sight of its unmerited sufferings. If children are part of the race, whatever children endure must be taken as but one element in the vast experience that goes to make up the life-history of mankind.

All this is very vague, and if we offer it as a

* ii. 11, 12.

* Luke xiii. 1-5.

consolation to a mother whose heart is torn with anguish at the sight of her child's pain, it is likely she will think our balm no better than the wormwood of mockery. It would be vain for us to imagine that we have solved the riddle, and vainer to suppose that any views of life could be set against the unquestionable fact that innocent children suffer, as though they in the slightest degree lessened the amount of this pain or made it appreciably easier to endure. But then, on the other hand, the mere existence of all this terrible agony does not justify us in bursting out into tremendous denunciations of the universe. The thoughts that rise from a consideration of the wider relations of the facts should teach us lessons of humility in forming our judgment on so vast a subject. We cannot deny the existence of evils that cry aloud for notice; we cannot explain them away. But at least we can follow the example of the elders and virgins of Israel, and be silent.

The portrait of misery that the poet has drawn in describing the condition of Jerusalem during the siege is painful enough when viewed by itself; and yet he proceeds further, and seeks to deepen the impression he has already made by setting the picture in a suitable frame. So he directs attention to the behaviour of surrounding peoples. Jerusalem is not permitted to hide her grief and shame. She is flung into an arena while a crowd of cruel spectators gloat over her agonies. These are to be divided into two classes, the unconcerned and the known enemies. There is not any great difference between them in their treatment of the miserable city. The unconcerned "hiss and wag their heads";* the enemies "hiss and gnash their teeth."† That is to say, both add to the misery of the Jews—the one class in mockery, the other in hatred. But what are these men at their worst? Behind them is the real Power that is the source of all the misery. If the enemy rejoices it is only because God has given him the occasion. The Lord has been carrying out His own deliberate intentions; nay, these events are but the execution of commands He issued in the days of old.‡ This reads like an anticipation of the Calvinistic decrees. But perhaps the poet is referring to the solemn threatening of Divine Judgment pronounced by a succession of prophets. Their message had been unheeded by their contemporaries. Now it has been verified by history. Remembering what that message was—how it predicted woes as the punishment of sins, how it pointed out a way of escape, how it threw all the responsibility upon those people who were so infatuated as to reject the warning—we cannot read into the poet's lines any notion of absolute predestination.

In the midst of this description of the miseries of Jerusalem the elegist confesses his own inability to comfort her. He searches for an image large enough for a just comparison with such huge calamities as he has in view. His language resembles that of our Lord when He exclaims, "Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?"§ a similarity which may remind us that if the troubles of man are great beyond earthly analogy, so also are the mercies of God. Compare these two, and there can be no question as to which way the scale will turn. Where sin and misery abound grace much more abounds. But now the poet is concerned with the woes of

Jerusalem, and he can only find one image with which these woes are at all comparable. Her breach, he says, "is great like the sea,"* meaning that her calamities are vast and terrible as the sea; or perhaps that the ruin of Jerusalem is like that produced by the breaking in of the sea—a striking image in its application to an inland mountain city; for no place was really safer from any such cataclysm than Jerusalem. The analogy is intentionally far-fetched. What might naturally happen to Tyre, but could not possibly reach Jerusalem, is nevertheless the only conceivable type of the events that have actually befallen this ill-fated city. The Jews were not a maritime people. To them the sea was no delight such as it is to us. They spoke of it with terror, and shuddered to hear from afar of its ravages. Now the deluge of their own troubles is compared to the great and terrible sea.

The poet can offer no comfort for such misery as this. His confession of helplessness agrees with what we must have perceived already, namely, that the Book of Lamentations is not a book of consolations. It is not always easy to see that the sympathy which mourns with the sufferer may be quite unable to relieve him. The too common mistake of the friend who comes to show sympathy is Bildad's and his companions' notion that he is called upon to offer advice. Why should one who is not in the school of affliction assume the function of pedagogue to a pupil of that school, who by reason of the mere fact of his presence there should rather be deemed fit to instruct the outsider?

If he cannot comfort Jerusalem, however, the elegist will pray with her. His latest reference to the Divine source of the troubles of the Jews leads him on to a cry to God for mercy on the miserable people. Though he may not yet see the gospel of grace which is the only thing greater than the sin and misery of man, he can point towards the direction in which that glorious gospel is to dawn on the eyes of weary sufferers. Here, if anywhere, is the solution of the mystery of misery.

CHAPTER IX.

PROPHEETS WITHOUT A VISION.

LAMENTATIONS ii. 9, 14.

IN deploring the losses suffered by the daughter of Zion the elegist bewails the failure of her prophets to obtain a vision from Jehovah. His language implies that these men were still lingering among the ruins of the city. Apparently they had not been considered by the invaders of sufficient importance to require transportation with Zedekiah and the princes. Thus they were within reach of inquirers, and doubtless they were more than ever in request at a time when many perplexed persons were anxious for pilotage through a sea of troubles. It would seem, too, that they were trying to execute their professional functions. They sought light; they looked in the right direction—to God. Yet their quest was vain; no vision was given to them; the oracles were dumb.

To understand the situation we must recollect the normal place of prophecy in the social life of Israel. The great prophets whose names and

* ii. 15. † ii. 16. ‡ ii. 17. § Luke xiii. 20.

* ii. 12.

works have come down to us in Scripture were always rare and exceptional men—voices crying in the wilderness. Possibly they were not more scarce at this time than at other periods. Jeremiah had not been disappointed in his search for a Divine message.* The greatest seer of visions ever known to the world, Ezekiel, had already appeared among the captives by the waters of Babylon. Before long the sublime prophet of the restoration was to sound his trumpet blast to awaken courage and hope in the exiles. Though pitched in a minor key, these very elegies bear witness to the fact that their gentle author was not wholly deficient in prophetic fire. This was not an age like the time of Samuel's youth, barren of Divine voices.† It is true that the inspired voices were now scattered over distant regions far from Jerusalem, the ancient seat of prophecy. Yet the idea of the elegist is that the prophets who might be still seen at the site of the city were deprived of visions. These must have been quite different men. Evidently they were the professional prophets, officials who had been trained in music and dancing to appear as choristers on festive occasions, the equivalent of the modern dervishes; but who were also sought after like the seer of Ramah, to whom young Saul resorted for information about his father's lost asses, as simple soothsayers. Such assistance as these men were expected to give was no longer forthcoming at the request of troubled souls.

The low and sordid uses to which every-day prophecy was degraded may incline us to conclude that the cessation of it was no very great calamity, and perhaps to suspect that from first to last the whole business was a mass of superstition affording large opportunities for charlatany. But it would be rash to adopt this extreme view without a fuller consideration of the subject. The great messengers of Jehovah frequently speak of the professional prophets with the contempt of Socrates for the professional sophists; and yet the rebukes which they administer to these men for their unfaithfulness show that they accredit them with important duties and the gifts with which to execute them.

Thus the lament of the elegist suggests a real loss—something more serious than the failure of assistance such as some Roman Catholics try to obtain from St. Anthony in the discovery of lost property. The prophets were regarded as the media of communication between heaven and earth. It was because of the low and narrow habits of the people that their gifts were often put to low and narrow uses which savoured rather of superstition than of devotion. The belief that God did not only reveal His will to great persons and on momentous occasions helped to make Israel a religious nation. That there were humble gifts of prophecy within the reach of the many, and that these gifts were for the helping of men and women in their simplest needs, was one of the articles of the Hebrew faith. The quenching of a host of smaller stars may involve as much loss of life as that of a few brilliant ones. If prophecy fades out from among the people, if the vision of God is no longer perceptible in daily life, if the Church, as a whole, is plunged into gloom, it is of little avail to her that a few choice souls here and there pierce the mists like solitary mountain peaks so as to stand alone in the clear light of heaven. The perfect condition

would be that in which "all the Lord's people were prophets." If this is not yet attainable, at all events we may rejoice when the capacity for communion with heaven is widely enjoyed, and we must deplore it as one of the greatest calamities of the Church that the quickening influence of the prophetic spirit should be absent from her assemblies. The Jews had not fallen so low that they could contemplate the cessation of communications with heaven unmoved. They were far from the practical materialism which leads its victims to be perfectly satisfied to remain in a condition of spiritual paralysis—a totally different thing from the theoretical materialism of Priestley and Tyndall. They knew that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"; and therefore they understood that a famine of the word of God must result in as real a starvation as a famine of wheat. When we have succeeded in recovering this Hebrew standpoint we shall be prepared to recognise that there are worse calamities than bad harvests and seasons of commercial depression; we shall be brought to acknowledge that it is possible to be starved in the midst of plenty, because the greatest abundance of such food as we have lacks the elements requisite for our complete nourishment. According to reports of sanitary authorities, children in Ireland are suffering from the substitution of the less expensive and sweeter diet of maize for the more wholesome oatmeal on which their parents were brought up. Must it not be confessed that a similar substitution of cheap and savoury soul pabulum—in literature, music, amusements—for the "sincere milk of the word" and the "strong meat" of truth is the reason why so many of us are not growing up to the stature of Christ? The "liberty of prophesying" for which our fathers contended and suffered is ours. But it will be a barren heritage if in cherishing the liberty we lose the prophesying. There is no gift enjoyed by the Church for which she should be more jealous than that of the prophetic spirit.

As we look across the wide field of history we must perceive that there have been many dreary periods in which the prophets could find no vision from the Lord. At first sight it would even seem that the light of heaven only shone on a few rare luminous spots, leaving the greater part of the world and the longer periods of time in absolute gloom. But this pessimistic view results from our limited capacity to perceive the light that is there. We look for the lightning. But inspiration is not always electric. The prophet's vision is not necessarily startling. It is a vulgar delusion to suppose that revelation must assume a sensational aspect. It was predicted of the Word of God incarnate that He should "not strive, or cry, or lift up His voice";* and when He came He was rejected because He would not satisfy the wonder-seekers with a flaring portent—a "sign from heaven." Still it cannot be denied that there have been periods of barrenness. They are found in what might be called the secular regions of the operation of the Spirit of God. A brilliant epoch of scientific discovery, artistic invention, or literary production is followed by a time of torpor, feeble imitation, or meretricious pretence. The Augustan and Elizabethan ages cannot be conjured back at will. Prophets of nature, poets, and artists can none

* See Jer. xlii. 4, 7.

† See 1 Sam. iii. 1.

* Isa. xlii. 1.

of them command the power of inspiration. This is a gift which may be withheld, and which, when denied, will elude the most earnest pursuit. We may miss the vision of prophecy when the prophets are as numerous as ever, and unfortunately as vocal. The preacher possesses learning and rhetoric. We only miss one thing in him—inspiration. But, alas! that is just the one thing needful.

Now the question forces itself upon our attention, what is the explanation of these variations in the distribution of the spirit of prophecy? Why is the fountain of inspiration an intermittent spring, a Bethesda? We cannot trace its failure to any shortness of supply, for this fountain is fed from the infinite ocean of the Divine life. Neither can we attribute caprice to One whose wisdom is infinite, and whose will is constant. It may be right to say that God withholds the vision, withholds it deliberately; but it cannot be correct to assert that this fact is the final explanation of the whole matter. God must be believed to have a reason, a good and sufficient reason, for whatever He does. Can we guess what His reason may be in such a case as this? It may be conjectured that it is necessary for the field to lie fallow for a season in order that it may bring forth a better crop subsequently. Incessant cultivation would exhaust the soil. The eye would be blinded if it had no rest from visions. We may be overfed; and the more nutritious our diet is the greater will be the danger of surfeit. One of our chief needs in the use of revelation is that we should thoroughly digest its contents. What is the use of receiving fresh visions if we have not yet assimilated the truth that we already possess? Sometimes, too, no vision can be found for the simple reason that no vision is needed. We waste ourselves in the pursuit of unprofitable questions when we should be setting about our business. Until we have obeyed the light that has been given us it is foolish to complain that we have not more light. Even our present light will wane if it is not followed up in practice.

But while considerations such as these must be attended to if we are to form a sound judgment on the whole question, they do not end the controversy, and they scarcely apply at all to the particular illustration of it that is now before us. There is no danger of surfeit in a famine; and it is a famine of the world that we are now confronted with. Moreover, the elegist supplies an explanation that sets all conjectures at rest.

The fault was in the prophets themselves. Although the poet does not connect the two statements together, but inserts other matter between them, we cannot fail to see that his next words about the prophets bear very closely on his lament over the denial of visions. He tells us that they had seen visions of vanity and foolishness.* This is with reference to an earlier period. Then they had had their visions; but these had been empty and worthless. The meaning cannot be that the prophets had been subject to unavoidable delusions, that they had sought truth, but had been rewarded with deception. The following words show that the blame was attributed entirely to their own conduct. Addressing the daughter of Zion the poet says: "Thy prophets have seen visions *for thee*." The visions were suited to the people to whom

they were declared—manufactured, shall we say?—with the express purpose of pleasing them. Such a degradation of sacred functions in gross unfaithfulness deserved punishment; and the most natural and reasonable punishment was the withholding for the future of true visions from men who in the past had forged false ones. The very possibility of this conduct proves that the influence of inspiration had not the hold upon these Hebrew prophets that it had obtained over the heathen prophet Balaam, when he exclaimed, in face of the bribes and threats of the infuriated king of Moab: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; what the Lord speaketh, that will I speak."*

It must ever be that unfaithfulness to the light we have already received will bar the door against the advent of more light. There is nothing so blinding as the habit of lying. People who do not speak truth ultimately prevent themselves from perceiving truth, the false tongue leading the eye to see falsely. This is the curse and doom of all insincerity. It is useless to enquire for the views of insincere persons; they can have no distinct views, no certain convictions, because their mental vision is blurred by their long-continued habit of confounding true and false. Then if for once in their lives such people may really desire to find a truth in order to assure themselves in some great emergency, and therefore seek a vision of the Lord, they will have lost the very faculty of receiving it.

The blindness and deadness that characterise so much of the history of thought and literature, art and religion, are to be attributed to the same disgraceful cause. Greek philosophy decayed in the insincerity of professional sophistry. Gothic art degenerated into the florid extravagance of the Tudor period when it had lost its religious motive, and had ceased to be what it pretended. Elizabethan poetry passed through *cuphuism* into the uninspired conceits of the sixteenth century. Dryden restored the habit of true speech, but it required generations of arid eighteenth-century sincerity in literature to make the faculty of seeing visions possible to the age of Burns and Shelley and Wordsworth.

In religion this fatal effect of insincerity is terribly apparent. The formalist can never become a prophet. Creeds which were kindled in the fires of passionate conviction will cease to be luminous when the faith that inspired them has perished; and then if they are still repeated as dead words by false lips the unreality of them will not only rob them of all value, it will blind the eyes of the men and women who are guilty of this falsehood before God, so that no new vision of truth can be brought within their reach. Here is one of the snares that attach themselves to the privilege of receiving a heritage of teaching from our ancestors. We can only avoid it by means of searching inquests over the dead beliefs which a foolish fondness has permitted to remain unburied, poisoning the atmosphere of living faith. So long as the fact that they are dead is not honestly admitted it will be impossible to establish sincerity in worship; and the insincerity, while it lasts, will be an impassable barrier to the advent of truth.

The elegist has laid his finger on the particu-

*ii. 14.

* Numb. xxiv. 13.

lar form of untruth of which the Jerusalem prophets had been guilty. They had not discovered her iniquity to the daughter of Zion.* Thus they had hastened her ruin by keeping back the message that would have urged their hearers to repentance. Some interpreters have given quite a new turn to the last clause of the fourteenth verse. Literally this states that the prophets have seen "drivings away"; and accordingly it has been taken to mean that they pretended to have had visions about the captivity when this was an accomplished fact, although they had been silent on the subject, or had even denied the danger, at the earlier time when alone their words could have been of any use; or, again, the words have been thought to suggest that these prophets were now at the later period predicting fresh calamities, and were blind to the vision of hope which a true prophet like Jeremiah had seen and declared. But such ideas are over-refined, and they give a twist to the course of thought that is foreign to the form of these direct, simple elegies. It seems better to take the final clause of the verse as a repetition of what went before, with a slight variety of form. Thus the poet declares that the burdens, or prophecies, which these unfaithful men have presented to the people have been causes of banishment.

The crying fault of the prophets is their reluctance to preach to people of their sins. Their mission distinctly involves the duty of doing so. They should not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. It is not within the province of the ambassador to make selections from among the despatches with which he has been entrusted in order to suit his own convenience. There is nothing that so paralyses the work of the preacher as the habit of choosing favourite topics and ignoring less attractive subjects. Just in proportion as he commits this sin against his vocation he ceases to be the prophet of God, and descends to the level of one who deals in *obiter dicta*, mere personal opinions to be taken on their own merits. One of the gravest possible omissions is the neglect to give due weight to the tragic fact of sin. All the great prophets have been conspicuous for their fidelity to this painful and sometimes dangerous part of their work. If we would call up a typical picture of a prophet in the discharge of his task, we should present to our minds Elijah confronting 'Ahab, or John the Baptist before Herod, or Savonarola accusing Lorenzo de Medici, or John Knox preaching at the court of Mary Stuart. He is Isaiah declaring God's abomination of sacrifices and incense when these are offered by blood-stained hands, or Chrysostom seizing the opportunity that followed the mutilation of the imperial statues at Antioch to preach to the dissolute city on the need of repentance, or Latimer denouncing the sins of London to the citizens assembled at Paul's Cross.

The shallow optimism that disregards the shadows of life is trebly faulty when it appears in the pulpit. It falsifies facts in failing to take account of the stern realities of the evil side of them; it misses the grand opportunity of rousing the consciences of men and women by forcing them to attend to unwelcome truths, and thus encourages the heedlessness with which people rush headlong to ruin; and at the same time it even renders the declaration of the gracious truths of the gospel, to which it devotes exclu-

sive attention, ineffectual, because redemption is meaningless to those who do not recognise the present slavery and the future doom from which it brings deliverance. On every account the rose-water preaching that ignores sin and flatters its hearers with pleasant words is thin, insipid, and lifeless. It tries to win popularity by echoing the popular wishes; and it may succeed in lulling the storm of opposition with which the prophet is commonly assailed. But in the end it must be sterile. When, "through fear or favour," the messenger of heaven thus prostitutes his mission to suit the ends of a low, selfish, worldly expediency, the very least punishment with which his offence can be visited is for him to be deprived of the gifts he has so grossly abused. Here, then, we have the most specific explanation of the failure of heavenly visions; it comes from the neglect of earthly sin. This is what breaks the magician's wand, so that he can no longer summon the Ariel of inspiration to his aid.

CHAPTER X.

THE CALL TO PRAYER.

LAMENTATIONS ii. 18-22.

It is not easy to analyse the complicated construction of the concluding portion of the second elegy. If the text is not corrupt its transitions are very abrupt. The difficulty is to adjust the relations of three sections. First we have the sentence, "Their heart cried unto the Lord." Next comes the address to the wall, "O wall of the daughter of Zion," etc. Lastly there is the prayer which extends from verse 20 to the end of the poem.

The most simple grammatical arrangement is to take the first clause in connection with the preceding verse. The last substantive was the word "adversaries." Therefore in the rigour of grammar the pronoun should represent that word. Read thus, the sentence relates an action of the enemies of Israel when their horn has been exalted. The word rendered "cried" is one that would designate a loud shout, and that translated "Lord" here is not the sacred name *Jehovah* but *Adonai*, a general term that might very well be used in narrating the behaviour of the heathen towards God. Thus the phrase would seem to describe the insolent shout of triumph which the adversaries of the Jews fling at the God of their victims.

On the other hand, it is to be observed that the general title "Lord" (*Adonai*) is also employed in the very next verse in the direct call to prayer. The heart, too, is mentioned again there as it is here, and that to express the inner being and deepest feelings of the afflicted city. It seems unlikely that the elegist would mention a heart-cry of the enemies and describe this as addressed to "The Lord."

Probably then we should apply this opening clause to the Jews, although they had not been named in the near context, a construction favoured by the abrupt transitions in which the elegist indulges elsewhere. It is the heart of the Jews that cried unto the Lord. Now the question arises, How shall we take this assertion in view of the words that follow? The common reading supposes that it introduces the immediately succeeding sentences. The heart of

* ii. 14.

the Jews calls to the wall of the daughter of Zion, and bids it arise and pray. But with this construction we should look for another word (such as "saying") to introduce the appeal, because the Hebrew word rendered "cried" is usually employed absolutely, and not as the preface to quoted speech. Besides, the ideas would be strangely involved. Some people, indefinitely designated "they," exhort the wall to weep and pray! How can this exhortation to a wall be described as calling to the Lord? The complication is increased when the prayer follows sharply on the anonymous appeal without a single connecting or explanatory clause.

A simpler interpretation is to follow Calvin in rendering the first clause absolutely, but still applying it to the Jews, who, though they are not named here, are supposed to be always in mind. We may not agree with the stern theologian of Geneva in asserting that the cry thus designated is one of impatient grief flowing not "from a right feeling or from the true fear of God, but from the strong and turbid impulse of nature." The elegist furnishes no excuse for this somewhat ungracious judgment. After his manner, already familiar to us, the poet interjects a thought—viz., that the distressed Jews cried to God. This suggests to him the great value of the refuge of prayer, a topic on which he forthwith proceeds to enlarge first by making an appeal to others, and then by himself breaking out into the direct language of petition.

This is not the first occasion on which the elegist has shown his faith in the efficacy of prayer. But hitherto he has only uttered brief exclamations in the middle of his descriptive passages. Now he gives a solemn call to prayer, and follows this with a deliberate full petition, addressed to God. We must feel that the elegy is lifted to a higher plane by the new turn that the thought of its author takes at this place. Grief is natural; it is useless to pretend to be impassive; and, although our Teutonic habits of reserve may make it difficult for us to sympathise with the violent outbursts that an Oriental permits himself without any sense of shame, we must admit that a reasonable expression of the emotions is good and wholesome. Tennyson recognises this in the well-known lyric where he says of the dead warrior's wife—

"She must weep or she will die."

Nevertheless, an unchecked rush of feeling, not followed by any action, cannot but evince weakness; it has no lifting power. Although, if the emotion is distressful, such an expression may give relief to the subject, it is certainly very depressing to the spectator. For this reason the Book of Lamentations strikes us as the most depressing part of the Bible—would it not be just to say, as the *only* part that can be so described? But it would not be fair to this Book to suppose that it did nothing beyond realising the significance of its title. It contains more than a melancholy series of laments. In the passage before us the poet raises his voice to a higher strain.

This new and more elevated turn in the elegy is itself suggestive. The transition from lamentation to prayer is always good for the sufferer. The first action may relieve his pent-up emotions; it cannot destroy the source from which they flow. But prayer is more practical, for it

aims at deliverance. That, however, is its least merit. In the very act of seeking help from God the soul is brought into closer relations with Him, and this condition of communion is a better thing than any results that can possibly follow in the form of answers to the prayer, great and helpful as these may be. The trouble that drives us to prayer is a blessing because the state of a praying soul is a blessed state.

Like the *muezzin* on his minaret, the elegist calls to prayer. But his exhortation is addressed to a strange object—to the *wall* of the daughter of Zion. This wall is to let its tears flow like a river. It is so far personified that mention is made of the apple of its eye; it is called upon to arise, to pour out its heart, to lift up its hands. The license of Eastern poetry permits the unflinching application of a metaphor to an extent that would be considered extravagant and even absurd in our own literature. It is only in a travesty of melodrama that Shakespeare permits the Thisbe of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to address a wall. Browning has an exquisitely beautiful little poem apostrophising an old wall; but this is not done so as to leave out of account the actual form and nature of his subject. Walls can not only be beautiful and even sublime, as Mr. Ruskin has shewn in his "Stones of Venice;" they may also wreath their severe outlines in a multitude of thrilling associations. This is especially so when, as in the present instance, it is the wall of a city that we are contemplating. Not a new piece of builder's work, neat and clean and bald, bare of all associations, as meaningless as in too many cases it is ugly, but an old wall, worn by the passing to and fro of generations that have turned to dust long years ago, bearing the bruises of war on its battered face, crumbling to powder, or perhaps half buried in weeds—such a wall is eloquent in its wealth of associations, and there is pathos in the thought of its mere age when this is considered in relation to the many men and women and children who have rested beneath its shadow at noon, or sheltered themselves behind its solid masonry amid the terrors of war. The walls that encircle the ancient English city of Chester and keep alive memories of mediæval life, the bits of the old London wall that are left standing among the warehouses and offices of the busy mart of modern commerce, even the remote wall of China for quite different reasons, and many another famous wall, suggest to us multitudinous reflections. But the walls of Jerusalem surpass them all in the pathos of the memories that cling to their old grey stones. It does not require a great stretch of imagination to picture these walls as once glowing and throbbing with an intense life, and now dreaming over the unfathomable depths of age-long memories.

In personifying the wall of Zion, however, the Hebrew poet does not indulge in reflections such as these, which are more in harmony with the mild melancholy of Gray's "Elegy" than with the sadder mood of the mourning patriot. He names the wall to give unity and concreteness to his appeal, and to clothe it in an atmosphere of poetic fancy. But his sober thought in the background is directed towards the citizens whom that historic wall once enclosed. Herein is his justification for carrying his personification so far. This is more than a wild apostrophe, the outburst of an excited poet's fancy. The

imaginative conceit wings the arrow of a serious purpose.

Let us look at the appeal in detail. First the elegist encourages a free outflow of grief, that tears should run like a river, literally, like a torrent—the allusion being to one of those steep watercourses which, though dry in summer, become rushing floods in the rainy season. This introduction shews, that the call to prayer is not intended in any sense as a rebuke for the natural expression of grief, nor as a denial of its existence. The sufferers cannot say that the poet does not sympathise with them. It might seem needless to give this assurance. But anybody who has attempted to offer exhortation to a person in trouble must have discovered how delicate his task is. Let him approach the subject as carefully as he may, it is almost certain that he will chafe the quivering nerves he desires to soothe, so sensitive is the soul in pain to any interference from without. Under these circumstances, the one method by which it is at all possible to smooth the way of approach is an expression of genuine sympathy.

There may be a deeper reason for this encouragement of the expression of grief as a preliminary to a call to prayer. The helplessness which it so eloquently proclaims is just the condition in which the soul is most ready to cast itself on the mercy of God. Calm fortitude must always be better than an undisciplined abandonment to grief. But before this has been attained there may come an apathy of despair, under the influence of which the feelings are simply benumbed. That apathy is the very opposite to drying up the fountain of grief as it may be dried in the sunshine of love; it is freezing it. The first step towards deliverance will be to melt the glacier. The soul must feel before it can pray. Therefore the tears are encouraged to run like torrents, and the sufferer to give himself no respite, nor let the apple of his eye cease from weeping.

Next the poet exhorts the object of his sympathy—this strange personification of the “wall of the daughter of Zion,” under the image of which he is thinking of the Jews—to arise. The weeping is but a preliminary to more promising acts. The sufferer is not to spend the long night in an unbroken flow of grief, like the psalmist “watering his couch with his tears.”* The very opposite attitude is now suggested. Grief must not be treated as a normal condition to be acquiesced in or even encouraged. The victim is tempted to cherish his sorrow as a sacred charge, to feel hurt if any mitigation of it is suggested, or ashamed of confessing that relief has been received. When he has reached this condition it is obvious that the substance of grief has passed; the ghost of it that remains is fast becoming a harmless sentiment. If, however, the trouble should be still maintaining the tightness of its grip on the heart, there is positive danger in permitting it to be indulged without intermission. The sufferer must be roused if he is to be saved from the disease of *melancholia*.

He must be roused also if he would pray. True prayer is a strenuous effort of the soul, requiring the most wakeful attention and taxing the utmost energy of will. The Jew stood up to pray with hands outstretched to heaven. The relaxed and feeble devotions of a somnolent

worshipper must fall flat and fruitless. There is no value in the length of a prayer, but there is much in its depth. It is the weight of its earnestness, not the comprehensiveness of its topics, that gives it efficacy. Therefore we must gird up our loins to pray just as we would to work, or run, or fight.

Now the awakened soul is urged to cry out in the night, and in the beginning of the night watches—that is to say, not only at the commencement of the night, for this would require no rousing, but at the beginning of each of the three watches into which the Hebrews divided the hours of darkness—at sunset, at ten o'clock, and at two in the morning. The sufferer is to keep watch with prayer—observing his vespers, his nocturns, and his matins, and of course to fulfil forms, but because, since his grief is continuous, his prayer also must not cease. This is all assigned to the night, perhaps because it is a quiet, solemn season for undisturbed reflection, when therefore the grief that requires the prayer is most acutely felt; or perhaps because the time of sorrow is naturally pictured as a night, as a season of darkness.

Proceeding with our consideration of the details of this call to prayer, we come upon the exhortation to pour out the heart like water before the face of the Lord. The image here used is not without parallel in scripture. Thus a psalmist exclaims—

“I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint:
My heart is like wax;
It is melted in the midst of my bowels.”*

But the ideas are not just the same in the two cases. While the psalmist thinks of himself as crushed and shattered, as though his very being were dissolved, the thought of the elegist has more action about it, with a deliberate intention and object in view. His image suggests complete openness before God. Nothing is to be withheld. It is not so much that the secrets of the soul are to be disclosed. The end aimed at is not confession, but confidence. Therefore what the writer would urge is that the sufferer should tell the whole tale of his grief to God, quite freely, without any reserve, trusting absolutely to the Divine sympathy.

This confidence is a primary requisite in prayer. Until we can trust our Father it is useless to petition for His aid; we could not avail ourselves of it if it were offered us. Indeed, the soul must come into relations of sympathy with God before any real prayer is at all possible.

We may go further. The attitude of soul that is here recommended is in itself the very essence of prayer. The devotions that consist in a series of definite petitions are of secondary worth, and superficial in comparison with this outpouring of the heart before God. To enter into relations of sympathy and confidence with God is to pray in the truest, deepest way possible, or even conceivable. Prayer in the heart of it is not petition; that is the beggar's resort. It is communion—the child's privilege. We must often be as beggars, empty of everything before God; yet we may also enjoy the happier relationship of sonship with our Father. Even in the extremity of need perhaps the best thing we can

* Psalm vi. 6.

* Psalm xxii. 14.

do is to spread out the whole case before God. It will certainly relieve our own minds to do so, and everything will appear changed when viewed in the light of the Divine presence. Perhaps we shall then cease to think ourselves aggrieved and wronged; for what are our deserts before the holiness of God? Passion is allayed in the stillness of the sanctuary, and the indignant protest dies upon our lips as we proceed to lay our case before the eyes of the All-Seeing. We cannot be impatient any longer; He is so patient with us so fair, so kind, so good. Thus, when we cast our burden upon the Lord, we may be surprised with the discovery that it is not so heavy as we supposed. There are times when it is not possible for us to go any further. We do not know what relief to ask for, or even whether we should request to be in any way delivered from a load which it may be our duty to bear, or the endurance of which may be a most wholesome discipline for us. These possibilities must always put a restraint upon the utterance of positive petitions. But they do not apply to the prayer that is a simple act of confidence with God. The secret of failure in prayer is not that we do not ask enough; it is that we do not pour out our hearts before God, the restraint of confidence rising from fear or doubt simply paralysing the energies of prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray not only because He gives us a model prayer, but much more because He is in Himself so true and full and winsome a revelation of God, that as we come to know and follow Him our lost confidence in God is restored. Then the heart that knows its own bitterness, and that shrinks from permitting the stranger even to meddle with its joy—how much more then with its sorrow?—can pour itself out quite freely before God, for the simple reason that He is no longer a stranger, but the one perfectly intimate and absolutely trusted Friend.

It is to be noted that the elegist points to a definite occasion for the outpouring of the heart before God. He singles out specifically the sufferings of the starving children—a terrible subject that appears more than once in this elegy, shewing how the horror of it has fastened on the imagination of the poet. This was the most heart-rending and mysterious ingredient in the bitter cup of the woes of Jerusalem. If we may bring any trouble to God we may bring the worst trouble. So this becomes the main topic of the prayer that follows. Here the cases of the principal victims are cited. Priest and prophet, notwithstanding the dignity of office, young man and maiden, old man and little child all alike have fallen victims. The ghastly incident of a siege, where hunger has reduced human beings to the level of savage beasts, women devouring their own children, is here cited, and its cause, as well as that of all the other scenes of the great tragedy, boldly ascribed to God. It is God who has summoned His Terrors as at other times He had summoned His people to the festivals of the sacred city. But if God mustered the whole army of calamities it seems right to lay the story of the havoc they have wrought before His face; and the prayer reads almost like an accusation, or at least an expostulation, a remonstrance. It is not such, however; for we have seen that elsewhere the elegist makes full confession of the guilt of Jerusalem and admits that the doom of the wretched city was quite merited. Still, if the

dire chastisement is from the hand of God, it is God alone who can bring deliverance. That is the final point to be reached.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN THAT HATH SEEN AFFLICTION.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 1-21.

WHETHER we regard it from a literary, a speculative, or a religious point of view, the third and central elegy cannot fail to strike us as by far the best of the five. The workmanship of this poem is most elaborate in conception and most finished in execution, the thought is most fresh and striking, and the spiritual tone most elevated, and, in the best sense of the word, evangelical. Like Tennyson, who is most poetic when he is most artistic, as in his lyrics, and like all the great sonneteers, the author of this exquisite Hebrew melody has not found his ideas to be cramped by the rigorous rules of composition. It would seem that to a master the elaborate regulations that fetter an inferior mind are no hindrances, but rather instruments fitted to his hand, and all the more serviceable for their exactness. Possibly the artistic refinement of form stimulates thought and rouses the poet to exert his best powers; or perhaps—and this is more probable—he selects the richer robe for the purpose of clothing his choicer conceptions. Here we have the acrostics worked up into triplets, so that they now appear at the beginning of every line, each letter occurring three times successively as an initial, and the whole poem falling into sixty-six verses or twenty-two triplets. Yet none of the other four poems have any approach to the wealth of thought or the uplifting inspiration that we meet with in this highly finished product of literary art.

This elegy differs from its sister poems in another respect. It is composed, for the most part, in the first person singular, the writer either speaking of his own experience or dramatically personating another sufferer. Who is it "man that hath seen affliction"? On the understanding that Jeremiah is the author of the whole book, it is commonly assumed that the prophet is here revealing his own feelings under the multitude of troubles with which he has been overwhelmed. But if, as we have seen, this hypothesis is, to say the least, extremely dubious, of course the assumption that has been based upon it loses its warranty. No doubt there is much in the touching picture of the afflicted person that agrees with what we know of the experience of the great prophet. And yet, when we look into it, we do not find anything of so specific a character as to settle us in the conclusion that the words could have been spoken by no one else. There is just the possibility that the poet is not describing himself at all; he may be representing somebody well known to his contemporaries—perhaps even Jeremiah, or just a typical character, in the manner in Browning's "Dramatis Personæ."

While some mystery hangs over the personality of this man of sorrows the power and pathos of the poem are certainly heightened by the concentration of our attention upon one individual. Few persons are moved by general

statements. Necessarily the comprehensive is all outline. It is by the supply of the particular that we fill up the details; and it is only when these details are present that we have a full-bodied picture. If an incident is typical it is illustrative of its kind. To know one such fact is to know all. Thus the science lecturer produces his specimen, and is satisfied to teach from it without adding a number of duplicates. The study of abstract reports is most important to those who are already interested in the subjects of these dreary documents; but it is useless as a means of exciting interest. Philanthropy must visit the office of the statistician if it would act with enlightened judgment, and not permit itself to become the victim of blind enthusiasm; but it was not born there, and the sympathy which is its parent can only be found among individual instances of distress.

In the present case the speaker who recounts his own misfortunes is more than a casual witness, more than a mere specimen picked out at random from the heap of misery accumulated in this age of national ruin. He is not simply a man who has seen affliction, one among many similar sufferers; he is *the* man, the well-known victim, one pre-eminent in distress even in the midst of a nation full of misery. Yet he is not isolated on a solitary peak of agony. As the supreme sufferer, he is also the representative sufferer. He is not selfishly absorbed in the morbid occupation of brooding over his private grievances. He has gathered into himself the vast and terrible woes of his people. Thus he foreshadows our Lord in His passion. We cannot but be struck by the aptness of much in this third elegy when it is read in the light of the last scenes of the gospel history. It would be a mistake to say that these outpourings from the heart of the Hebrew patriot were intended to convey a prophetic meaning with reference to another Sufferer in a far-distant future. Nevertheless the application of the poem to the Man of Sorrows is more than a case of literary illustration; for the idea of representative suffering which here emerges, and which becomes more definite in the picture of the servant of Jehovah in Isa. liii., only finds its full realisation and perfection in Jesus Christ. It is repeated, however, with more or less distinctness wherever the Christ spirit is revealed. Thus in a noble interpretation of St. Paul, the Apostle is represented as experiencing—

“Desperate tides of the whole world’s anguish
Forced through the channel of a single heart.”*

The portrait of himself drawn by the author of this elegy is the more graphic by reason of the fact that the present is linked to the past. The striking commencement, “*I am the man,*” etc., sets the speaker in imagination before our eyes. The addition “*who has seen*” (or rather, experienced) “*affliction*” connects him with his present sufferings. The unfathomable mystery of personal identity here confronts us. This is more than memory, more than the lingering scar of a previous experience; it is, in a sense, the continuance of that experience, its ghostly presence still haunting the soul that once knew it in the glow of life. Thus we are what we have thought and felt and done, and our present is the perpetuation of our past. The man who has seen affliction does not only keep the history of

his distresses in the quiet chamber of memory. His own personality has slowly acquired a depth, a fulness, a ripeness that remove him far from the raw and superficial character he once was. We are silenced into awe before Job, Jeremiah, and Dante, because these men grew great by suffering. Is it not told even of our Lord Jesus Christ that He was made perfect by the things that He suffered?† Unhappily it cannot be said that every hero of tragedy climbs to perfection on the rugged steps of his terrible life-drama; some men are shattered by discipline which proves to be too severe for their strength. Christ rose to His highest glory by means of the cruelty of His enemies and the treason of one of His trusted disciples; but cruel wrongs drove Lear to madness, and a confidant’s treachery made a murderer of Othello. Still all who pass through the ordeal come out other than they enter, and the change is always a growth in some direction, even though in many cases we must admit with sorrow that this is a downward direction.

It is to be observed that here in his self-portraiture—just as elsewhere when describing the calamities that have befallen his people—the elegist attributes the whole series of disastrous events to God. This characteristic of the Book of Lamentations throughout is nowhere more apparent than in the third chapter. So close is the thought of God to the mind of the writer, he does not even think it necessary to mention the Divine name. He introduces his pronouns without any explanation of their objects, saying “*His wrath*” and “*He hath led me,*” and so on through the succeeding verses. This quiet assumption of a recognised reference of all that happens to one source, a source that is taken to be so well known that there is no occasion to name it, speaks volumes for the deep-seated faith of the writer. He is at the antipodes of the too common position of those people who habitually forget to mention the name of God because He is never in their thoughts. God is always in the thoughts of the elegist, and that is why He is not named. Like Brother Lawrence, this man has learnt to “practise the presence of God.”

In amplifying the account of his sufferings, after giving a general description of himself as the man who has experienced affliction, and adding a line in which this experience is connected with its cause—the rod of the wrath of Him who is unnamed, though ever in mind—the stricken patriot proceeds to illustrate and enforce his appeal to sympathy by means of a series of vivid metaphors. This is the most crisp and pointed writing in the book. It hurries us on with a breathless rush of imagery, scene after scene flashing out in bewildering speed like the whirl of objects we look at from the windows of an express train.

Let us first glance at the successive pictures in this rapidly moving panorama of similes, and then at the general import and drift of the whole.

The afflicted man was under the Divine guidance; he was not the victim of blind self-will; it was not when straying from the path of right that he fell into this pit of misery. The strange thing is that God led him straight into it—led him into darkness, not into light as might have been expected with such a Guide.‡ The first image, then, is that of a traveller misled. The

* “St. Paul,” by Frederick Myers.

† Heb. v. 8, 9.

‡ iii. 2.

perception of the first terrible truth that is here suggested prompts the writer at once to draw an inference as to the relation in which God stands to him, and the nature and character of the Divine treatment of him throughout. God, whom he has trusted implicitly, whom he has followed in the simplicity of ignorance, God proves to be his Opponent! He feels like one duped in the past, and at length undeceived as he makes the amazing discovery that his trusted Guide has been turning His hand against him repeatedly all the day of his woful wanderings.* For the moment he drops his metaphors, and reflects on the dreadful consequences of this fatal antagonism. His flesh and skin, his very body is wasted away; he is so crushed and shattered, it is as though God had broken his bones.† Now he can see that God has not only acted as an enemy in guiding him into the darkness; God's dealings have shewn more overt antagonism. The helpless sufferer is like a besieged city, and God, who is conducting the assault, has thrown up a wall round him. With that daring mixture of metaphors, or, to be more precise, with that freedom of sudden transition from the symbol to the subject symbolised which we often meet with in this Book, the poet calls the rampart with which he has been girdled "gall and travail,"‡ for he has felt himself beset with bitter grief and weary toil.§

Then the scene changes. The victim of Divine wrath is a captive languishing in a dungeon, which is as dark as the abodes of the dead, as the dwellings of those who have been *long* dead. || The horror of this metaphor is intensified by the idea of the antiquity of Hades. How dismal is the thought of being plunged into a darkness that is already aged—a stagnant darkness, the atmosphere of those who long since lost the last rays of the light of life! There the prisoner is bound by a heavy chain.¶ He cries for help; but he is shut down so low that his prayer cannot reach his Captor.**

Again we see him still hampered, though in altered circumstances. He appears as a traveller whose way is blocked, and that not by some accidental fall of rock, but of set purpose, for he finds the obstruction to be of carefully prepared masonry, "hewn stones."†† Therefore he has to turn aside, so that his paths become crooked. Yet more terrible does the Divine enmity grow. When the pilgrim is thus forced to leave the highroad and make his way through the adjoining thickets his Adversary avails Himself of the cover to assume a new form, that of a lion or a bear lying in ambush.‡‡ The consequence is that the hapless man is torn as by the claws and fangs of beasts of prey.§§ But now these wild regions in which the wretched traveller is wandering at the peril of his life suggests the idea of the chase. The image of the savage animals is defective in this respect, that man is their superior in intelligence, though not in strength. But in the present case the victim is in every way inferior to his Pursuer. So God appears as the Huntsman, and the unhappy sufferer as the poor hunted game. The bow is bent, and the arrow directed straight for its

mark.* Nay, arrow after arrow has already been let fly, and the dreadful Huntsman, too skilful ever to miss His mark, has been shooting "the sons of His quiver" into the very vitals of the object of His pursuit.†

Here the poet breaks away from his imagery for a second time to tell us that he has become an object of derision to all his people, and the theme of their mocking songs.‡ This is a striking statement. It shews that the afflicted man is not simply one member of the smitten nation of Israel, sharing the common hardships of the race whose "badge is servitude." He not merely experiences exceptional sufferings. He meets with no sympathy from his fellow-countrymen. On the contrary, these people so far dissociate themselves from his case that they can find amusement in his misery. Thus, while even a misguided Don Quixote is a noble character in the rare chivalry of his soul, and while his very delusions are profoundly pathetic, many people can only find material for laughter in them, and pride themselves in their superior sanity for so doing, although the truth is, their conduct proves them to be incapable of understanding the lofty ideals that inspire the object of their empty derision; thus Jeremiah was mocked by his unthinking contemporaries, when, whether in error, as they supposed, or wisely, as the event shewed, he preached an apparently absurd policy; and thus a greater than Jeremiah, One as supreme in reasonableness as in goodness, was jeered at by men who thought Him at best a Utopian dreamer, because they were grovelling in earthly thoughts far out of reach of the spiritual world in which He moved.

Returning to imagery, the poet pictures himself as a hardly used guest at a feast. He is fed, crammed, sated; but his food is bitterness, the cup has been forced to his lips, and he has been made drunk—not with pleasant wine, however, but with wormwood.§ Gravel has been mixed with his bread, or perhaps the thought is that when he has asked for bread stones had been given him. He has been compelled to masticate this unnatural diet, so that his teeth have been broken by it. Even that result he ascribes to God, saying, "He hath broken my teeth."|| It is difficult to think of the interference with personal liberty being carried farther than this. Here we reach the extremity of crushed misery.

Reviewing the whole course of his wretched sufferings from the climax of misery, the man who has seen all this affliction declares that God has cast him off from peace.¶ The Christian sufferer knows what a profound consolation there is in the possession of the peace of God, even when he is passing through the most acute agonies—a peace which can be maintained both amid the wildest tempests of external adversity and in the presence of the fiercest paroxysms of personal anguish. Is it not the acknowledged secret of the martyrs' serenity? Happily many an obscure sufferer has discovered it for himself, and found it better than any balm of Gilead. This most precious gift of heaven to suffering souls is denied to the man who here bewails his dismal fate. So too it was denied to Jesus in the garden, and again on the cross. It is possible that the dark day will come when it will be denied to one or another of His people. Then

* iii. 3.

† iii. 4.

‡ The Authorised Version has "travel," a mere variation in spelling. The word means painful labour, toil.

§ iii. 4.

|| iii. 6.

¶ iii. 7.

** iii. 3.

†† iii. 9.

‡‡ iii. 10.

§§ iii. 11.

* iii. 12.

† iii. 13.

‡ iii. 14.

§ iii. 15.

|| iii. 16.

¶ iii. 17.

the experience of the moment will be terrible indeed. But it will be brief. An angel ministered to the Sufferer in Gethsemane. The joy of the resurrection followed swiftly on the agonies of Calvary. In the elegy we are now studying a burst of praise and glad confidence breaks out almost immediately after the lowest depths of misery have been sounded, shewing that, as Keats declares in an exquisite line—

“There is a budding morrow in midnight.”

It is not surprising, however, that, for the time being, the exceeding blackness of the night keeps the hope of a new day quite out of sight. The elegist exclaims that he has lost the very idea of prosperity. Not only has his strength perished, his hope in God has perished also.* Happily God is far too good a Father to deal with His children according to the measure of their despair. He is found by those who are too despondent to seek Him, because He is always seeking His lost children, and not waiting for them to make the first move towards Him.

When we come to look at the series of pictures of affliction as a whole we shall notice that one general idea runs through them. This is that the victim is hindered, hampered, restrained. He is led into darkness, besieged, imprisoned, chained, driven out of his way, seized in ambuscade, hunted, even forced to eat unwelcome food. This must all point to a specific character of personal experience. The troubles of the sufferer have mainly assumed the form of a thwarting of his efforts. He has not been an indolent, weak, cowardly creature, succumbing at the first sign of opposition. To an active man with a strong will resistance is one of the greatest of troubles, although it will be accepted meekly, as a matter of course, by a person of servile habits. If the opposition comes from God, may it not be that the severity of the trouble is just caused by the obstinacy of self-will? Certainly it does not appear to be so here; but then we must remember the writer is stating his own case.

Two other characteristics of the whole passage may be mentioned. One is the *persistence* of the Divine antagonism. This is what makes the case look so hard. The pursuer seems to be ruthless; He will not let His victim alone for a moment. One device follows sharply on another. There is no escape. The second of these characteristics of the passage is a gradual *aggravation* in the severity of the trials. At first God is only represented as a guide who misleads; then He appears as a besieging enemy; later like a destroyer. And correspondingly the troubles of the sufferer grow in severity, till at last he is flung into the ashes, crushed and helpless.

All this is peculiarly painful reading to us with our Christian thoughts of God. It seems so utterly contrary to the character of our Father revealed in Jesus Christ. But then it is not a part of the Christian revelation, nor was it uttered by a man who had received the benefits of that highest teaching. That, however, is not a complete explanation. The dreadful thoughts about God that are here recorded are almost

without parallel even in the Old Testament. How contrary they are to such an idea as that of the pitiful Father in Psalm ciii.! On the other hand, it should be remembered that if ever we have to make allowance for the personal equation we must be ready to do so most liberally when we are listening to the tale of his wrongs as this is recounted by the sufferer himself. The narrator may be perfectly honest and truthful, but it is not in human nature to be impartial under such circumstances. Even when, as in the present instance, we have reason to believe that the speaker is under the influence of a Divine inspiration, we have no right to conclude that this gift would enable him to take an all-round vision of truth. Still, can we deny that the elegist has presented to our minds but one facet of truth? If we do not accept it as intended for a complete picture of God, and if we confine it to an account of the Divine action under certain circumstances as this appears to one who is most painfully affected by it, without any assertion concerning the ultimate motives of God—and 't' is is all we have any justification for doing—it may teach us important lessons which we are too ready to ignore in favour of less unpleasant notions. Finally it would be quite unfair to the elegist, and it would give us a totally false impression of his ideas, if we were to go no further than this. To understand him at all we must hear him out. The contrast between the first part of this poem and the second is startling in the extreme, and we must not forget that the two are set in the closest juxtaposition, for it is plain that the one is intended to balance the other. The harshness of the opening words could be permitted with the more daring, because a perfect corrective to any unsatisfactory inferences that might be drawn from it was about to be immediately supplied.

The triplet of verses 19 to 21 serves as a transition to the picture of the other side of the Divine action. It begins with prayer. Thus a new note is struck. The sufferer knows that God is not at heart his enemy. So he ventures to beseech the very Being concerning whose treatment of him he has been complaining so bitterly, to remember his affliction and the misery it has brought on him, the wormwood, the gall of his hard lot. Hope now dawns on him out of his own recollections. What are these? The Authorised Version would lead us to think that when he uses the expression, “This I recall to my mind,”* the poet is referring to the encouraging ideas of the verses that immediately follow in the next section. But it is not probable that the last line of a triplet would thus point forward to another part of the poem. It is more consonant with the method of the composition to take this phrase in connection with what precedes it in the same triplet, and a perfectly permissible change in the translation of the 20th verse gives good sense in that connection. We may read this:

“Thou (O God) wilt surely remember, for my soul is bowed down within me.”

Thus the recollection that God too has a memory and that He will remember His suffering servant becomes the spring of a new hope.

* iii. 18.

* iii. 21.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNFAILING GOODNESS OF GOD.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 22-24.

ALTHOUGH the elegist has prepared us for brighter scenes by the more hopeful tone of an intermediate triplet, the transition from the gloom and bitterness of the first part of the poem to the glowing rapture of the second is among the most startling effects in literature. It is scarcely possible to conceive of darker views of Providence, short of a Manichæan repudiation of the God of the physical universe as an evil being, than those which are boldly set forth in the opening verses of the elegy; we shudder at the awful words, and shrink from repeating them, so near to the verge of blasphemy do they seem to come. And now those appalling utterances are followed by the very choicest expression of confidence in the boundless goodness of God! The writer seems to leap in a moment out of the deepest, darkest pit of misery into the radiance of more than summer sunlight. How can we account for this extraordinary change of thought and temper?

It is not enough to ascribe the sharpness of the contrast either to the clumsiness of the author in giving utterance to his teeming fancies just as they occur to him, without any consideration for their bearings one upon another; or to his art in designedly preparing an awakening shock. We have still to answer the question, How could a man entertain two such conflicting currents of thought in closest juxtaposition?

In their very form and structure these touching elegies reflect the mental calibre of their author. A wooden soul could never have invented their movements. They reveal a most sensitive spirit, a spirit that resembles a finely strung instrument of music, quivering in response to impulses from all directions. People of a mercurial temperament live in a state of perpetual oscillation between the most contrary moods, and the violence of their despair is always ready to give place to the enthusiasm of a new hope. We call them inconsistent; but their inconsistency may spring from a quick-witted capacity to see two sides of a question in the time occupied by slower minds with the contemplation of one. As a matter of fact, however, the revulsion in the mind of the poet may not have been so sudden as it appears in his work. We can scarcely suppose that so elaborate a composition as this elegy was written from beginning to end at a single sitting. Indeed, here we seem to have the mark of a break. The author composes the first part in an exceptionally gloomy mood, and leaves the poem unfinished, perhaps for some time. When he returns to it on a subsequent occasion he is in a totally different frame of mind, and this is reflected in the next stage of his work. Still the point of importance is the possibility of the very diverse views here recorded.

Nor is this wholly a matter of temperament. Is it not more or less the case with all of us, that since absorption with one class of ideas entirely excludes their opposites, when the latter are allowed to enter the mind they will rush in with the force of a pent-up flood? Then we are astonished that we could ever have forgotten

them. We build our theories in disregard of whole regions of thought. When these occur to us it is with the shock of a sudden discovery, and in the flash of the new light we begin at once to take very different views of our universe. Possibly we have been oblivious of our own character, until suddenly we are awakened to our true state, to be overwhelmed with shame at an unexpected revelation of sordid meanness, of despicable selfishness. Or perhaps the vision is of the heart of another person, whose quiet, unassuming goodness we have not appreciated, because it has been so unvarying and dependable that we have taken it as a matter of course, like the daily sunrise, never perceiving that this very constancy is the highest merit. We have been more grateful for the occasional lapses into kindness with which habitually churlish people have surprised us. Then there has come the revelation, in which we have been made to see that a saint has been walking by our side all the day. Many of us are very slow in reaching a similar discovery concerning God. But when we begin to take a right view of His relations to us we are amazed to think that we had not perceived them before, so rich and full and abounding are the proofs of His exceeding goodness.

Still it may seem to us a strange thing that this most perfect expression of a joyous assurance of the mercy and compassion of God should be found in the Book of Lamentations of all places. It may well give heart to those who have not sounded the depths of sorrow, as the author of these sad poems had done, to learn that even he had been able to recognise the merciful kindness of God in the largest possible measure. A little reflection, however, should teach us that it is not so unnatural a thing for this gem of grateful appreciation to appear where it is. We do not find, as a rule, that the most prosperous people are the foremost to recognise the love of God. The reverse is very frequently the case. If prosperity is not always accompanied by callous ingratitude—and of course it would be grossly unjust to assert anything so harsh—at all events it is certain that adversity is far from blinding our eyes to the brighter side of the revelation of God. Sometimes it is the very means by which they are opened. In trouble the blessings of the past are best valued, and in trouble the need of God's compassion is most acutely felt. But this is not all. The softening influence of sorrow seems to have a more direct effect upon our sense of Divine goodness. Perhaps, too, it is some compensation for melancholy, that persons who are afflicted with it are most responsive to sympathy. The morbid, despondent poet Cowper has written most exquisitely about the love of God. Watts is enthusiastic in his praise of the Divine grace; but a deeper note is sounded in the Olney hymns, as, for example, in that beginning with the line—

“Hark, my soul, it is the Lord.”

While reading this hymn to-day we cannot fail to feel the peculiar thrill of personal emotion that still quivers through its living words, revealing the very soul of their author. This is more than joyous praise; it is the expression of a personal experience of the compassion of God in times of deepest need. The same sensitive poet has given us a description of the very condition that is illustrated by the passage in the Hebrew elegist we are now considering, in lines

which, familiar as they are, acquire a fresh meaning when read in this association—the lines—

"Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings:
It is the Lord who rises
With healing in His wings.
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul, again,
A season of clear shining,
To cheer it after rain."

We may thank the Calvinistic poet for here touching on another side of the subject. He reminds us that it is God who brings about the unexpected joy of renewed trust in His unfailing mercy. The sorrowful soul is, consciously or unconsciously, visited by the Holy Spirit, and the effect of contact with the Divine is that scales fall from the eyes of the surprised sufferer. If it is right to say that one portion of Scripture is more inspired than another we must feel that there is more Divine light in the second part of this elegy than in the first. It is this surprising light from Heaven that ultimately accounts for the sudden revolution in the feelings of the poet.

In his new consciousness of the love of God the elegist is first struck by its amazing persistence. Probably we should follow the Targum and the Syriac version in rendering the twenty-second verse thus—

"The Lord's mercies, verily they cease not," etc.

instead of the usual English rendering—

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed," etc.

There are two reasons for this emendation. *First*, the momentary transition to the plural "we" is harsh and improbable. It is true the author makes a somewhat similar change a little later;* but there it is in an extended passage, and one in which he evidently wishes to represent his people with ideas that are manifestly appropriate to the community at large. Here, on the other hand, the sentence breaks into the midst of personal reflections. *Second*—and this is the principal consideration—the balance of the phrases, which is so carefully observed throughout this elegy, is upset by the common rendering, but restored by the emendation. The topic of the triplet in which the disputed passage occurs is the amazing persistence of God's goodness to His suffering children. The proposed alteration is in harmony with this.

The thought here presented to us rests on the truth of the eternity and essential changelessness of God. We cannot think of Him as either fickle or failing; to do so would be to cease to think of Him as God. If He is merciful at all He cannot be merciful only spasmodically, erratically, or temporarily. For all that, we need not regard these heart-stirring utterances as the expressions of a self-evident truism. The wonder and glory of the idea they dilate upon are not the less for the fact that we should entertain no doubt of its truth. The certainty that the character of God is good and great does not detract from His goodness or His greatness. When we are assured that His nature is not fallible our contemplation of it does not cease to be an act of adoration. On the contrary, we can worship the immutable perfection of God with fuller praises than we should give to fitful gleams of less abiding qualities.

* iii. 40-48.

As a matter of fact, however, our religious experience is never the simple conclusion of bare logic. Our feelings, and not these only, but also our faith need repeated assurances of the continuance of God's goodness, because it seems as though there were so much to absorb and quench it. Therefore the perception of the fact of its continuance takes the form of a glad wonder that God's mercies do not cease. Thus it is amazing to us that these mercies are not consumed by the multitude of the sufferers who are dependent upon them—the extent of God's family not in any way cramping His means to give the richest inheritance to each of His children; nor by the depth of individual need—no single soul having wants so extreme or so peculiar that His aid cannot avail entirely for them; nor by the shocking ill-desert of the most unworthy of mankind—even sin, while it necessarily excludes the guilty from any present enjoyment of the love of God, not really quenching that love or precluding a future participation in it on condition of repentance; nor by the wearing of time, beneath which even granite rocks crumble to powder.

The elegist declares that the reason why God's mercies are not consumed is that His compassions do not fail. Thus he goes behind the kind actions of God to their originating motives. To a man in the condition of the writer of this poem of personal confidences the Divine sympathy is the one fact in the universe of supreme importance. So will it be to every sufferer who can assure himself of the truth of it. But is this only a consolation for the sorrowing? The pathos, the very tragedy of human life on earth, should make the sympathy of God the most precious fact of existence to all mankind. Portia rightly reminds Shylock that "we all do look for mercy"; but if so, the spring of mercy, the Divine compassion, must be the one source of true hope for every soul of man. Whether we are to attribute it to sin alone, or whether there may be other dark, mysterious ingredients in human sorrow, there can be no doubt that the deepest need is that God should have pity on His children. The worship of heaven among the angels may be one pure song of joy; but here, even though we are privileged to share the gladness of the celestial praises, a plaintive note will mingle with our anthem of adoration, because a pleading cry must ever go up from burdened spirits; and when relief is acknowledged our thanksgiving must single out the compassion of God for deepest gratitude. It is much, then, to know that God not only helps the needy—that is to say, all mankind—but that He feels with His suffering children. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has taught us to see this reassuring truth most clearly in the revelation of God in His Son, repeatedly dwelling on the sufferings of Christ as the means by which He was brought into sympathetic, helpful relations to the sufferings of mankind.*

Further, the elegist declares that the special form taken by these unceasing mercies of God is daily renewal. The love of God is constant—one changeless Divine attribute; but the manifestations of that love are necessarily successive and various according to the successive and various needs of His children. We have not only to praise God for His eternal, immutable goodness, vast and wonderful as that is; to our

* Heb. ii. 18, iv. 15.

perceptions, at all events, His immediate, present actions are even more significant because they shew His personal interest in individual men and women, and His living activity at the very crisis of need. There is a certain aloofness, a certain chillness, in the thought of ancient kindness, even though the effects of it may reach to our own day in full and abundant streams. But the living God is an active God, who works in the present as effectually as He worked in the past. There is another side to this truth. It is not sufficient to have received the grace of God once for all. If "He giveth more grace," it is because we need more grace. This is a stream that must be ever flowing into the soul, not the storage of a tank filled once for all and left to serve for a lifetime. Therefore the channel must be kept constantly clear, or the grace will fail to reach us, although in itself it never runs dry.

There is something cheering in the poet's idea of the morning as the time when these mercies of God are renewed. It has been suggested that he is thinking of renewals of brightness after dark seasons of sorrow, such as are suggested by the words of the psalmist—

"Weeping may come in to lodge at even,
But joy cometh in the morning."*

This idea, however, would weaken the force of the passage, which goes to shew that God's mercies do not fail, are not interrupted. The emphasis is on the thought that no day is without God's new mercies, not even the day of darkest trouble; and further, there is the suggestion that God is never dilatory in coming to our aid. He does not keep us waiting and wearying while He tarries. He is prompt and early with His grace. The idea may be compared with that of the promise to those who seek God *early*, literally, *in the morning*.† Or we may think of the night as the time of repose, when we are oblivious of God's goodness, although even through the hours of darkness He who neither slumbers nor sleeps is constantly watching over His unconscious children. Then in the morning there dawns on us a fresh perception of His goodness. If we are to realise the blessing sought in Sir Thomas Browne's prayer, and

"Awake into some holy thought,"

no more holy thought can be desired than a grateful recognition of the new mercies on which our eyes open with the new day. A morning so graciously welcomed is the herald of a day of strength and happy confidence.

To the notion of the morning renewal of the mercies of God the poet appends a recognition of His great faithfulness. This is an additional thought. Faithfulness is more than compassion. There is a strength and a stability about the idea that goes further to insure confidence. It is more than the fact that God is true to His word, that He will certainly perform what He has definitely promised. Fidelity is not confined to compacts—it is not limited to the question of what is "in the bond"; it concerns persons rather than phrases. To be faithful to a friend is more than to keep one's word to him. We may have given him no pledge; and yet we must confess to an obligation to be true—to be true to the man himself. Now while we are called

upon to be loyal to God, there is a sense in which we may venture without irreverence to say that He may be expected to be faithful to us. He is our Creator, and He has placed us in this world by His own will; His relations with us cannot cease at this point. So Moses pleaded that God, having led His people into the wilderness, could not desert them there; and Jeremiah even ventured on the daring prayer—

"Do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory."*

It is because we are sure the just and true God could never do anything so base that His faithfulness becomes the ground of perfect confidence. It may be said, on the other hand, that we cannot claim any good thing from God on the score of merit, because we only deserve wrath and punishment. But this is not a question of merit. Fidelity to a friend is not exhausted when we have treated him according to his deserts. It extends to a treatment of him in accordance with the direct claims of friendship, claims which are to be measured by need rather than by merit.

The conclusion drawn from these considerations is given in an echo from the Psalms—

"The Lord is my portion."†

The words are old and well-worn; but they obtain a new meaning when adopted as the expression of a new experience. The lips have often chanted them in the worship of the sanctuary. Now they are the voice of the soul, of the very life. There is no plagiarism in such a quotation as this, although in making it the poet does not turn aside to acknowledge his obligation to the earlier author who coined the immortal phrase. The seizure of the old words by the soul of the new writer makes them his own in the deepest sense, because under these circumstances it is not their literary form, but their spiritual significance, that gives them their value. This is true of the most frequently quoted words of Scripture. They are new words to every soul that adopts them as the expression of a new experience.

It is to be observed that the experience now reached is something over and above the conscious reception of daily mercies. The Giver is greater than His gifts. God is first known by means of His actions, and then being thus known He is recognised as Himself the portion of His people, so that to possess Him is their one satisfying joy in the present and their one inspiring hope for the future.

CHAPTER XIII.

QUIET WAITING.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 25-36.

HAVING struck a rich vein, our author proceeds to work it with energy. Pursuing the ideas that flow out of the great truth of the endless goodness of God, and the immediate inference that He of whom so wonderful a character can be affirmed is Himself the soul's best possession, the poet enlarges upon their wider relations. He must adjust his views of the whole world to the new situation that is thus opening out before him. All things are new in the light of the

* Psalm xxx. 5, R. V. Marg.

† Prov. viii. 17.

* Jer. xiv. 21.

† Psalm lxxiii. 26.

splendid vision before which his gloomy meditations have vanished like a dream. He sees that he is not alone in enjoying the supreme blessedness of the Divine love. The revelation that has come to him is applicable to other men if they will but fulfil the conditions to which it is attached.

In the first place, it is necessary to perceive clearly what those conditions are on which the happy experience of God's unfailing mercies may be enjoyed by any man. The primary requisite is affirmed to be *quiet waiting*.^{*} The passivity of this attitude is accentuated in a variety of expressions. It is difficult for us of the modern western world to appreciate such teaching. No doubt if it stood by itself it would be so one-sided as to be positively misleading. But this is no more than must be said of any of the best lessons of life. We require the balancing of separate truths in order to obtain truth, as we want the concurrence of different impulses to produce the resultant of a right direction of life. But in the present case the opposite end of the scale has been so much overweighted that we sorely need a very considerable addition on the side to which the elegist here leans. Carlyle's gospel of work—a most wholesome message as far as it went—fell on congenial Anglo-Saxon soil; and this and the like teaching of kindred minds has brought forth a rich harvest in the social activity of modern English life. The Church has learnt the duty of working—which is well. She does not appear so capable of attaining the blessedness of waiting. Our age is in no danger of the dreaminess of quietism. But we find it hard to cultivate what Wordsworth calls "wise passiveness." And yet in the heart of us we feel the lack of this spirit of quiet. Charles Lamb's essay on the "Quakers' Meeting" charms us, not only on account of its exquisite literary style, but also because it reflects a phase of life which we own to be most beautiful.

The waiting here recommended is more than simple passiveness, however, more than a bare negation of action. It is the very opposite of lethargy and torpor. Although it is quiet, it is not asleep. It is open-eyed, watchful, expectant. It has a definite object of anticipation, for it is a waiting for God and His salvation; and therefore it is hopeful. Nay, it has a certain activity of its own, for it seeks God. Still, this activity is inward and quiet; its immediate aim is not to get at some visible earthly end, however much this may be desired, nor to attain some inward personal experience, some stage in the soul's culture, such as peace, or purity, or power, although this may be the ultimate object of the present anxiety; primarily it seeks God—all else it leaves in His hands. Thus it is rather a change in the tone and direction of the soul's energies than a state of repose. It is the attitude of the watchman on his lonely tower—calm and still, but keen-eyed and alert, while down below in the crowded city some fret themselves with futile toil and others slumber in stupid indifference.

To this waiting for Him and definite seeking of Him God responds in some special manifestation of mercy. Although, as Jesus Christ tells us, our Father in heaven "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust,"[†] the fact here distinctly implied, that the goodness of God is ex-

ceptionally enjoyed on the conditions now laid down, is also supported by our Lord's teaching in the exhortations, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."^{*} St. James adds, "Ye have not because ye ask not."[†] This, then, is the method of the Divine procedure. God expects His children to wait on Him as well as to wait for Him. We cannot consider such an expectation unreasonable. Of course it would be foolish to imagine God piquing Himself on His own dignity, so as to decline aid until He had been gratified by a due observance of homage. There is a deeper motive for the requirement. God's relations with men and women are personal and individual; and when they are most happy and helpful they always involve a certain reciprocity. It may not be necessary or even wise to demand definite things from God whenever we seek His assistance; for He knows what is good, while we often blunder and ask amiss. But the seeking here described is of a different character. It is not seeking things; it is seeking God. This is always good. The attitude of trust and expectancy that it necessitates is just that in which we are brought into a receptive state. It is not a question of God's willingness to help; He is always willing. But it cannot be fitting that He should act towards us when we are distrustful, indifferent, or rebellious, exactly as He would act if He were approached in submission and trustful expectation.

Quiet waiting, then, is the right and fitting condition for the reception of blessing from God. But the elegist holds more than this. In his estimation the state of mind he here commends is itself good for a man. It is certainly good in contrast with the unhappy alternatives—feeble fussiness, wearing anxiety, indolent negligence, or blank despair. It is good also as a positive condition of mind. He has reached a happy inward attainment who has cultivated the faculty of possessing his soul in patience. His eye is clear for visions of the unseen. To him the deep fountains of life are open. Truth is his, and peace and strength also. When we add to this calmness the distinct aim of seeking God we may see how the blessedness of the condition recommended is vastly enhanced. We are all insensibly moulded by our desires and aims. The expectant soul is transformed into the image of the hope it pursues. When its treasure is in heaven its heart is there also, and therefore its very nature becomes heavenly.

To his reflections on the blessedness of quiet waiting the elegist adds a very definite word about another experience, declaring that "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."[‡] This interesting assertion seems to sound an autobiographical note, especially as the whole poem treats of the writer's personal experience. Some have inferred that the author must have been a young man at the time of writing. But if, as seems probable, he is calling to mind what he has himself passed through, this may be a recollection of a much earlier period of his life. Thus he would seem to be recognising, in the calm of subsequent reflection, what perhaps he may have been far from admitting while bearing the burdens, that the labours and hard-

^{*} iii. 26.

[†] Matt. v. 45.

^{*} vii. 7, 8.

[†] James iv. 2.

[‡] iii. 27.

ships of his youth prove to have been for his own advantage. This truth is often perceived in the meditations of mature life, although it is not so easily acknowledged in the hours of strain and stress.

It is impossible to say what particular yoke the writer is thinking about. The persecutions inflicted on Jeremiah have been cited in illustration of this passage; and although we may not be able to ascribe the poem to the great prophet, his toils and troubles will serve as instances of the truth of the words of the anonymous writer, for undoubtedly his sympathies were quickened while his strength was ripened by what he endured. If we will have a definite meaning the yoke may stand for one of three things—for instruction, for labour, or for trouble. The sentence is true of either of these forms of yoke. We are not likely to dispute the advantages of youthful education over that which is delayed till adult age; but even if the acquisition of knowledge is here suggested, we cannot suppose it to be book knowledge, it must be that got in the school of life. Thus we are brought to the other two meanings. Then the connection excludes the notion of pleasant, attractive work, so that the yoke of labour comes near to the burden of trouble. This seems to be the essential idea of the verse. Irksome work, painful toil, forced labour partaking of the nature of servitude—these ideas are most vividly suggested by the image of a yoke. And they are what we most shrink from in youth. Inactivity is then by no means sought or desired. The very exercise of one's energies is a delight at the time of their fresh vigour. But this exercise must be in congenial directions, in harmony with one's tastes and inclinations, or it will be regarded as an intolerable burden. Liberty is sweet in youth; it is not work that is dreaded, but compulsion. Youth emulates the bounding energies of the war horse, but it has a great aversion to the patient toil of the ox. Hence the yoke is resented as a grievous burden; for the yoke signifies compulsion and servitude. Now, as a matter of fact, this yoke generally has to be borne in youth. People might be more patient with the young if they would but consider how vexatious it must be to the shoulders that are not yet fitted to wear it, and in the most liberty-loving age. As time passes custom makes the yoke easier to be borne; and yet then it is usually lightened. In our earlier days we must submit and obey, must yield and serve. This is the rule in business, the drudgery and restraint of which naturally attach themselves to the first stages. If older persons reflected on what this must mean at the very time when the appetite for delight is most keen, and the love of freedom most intense, they would not press the yoke with needless harshness.

But now the poet has been brought to see that it was for his own advantage that he was made to bear the yoke in his youth. How so? Surely not because it prevented him from taking too rosy views of life, and so saved him from subsequent disappointment. Nothing is more fatal to youth than cynicism. The young man who professes to have discovered the hollowness of life generally is in danger of making his own life a hollow and wasted thing. The elegist could never have fallen to this miserable condition, or he would never have written as he has done here. With faith and manly courage the yoke has the

very opposite effect. The faculty of cherishing hope in spite of present hardships, which is the peculiar privilege of youth, may stand a man in stead at a later time, when it is not so easy to triumph over circumstances, because the old buoyancy of animal spirits, which means so much in early days, has vanished; and then if he can look back and see how he has been cultivating habits of endurance through years of discipline without his soul having been soured by the process, he may well feel profoundly thankful for those early experiences which were undoubtedly very hard in their rawness.

The poet's reflections on the blessedness of quiet waiting are followed by direct exhortations to the behaviour which is its necessary accompaniment—for such seems to be the meaning of the next triplet, verses 28 to 30. The Revisers have corrected this from the indicative mood, as it stands in the Authorised Version, to the imperative—"Let him sit alone," etc., "Let him put his mouth in the dust," etc., "Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him," etc. The exhortations flow naturally out of the preceding statements, but the form they assume may strike us as somewhat singular. Who is the person thus indirectly addressed? The grammar of the sentences would invite our attention to the "man" of the twenty-seventh verse. If it is good for everybody to bear the yoke in his youth, it might be suggested further that it would be well for everybody to act in the manner now indicated—that is to say, the advice would be of universal application. We must suppose, however, that the poet is thinking of a sufferer similar to himself.

Now the point of the exhortation is to be found in the fact that it goes beyond the placid state just described. It points to solitude, silence, submission, humiliation, non-resistance. The principle of calm, trustful expectancy is most beautiful; and if it were regarded by itself it could not but fascinate us, so that we should wonder how it would be possible for anybody to resist its attractions. But immediately we try to put it in practice we come across some harsh and positively repellent features. When it is brought down from the ethereal regions of poetry and set to work among the gritty facts of real life, how soon it seems to lose its glamour! It can never become mean or sordid; and yet its surroundings may be so. Most humiliating things are to be done, most insulting things endured. It is hard to sit in solitude and silence—a Ugolino in his tower of famine, a Bonnivard in his dungeon; there seems to be nothing heroic in this dreary inactivity. It would be much easier to attempt some deed of daring, especially if that were in the heat of battle. Nothing is so depressing as loneliness—the torture of a prisoner in solitary confinement. And yet now there must be no word of complaint because the trouble comes from the very Being who is to be trusted for deliverance. There is a call for action, however, but only to make the submission more complete and the humiliation more abject. The sufferer is to lay his mouth in the dust like a beaten slave.* Even this he might brace himself to do, stifling the last remnant of his pride because he is before the Lord of heaven and earth. But it is not enough. A yet more bitter cup must be drunk to the dregs. He must actually turn his cheek to the smiter, and quietly

* iii. 29.

submit to reproach.* God's wrath may be accepted as a righteous retribution from above. But it is hard indeed to manifest the same spirit of submission in face of the fierce malignity or the petty spite of men. Yet silent waiting involves even this. Let us count the cost before we venture on the path which looks so beautiful in idea, but which turns out to be so very trying in fact.

We cannot consider this subject without being reminded of the teaching and—a more helpful memory—the example also of our Lord. It is hard to receive even from His lips the command to turn the other cheek to one who has smitten us on the right cheek. But when we see Jesus doing this very thing the whole aspect of it is changed. What before looked weak and cowardly is now seen to be the perfection of true courage and the height of moral sublimity. By His own endurance of insult and ignominy our Lord has completely revolutionised our ideas of humiliation. His humiliation was His glorification. What a Roman would despise as shameful weakness He has proved to be the triumph of strength. Thus, though we may not be able to take the words of the Lamentations as a direct prophecy of Jesus Christ, they so perfectly realise themselves in the story of His Passion, that to Christendom they must always be viewed in the light of that supreme wonder of a victory won through submission; and while they are so viewed they cannot fail to set before us an ideal conduct for the sufferer under the most trying circumstances.

This advice is not so paradoxical as it appears. We are not called upon to accept it merely on the authority of the speaker. He follows it up by assigning good reasons for it. These are all based on the assumption which runs through the elegies, that the sufferings therein described come from the hand of God. They are most of them the immediate effects of man's enmity. But a Divine purpose is always to be recognised behind the human instrumentality. This fact at once lifts the whole question out of the region of miserable, earthly passions and mutual recriminations. In apparently yielding to a tyrant from among his fellow-men the sufferer is really submitting to his God.

Then the elegist gives us three reasons why the submission should be complete and the waiting quiet. The *first* is that the suffering is but temporary. God seems to have cast off His afflicted servant. If so it is but for a season.† This is not a case of absolute desertion. The sufferer is not treated as a reprobate. How could we expect patient submission from a soul that had passed the portals of a hell over which Dante's awful motto of despair was inscribed? If they who entered were to "forsake all hope" it would be a mockery to bid them "be still." It would be more natural for these lost souls to shriek with the fury of madness. The *first* ground of quiet waiting is hope. The *second* is to be found in God's unwillingness to afflict.‡ He never takes up the rod, as we might say, *con amore*. Therefore the trial will not be unduly prolonged. Since God Himself grieves to inflict it, the distress can be no more than is absolutely necessary. The *third* and last reason for this patience of submission is the certainty that God cannot commit an injustice. So important is this consideration in the eyes of the elegist that he

devotes a complete triplet to it, illustrating it from three different points of view.* We have the conqueror with his victims, the magistrate in a case at law, and the private citizen in business. Each of these instances affords an opportunity for injustice. God does not look with approval on the despot who crushes all his prisoners—for Nebuchadnezzar's outrages are by no means condoned, although they are utilised as chastisements; nor on the judge who perverts the solemn process of law, when deciding, according to the Jewish theocratic idea, in place of God, the supreme Arbitrator, and, as the oath testifies, in His presence; nor on the man who in a private capacity circumvents his neighbour. But how can we ascribe to God what He will not sanction in man? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"† exclaims the perplexed patriarch; and we feel that his plea is unanswerable. But if God is just we can afford to be patient. And yet we feel that while there is something to calm us and allay the agonising terrors of despair in this thought of the unswerving justice of God, we must fall back for our most satisfying assurance on that glorious truth which the poet finds confirmed by his daily experience, and which he expresses with such a glow of hope in the rich phrase, "Yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies."‡

CHAPTER XIV.

GOD AND EVIL.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37-39.

THE eternal problem of the relation of God to evil is here treated with the keenest discrimination. That God is the supreme and irresistible ruler, that no man can succeed with any design in opposition to His will, that whatever happens must be in some way an execution of His decree, and that He, therefore, is to be regarded as the author of evil as well as good—these doctrines are so taken for granted that they are neither proved nor directly affirmed, but thrown into the form of questions that can have but one answer, as though to imply that they are known to everybody, and cannot be doubted for a moment by any one. But the inference drawn from them is strange and startling. It is that not a single living man has any valid excuse for complaining. That, too, is considered to be so undeniable that, like the previous ideas, it is expressed as a self-answering question. But we are not left in this paradoxical position. The evil experienced by the sufferer is treated as the punishment of his sin. What right has he to complain of that? A slightly various rendering has been proposed for the thirty-ninth verse, so as to resolve into a question and its answer. Read in this way, it asks, why should a living man complain? and then suggests the reply, that if he is to complain at all it should not be on account of his sufferings, treated as wrongs. He should complain against himself, his own conduct, his sin. We have seen, however, in other cases, that the breaking of a verse in this way is not in harmony with the smooth style of the elegiac poetry in which the words occur. This requires us to take the three verses of the triplet as continuous, flowing sentences.

* iii. 30.

† iii. 31, 32.

‡ iii. 33.

* iii. 34-36.

† Gen. xviii. 25.

‡ iii. 32.

Quite a number of considerations arise out of the curious juxtaposition of ideas in this passage. In the first place, it is very evident that by the word "evil" the writer here means trouble and suffering, not wickedness, because he clearly distinguishes it from the sin the mention of which follows. That sin is a man's own deed, for which he is justly punished. The poet, then, does not attribute the causation of sin to God; he does not speculate at all on the origin of moral evil. As far as he goes in the present instance, he would seem to throw back the authorship of it upon the will of man. How that will came to turn astray he does not say. This awful mystery remains unsolved through the whole course of the revelation of the Old Testament, and even through that of the New also. It cannot be maintained that the story of the Fall in Genesis is a solution of the mystery. To trace temptation back to the serpent is not to account for its existence, nor for the facility with which man was found to yield to it. When, at a later period, Satan appears on the stage, it is not to answer the perplexing question of the origin of evil. In the Old Testament he is nowhere connected with the Fall—his identification with the serpent first occurring in the Book of Wisdom,* from which apparently it passed into current language, and so was adopted by St. John in the Apocalypse.† At first Satan is the adversary and accuser of man, as in Job‡ and Zechariah;§ then he is recognised as the tempter, in Chronicles, for example.|| But in no case is he said to be the primary cause of evil. No plummet can sound the depths of that dark pit in which lurks the source of sin.

Meanwhile a very different problem, the problem of suffering, is answered by attributing this form of evil quite unreservedly and even emphatically to God. It is to be remembered that our Lord, accepting the language of his contemporaries, ascribes this to Satan, speaking of the woman afflicted with a spirit of infirmity as one whom Satan had bound;¶ and that similarly St. Paul writes of his thorn in the flesh as a messenger of Satan,** to whom he also assigns the hindrance of a projected journey.†† But in these cases it is not in the least degree suggested that the evil spirit is an irresistible and irresponsible being. The language only points to his immediate agency. The absolute supremacy of God is never called in question. There is no real concession to Persian dualism anywhere in the Bible. In difficult cases the sacred writers seem more anxious to uphold the authority of God than to justify His actions. They are perfectly convinced that those actions are all just and right, and not to be called in question, and so they are quite fearless in attributing to His direct commands occurrences that we should perhaps think more satisfactorily accounted for in some other way. In such cases theirs is the language of unfailing faith, even when faith is strained almost to breaking.

The unquestionable fact that good and evil both come from the mouth of the Most High is based on the certain conviction that He is the Most High. Since it cannot be believed that His decrees should be thwarted, it cannot be supposed that there is any rival to His power. To

speak of evil as independent of God is to deny that He is God. This is what a system of pure dualism must come to. If there are two mutually independent principles in the universe neither of them can be God. Dualism is as essentially opposed to the idea we attach to the name "God" as polytheism. The gods of the heathen are no gods, and so also are the imaginary twin divinities that divide the universe between them, or contend in a vain endeavour to suppress one another. "God," as we understand the title, is the name of the Supreme, the Almighty, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Zend-Avesta escapes the logical conclusion of atheism by regarding its two principles, Ormuzd and Ahriman, as two streams issuing from a common fountain, or as two phases of one existence. But then it saves its theism at the expense of its dualism. In practice, however, this is not done. The dualism, the mutual antagonism of the two powers, is the central idea of the Parsee system; and being so, it stands in glaring contrast to the lofty monism of the Bible.

Nevertheless, it may be said, although it is thus necessary to attribute evil as well as good to God if we would not abandon the thought of His supremacy, a thought that is essential to our conception of His very nature, this is a perplexing necessity, and not one to be accepted with any sense of satisfaction. How then can the elegist welcome it with acclamation and set it before us with an air of triumph? That he does so is undeniable, for the spirit and tone of the poem here become positively exultant.

We may reply that the writer appears as the champion of the Divine cause. No attack on God's supremacy is to be permitted. Nothing of the kind, however, has been suggested. The writer is pursuing another aim, for he is anxious to still the murmurs of discontent. But how can the thought of the supremacy of God have that effect? One would have supposed the ascription to God of the trouble complained of would deepen the sense of distress and turn the complaint against Him. Yet it is just here that the elegist sees the unreasonableness of a complaining spirit.

Of course the uselessness of complaining, or rather the uselessness of attempting resistance, may be impressed upon us in this way. If the source of our trouble is nothing less than the Almighty and Supreme Ruler of all things it is stupid to dream of thwarting His purposes. If a man will run his head like a battering-ram against a granite cliff the most he can expect by his madness will be to bespatter the rock with his brains. It may be necessary to warn the rebel against Providence of this danger by shewing him that what he mistakes for a flimsy veil or a shadowy cloud is an immovable wall. But what will he find to exult over in the information? The hopelessness of resistance is no better than the consolation of pessimism, and its goal of despair. Our author, on the other hand, evidently intends to be reassuring.

Now, is there not something reassuring in the thought that evil and good come to us from one and the same source? For, consider the alternative. Remember, the evil exists as surely as the good. The elegist does not attempt to deny this, or to minimise the fact. He never calls evil good, never explains it away. There it stands before us, in all its ugly actuality, speculations concerning its origin neither aggravating the se-

* Wisdom ii. 23 ff.

† Rev. xii. 9.

‡ Job i. 6-12, ii. 1-7.

§ Zech. iii. 1, 2.

|| 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

¶ Luke xiii. 16.

** 2 Cor. xii. 7.

†† 1 Thess. ii. 18.

verity of its symptoms nor alleviating them. Whence, then, did this perplexing fact arise? If we postulate some other source than the Divine origin of good, what is it? A dreadful mystery here yawns at our feet. If evil came from an equally potent origin it would contend with good on even terms, and the issue would always hang in the balance. There could be nothing reassuring in that tantalising situation. The fate of the universe would be always quivering in uncertainty. And meanwhile we should have to conclude, that the most awful conflict with absolutely doubtful issues was raging continually. We could only contemplate the idea of this vast schism with terror and dismay. But now assuredly there is something calming in the thought of the unity of the power that distributes our fortunes; for this means that a man is in no danger of being tossed like a shuttlecock between two gigantic rival forces. There must be a singleness of aim in the whole treatment of us by Providence, since Providence is one. Thus, if only as an escape from an inconceivably appalling alternative, this doctrine of the common source of good and evil is truly reassuring.

We may pursue the thought further. Since good and evil spring from one and the same source, they cannot be so mutually contradictory as we have been accustomed to esteem them. They are two children of a common parent; then they must be brothers. But if they are so closely related a certain family likeness may be traced between them. This does not destroy the actuality of evil. But it robs it of its worst features. The pain may be as acute as ever in spite of all our philosophising. But the significance of it will be wholly changed. We can now no longer treat it as an accursed thing. If it is so closely related to good, we may not have far to go in order to discover that it is even working for good.

Then if evil and good come from the same source it is not just to characterise that source by reference to one only of its effluents. We must not take a rose-coloured view of all things, and relapse into idle complacency, as we might do if we confined our observation to the pleasant facts of existence, for the unpleasant facts—loss, disappointment, pain, death—are equally real, and are equally derived from the highest Authority. Neither are we justified in denying the existence of the good when overwhelmed with a sense of the evil in life. At worst we live in a very mixed world. It is unscientific, it is unjust to pick out the ills of life and gibbet them as specimens of the way things are going. If we will recite the first part of such an elegy as that we are now studying, at least let us have the honesty to read on to the second part, where the surpassingly lovely vision of the Divine compassion so much more than counterbalances the preceding gloom. Is it only by accident that the poet says "evil and good," and not, as we usually put the phrase, "good and evil"? Good shall have the last word. Evil exists; but the finality and crown of existence is not evil, but good.

The conception of the primary unity of causation which the Hebrew poet reaches through his religion is brought home to us to-day with a vast accumulation of proof by the discoveries of science. The uniformity of law, the co-relation of forces, the analyses of the most diverse and complex organisms into their common

chemical elements, the evidence of the spectro-scope to the existence of precisely the same elements among the distant stars, as well as the more minute homologies of nature in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, are all irrefutable confirmations of this great truth. Moreover, science has demonstrated the intimate association of what we cannot but regard as good and evil in the physical universe. Thus, while carbon and oxygen are essential elements for the building up of all living things, the effect of perfectly healthy vital functions working upon them is to combine them into carbonic acid, which is a most deadly poison; but then this noxious gas becomes the food of plants, from which the animal life in turn derives its nourishment. Similarly microbes, which we commonly regard as the agents of corruption and disease, are found to be not only nature's scavengers, but also the indispensable ministers of life, when, clustering round the roots of plants in vast crowds, they convert the organic matter of the soil, such as manure, into those inorganic nitrates which contain nitrogen in the form suitable for absorption by vegetable organisms. The mischief wrought by germs, great as it is, is infinitely outweighed by the necessary service existences of this kind render to all life by preparing some of its indispensable conditions. The inevitable conclusion to be drawn from facts such as these is that health and disease, and life and death, interact, are inextricably blended together, and mutually transformable—what we call disease and death in one place being necessary for life and health in another. The more clearly we understand the processes of nature the more evident is the fact of her unity, and therefore the more impossible is it for us to think of her objectionable characteristics as foreign to her being—alien immigrants from another sphere. Physical evil itself looks less dreadful when it is seen to take its place as an integral part of the complicated movement of the whole system of the universe.

But the chief reason for regarding the prospect with more than satisfaction has yet to be stated. It is derived from the character of Him to whom both the evil and the good are attributed. We can go beyond the assertion that these contrarieties spring from one common origin to the great truth that this origin is to be found in God. All that we know of our Father in heaven comes to our aid in reflecting upon the character of the actions thus attributed to Him. The account of God's goodness that immediately precedes this ascription of the two extreme experiences of life to Him would be in the mind of the writer, and it should be in the mind of the reader also. The poet has just been dwelling very emphatically on the indubitable justice of God. When, therefore, he reminds us that both evil and good come from the Divine Being, it is as though he said that they both originated in justice. A little earlier he was expressing the most fervent appreciation of the mercy and compassion of God. Then these gracious attributes should be in our thoughts while we hear that the mixed experiences of life are to be traced back to Him of whom so cheering a view can be taken.

We know the love of God much more fully since it has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Therefore we have a much better reason for building our faith and hope on the fact of the universal Divine origin of events. In itself the

evil exists all the same, whether we can trace its cause or not, and the discovery of the cause in no way aggravates it. But this discovery may lead us to take a new view of its issues. If it comes from One who is as just and merciful as He is mighty we may certainly conclude that it will lead to the most blessed results. Considered in the light of the assured character of its purpose, the evil itself must assume a totally different character. The child who receives a distasteful draught from the hand of the kindest of parents knows that it cannot be a cup of poison, and has good reason for believing it to be a necessary medicine.

The last verse of the triplet startles the reader with an unexpected thought. The considerations already adduced are all meant to check any complaint against the course of Providence. Now the poet appends a final argument, which is all the more forcible for not being stated as an argument. At the very end of the passage, when we are only expecting the language to sink into a quiet conclusion, a new idea springs out upon us, like a tiger from its lair. This trouble about which a man is so ready to complain, as though it were some unaccountable piece of injustice, is simply *the punishment of his sin!* Like the other ideas of the passage, the notion is not tentatively argued; it is boldly taken for granted. Once again we see that there is no suspicion in the mind of the elegist of the perplexing problem that gives its theme to the Book of Job. But do we not sometimes press that problem too far? Can it be denied that, to a large extent, suffering is a direct consequence and the natural punishment of sin? Are we not often burnt for the simple reason that we have been playing with fire? At all events, the whole course of previous prophecy went to shew that the national sins of Israel must be followed by some dreadful disasters; and when the war-cloud was hovering on the horizon Jeremiah saw in it the herald of approaching doom. Then the thunderbolt fell; and the wreck it caused became the topic of this Book of Lamentations. After such a preparation, what was more natural, and reasonable, and even inevitable, than that the elegist should calmly assume that the trouble complained of was no more than was due to the afflicted people? This is clear enough when we think of the nation as a whole. It is not so obvious when we turn our attention to individual cases; but the bewildering problem of the sufferings of innocent children, which constitutes the most prominent feature in the poet's picture of the miseries of the Jews, is not here revived.

We must suppose that he is thinking of a typical citizen of Jerusalem. If the guilty city merited severe punishment, such a man as this would also merit it; for the deserts of the city are only the deserts of her citizens. It will be for everybody to say for himself how far the solution of the mystery of his own troubles is to be looked for in this direction. A humble conscience will not be eager to repudiate the possibility that its owner has not been punished beyond his deserts, whatever may be thought of other people, innocent children in particular. There is one word that may bring out this aspect of the question with more distinctness—the word “living.” The poet asks, “Wherefore doth a *living* man complain?” Why does he attach this attribute to the subject of his question? The only satisfactory explanation that

has been offered is that he would remind us that while the sufferer has his life preserved to him he has no valid ground of complaint. He has not been overpaid; he has not even been paid in full; for it is an Old Testament doctrine which the New Testament repeats when it declares that “the wages of sin is death.”*

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETURN.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 40-42.

WHEN prophets, speaking in the name of God, promised the exiles a restoration to their land and the homes of their fathers, it was always understood and often expressly affirmed that this reversal of their outward fortunes must be preceded by an inner change, a return to God in penitent submission. Expulsion from Canaan was the chastisement of apostasy from God; it was only right and reasonable that the discipline should be continued as long as the sin that necessitated it remained. It would be a mistake, however, to relegate the treatment of this deadly sin to a secondary place, as only the cause of a more serious trouble. There could be no more serious trouble. The greatest evil from which Israel suffered was not the Babylonian exile; it was her self-inflicted banishment from God. The greatest blessing to be sought for her was not liberty to return to the hills and cities of Palestine; it was permission and power to come back to God. It takes us long to learn that sin is worse than punishment, and that to be brought home to our Father in heaven is a more desirable good than any earthly recovery of prosperity. But the soul that can say with the elegist, “The Lord is my portion,” has reached the vantage ground from which the best things can be seen in their true proportions; and to such a soul no advent of temporal prosperity can compare with the gaining of its one prized possession. In the triplet of verses that follows the pointed phrase which rebukes complaint for suffering by attributing it to sin the poet conducts us to those high regions where the more spiritual truth concerning these matters can be appreciated.

The form of the language here passes into the plural. Already we have been made to feel that the man who has seen affliction is a representative sufferer, although he is describing his own personal distresses. The immediately preceding clause seems to point to the sinful Israelite generally, in its vague reference to a “living man.” † Now there is a transition in the movement of the elegy, and the solitary voice gives place to a chorus, the Jews as a body appearing before God to pour out their confessions in common. According to his usual method the elegist makes the transition quite abruptly, without any explanatory preparation. The style resembles that of an oratorio, in which solo and chorus alternate with close sequence. In the present instance the effect is not that of dramatic variety, because we feel the vital sympathy that the poet cherishes for his people, so that their experience is as his experience. It is a faint shadow of the condition of the great Sin-bearer, of whom it could be said, “In all their affliction He was afflicted.” ‡

Before it is possible to return to God, before

* Rom. vi. 23.

† iii. 39.

‡ Isa. lxiii. 9.

the desire to return is even awakened, a much less inviting action must be undertaken. The first and greatest hindrance to reconciliation with our Father is our failure to recognise that any such reconciliation is necessary. The most deadening effect of sin is seen in the fact that it prevents the sinner from perceiving that he is at enmity with God at all, although by everything he does he proclaims his rebellion. The Pharisee of the parable cannot be justified, cannot really approach God at all, because he will not admit that he needs any justification, or is guilty of any conduct that separates him from God. Just as the most hopeless state of ignorance is that in which there is a serene unconsciousness of any deficiency of knowledge, so the most abandoned condition of guilt is the inability to perceive the very existence of guilt. The sick man who ignores his disease will not resort to a physician for the cure of it. If the soul's quarrel with her Lord is ever to be ended it must be discovered. Therefore the first step will be in the direction of self-examination.

We are led to look in this direction by the startling thought with which the previous triplet closes. If the calamities bewailed are the chastisements of sin it is necessary for this sin to be sought out. The language of the elegist suggests that we are not aware of the nature of our own conduct, and that it is only by some serious effort that we can make ourselves acquainted with it, for this is what he implies when he represents the distressed people resolving to "search and try" their ways. Easy as it may seem in words, experience proves that nothing is more difficult in practice than to fulfil the precept of the philosopher, "Know thyself." The externalism in which most of our lives are spent makes the effort to look within a painful contradiction of habit. When it is attempted pride and prejudice face the inquirer, and too often quite hide the true self from view. If the pursuit is pushed on in spite of these hindrances the result may prove to be a sad surprise. Sometimes we see ourselves unexpectedly revealed, and then the sight of so great a novelty amazes us. The photographer's proof of a portrait dissatisfies the subject, not because it is a bad likeness, but rather because it is too faithful to be pleasing. A wonderful picture of Rossetti's represents a young couple who are suddenly confronted in a lonely forest by the apparition of their two selves as simply petrified with terror at the appalling spectacle.

Even when the effort to acquire self-knowledge is strenuous and persevering, and accompanied by an honest resolution to accept the results, however unwelcome they may be, it often fails for lack of a standard of judgment. We compare ourselves with ourselves—our present with our past, or at best our actual life with our ideals. But this is a most illusory process, and its limits are too narrow. Or we compare ourselves with our neighbours—a possible advance, but still a most unsatisfactory method; for we know so little of them, all of us dwelling more or less like stars apart, and none of us able to sound the abysmal depths of another's personality. Even if we could fix this standard it too would be very illusory, because those people with whom we are making the comparison, quite as much as we ourselves, may be astray, just as a whole planetary system, though perfectly balanced in the mutual relations of its own consti-

uent worlds, may yet be out of its orbit, and rushing on all together towards some awful common destruction.

A more trustworthy standard may be found in the heart-searching words of Scripture, which prove to be as much a revelation of man to himself as one of God to man. This Divine test reaches its perfection in the historical presentation of our Lord. We discover our actual characters most effectually when we compare our conduct with the conduct of Jesus Christ. As the Light of the world, He leads the world to see itself. He is the great touchstone of character. During His earthly life hypocrisy was detected by His searching glance; but that was not admitted by the hypocrite. It is when He comes to us spiritually that His promise is fulfilled, and the Comforter convinces of *sin* as well as of righteousness and judgment. Perhaps it is not so eminently desirable as Burns would have us believe, that we should see ourselves as others see us; but it is supremely important to behold ourselves in the pure, searching light of the Spirit of Christ.

We may be reminded, on the other hand, that too much introspection is not wholesome, that it begets morbid ways of thought, paralyses the energies, and degenerates into insipid sentimentality. No doubt it is best that the general tendency of the mind should be towards the active duties of life. But to admit this is not to deny that there may be occasions when the most ruthless self-examination becomes a duty of first importance. A season of severe chastisement, such as that to which the Book of Lamentations refers, is one that calls most distinctly for the exercise of this rare duty. We cannot make our daily meal of drugs; but drugs may be most necessary in sickness. Possibly, if we were in a state of perfectly sound spiritual health, it might be well for us never to spare a thought for ourselves from our complete absorption with the happy duties of a full and busy life. But since we are far from being thus healthy, since we err and fail and sin, time devoted to the discovery of our faults may be exceedingly well spent.

Then while a certain kind of self-study is always mischievous—the sickly habit of brooding over one's feelings—it is to be observed that the elegist does not recommend this. His language points in quite another direction. It is not emotion but action that he is concerned with. The searching is to be into our "ways," the course of our conduct. There is an objectivity in this inquiry, though it is turned inward, that contrasts strongly with the investigation of shadowy sentiments. Conduct, too, is the one ground of the judgment of God. Therefore the point of supreme importance to ourselves is to determine whether conduct is right or wrong. With this branch of self-examination we are not in so much danger of falling into complete delusions as when we are considering less tangible questions. Thus this is at once the most wholesome, the most necessary, and the most practicable process of introspection.

The particular form of conduct here referred to should be noted. The word "ways" suggests habit and continuity. These are more characteristic than isolated deeds—short spasms of virtue or sudden falls before temptation. The final judgment will be according to the life, not its exceptional episodes. A man lives his habits.

He may be capable of better things, he may be liable to worse; but he is what he does habitually. The world will applaud him for some outburst of heroism in which he rises for the moment above the sordid level of his everyday life, or execrate him for his shameful moment of self-forgetfulness; and the world will have this amount of justice in its action, that the capacity for the occasional is itself a permanent attribute, although the opportunity for the active working of the latent good or evil is rare. The startling outburst may be a revelation of old but hitherto hidden "ways." It must be so to some extent; for no man wholly belies his own nature unless he is mad—beside himself, as we say. Still it may not be so entirely, or even chiefly; the surprised self may not be the normal self, often is not. Meanwhile our main business in self-examination is to trace the course of the unromantic beaten track, the long road on which we travel from morning to evening through the whole day of life.

The result of this search into the character of their ways on the part of the people is that it is found to be necessary to forsake them forthwith; for the next idea is in the form of a resolution to turn out of them, nay, to turn back, retracing the footsteps that have gone astray, in order to come to God again. These ways are discovered, then, to be bad—vicious in themselves, and wrong in their direction. They run down-hill, away from the home of the soul, and towards the abodes of everlasting darkness. When this fact is perceived it becomes apparent that some complete change must be made. This is a case of ending our old ways, not mending them. Good paths may be susceptible of improvement. The path of the just should "shine more and more unto the perfect day." But here things are too hopelessly bad for any attempt at amelioration. No engineering skill will ever transform the path that points straight to perdition into one that conducts us up to the heights of heaven. The only chance of coming to walk in the right way is to forsake the wrong way altogether, and make an entirely new start. Here, then, we have the Christian doctrine of conversion—a doctrine which always appears extravagant to people who take superficial views of sin, but one that will be appreciated just in proportion to the depth and seriousness of our ideas of its guilt. Nothing contributes more to unreality in religion than strong language on the nature of repentance apart from a corresponding consciousness of the tremendous need of a most radical change. This deplorable mischief must be brought about when indiscriminate exhortations to the extreme practice of penitence are addressed to mixed congregations. It cannot be right to press the necessity of conversion upon young children and the carefully sheltered and lovingly trained youth of Christian homes in the language that applies to their unhappy brothers and sisters who have already made shipwreck of life. This statement is liable to misapprehension; doubtless to some readers it will savour of the light views of sin deprecated above, and point to the excuses of the Pharisee. Nevertheless it must be considered if we would avoid the characteristic sin of the Pharisee, hypocrisy. It is unreasonable to suppose that the necessity of a complete conversion can be felt by the young and comparatively innocent as it should be felt by abandoned profligates, and the

attempt of the preacher to force it on their relatively pure consciences is a direct incentive to cant. The fifty-first Psalm is the confession of his crime by a murderer; Augustine's "Confessions" are the outpourings of a man who feels that he has been dragging his earlier life through the mire; Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" reveals the memories of a rough soldier's shame and folly. No good can come of the unthinking application of such utterances to persons whose history and character are entirely different from those of the authors.

On the other hand, there are one or two further considerations which should be borne in mind. Thus it must not be forgotten that the greatest sinner is not necessarily the man whose guilt is most glaringly apparent; nor that sins of the heart count with God as equivalent to obviously wicked deeds committed in the full light of day; nor that guilt cannot be estimated absolutely, by the bare evil done, without regard to the opportunities, privileges, and temptations of the offender. Then, the more we meditate upon the true nature of sin, the more deeply must we be impressed with its essential evil even when it is developed only slightly in comparison with the hideous crimes and vices that blacken the pages of history—as, for example, in the careers of a Nero or a Cæsar Borgia. The sensitive conscience does not only feel the exact guilt of its individual offences, but also, and much more, "the exceeding sinfulness of sin." When we consider their times and the state of the society in which they lived, we must feel that neither Augustine nor Bunyan had been so wicked as the intensity of the language of penitence they both employed might lead us to suppose. It is quite foreign to the nature of heartfelt repentance to measure degrees of guilt. In the depth of its shame and humiliation no language of contrition seems to be too strong to give it adequate expression. But this must be entirely spontaneous; it is most unwise to impose it from without in the form of an indiscriminate appeal to abject penitence.

Then it is also to be observed that while the fundamental change described in the New Testament as a new birth cannot well be regarded as a thing of repeated occurrence, we may have occasion for many conversions. Every time we turn into the wrong path we put ourselves under the necessity of turning back if ever we would walk in the right path again. What is that but conversion? It is a pity that we should be hampered by the technicality of a term. This may lead to another kind of error—the error of supposing that if we are once converted we are converted for life, that we have crossed our Rubicon, and cannot recross it. Thus while the necessity of a primary conversion may be exaggerated in addresses to the young, the greater need of subsequent conversions may be neglected in the thoughts of adults. The "converted" person who relies on the one act of his past experience to serve as a talisman for all future time is deluding himself in a most dangerous manner. Can it be asserted that Peter had not been "converted," in the technical sense, when he fell through undue self-confidence, and denied his Master with "oaths and curses?"

Again—a very significant fact—the return is described in positive language. It is a coming back to God, not merely a departure from the old way of sin. The initial impulse towards a

better life springs more readily from the attraction of a new hope than from the repulsion of a loathed evil. The hopeful repentance is exhilarating, while that which is only born of the disgust and horror of sin is dismally depressing. Lurid pictures of evil rarely beget penitence. The "Newgate Calendar" is not to be credited with the reformation of criminals. Even Dante's "Inferno" is no gospel. In prosecuting his mission as the prophet of repentance John the Baptist was not content to declare that the axe was laid at the root of the tree; the pith of his exhortation was found in the glad tidings that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." St. Paul shows that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. Besides, the repentance that is induced by this means is of the best character. It escapes the craven slavishness of fear; it is not a merely selfish shrinking from the lash; it is inspired by the pure love of a worthy end. Only remorse lingers in the dark region of regrets for the past. Genuine repentance always turns a hopeful look towards a better future. It is of little use to exorcise the spirit of evil if the house is not to be tenanted by the spirit of good. Thus the end and purpose of repentance is to be reunited with God.

Following up his general exhortation to return to God, the elegist adds a particular one, in which the process of the new movement is described. It takes the form of a prayer from the heart. The resolution is to lift up the heart with the hands. The erect posture, with the hands stretched out to heaven, which was the Hebrew attitude in prayer, had often been assumed in meaningless acts of formal worship before there was any real approach to God or any true penitence. Now the repentance will be manifested by the reality of the prayer. Let the heart also be lifted up. The true approach to God is an act of the inner life, to which in its entirety—thought, affection, and will—the Jewish metaphor of the heart points.

Lastly, the poet furnishes the returning penitents with the very language of the heart's prayer, which is primarily confession. The doleful fact that God has not pardoned His people is directly stated, but not in the first place. This statement is preceded by a clear and unreserved confession of sin. Repentance must be followed by confession. It is not a private matter concerning the offender alone. Since the offence was directed against another, the amendment must begin with a humble admission of the wrong that has been done. Thus, immediately the prodigal son is met by his father he sobs out his confession;* and St. John assigns confession as an essential preliminary to forgiveness, saying: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."†

CHAPTER XVI.

GRIEVING BEFORE GOD.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 43-54.

As might have been expected, the mourning patriot quickly forsakes the patch of sunshine which lights up a few verses of this elegy. But the vision of it has not come in vain; for it

* Luke. xv. 21.

† 1 John i. 9.

leaves gracious effects to tone the gloomy ideas upon which the meditations of the poet now return, like birds of the night hastening back to their darksome haunts. In the first place, his grief is no longer solitary. It is enlarged in its sympathies so as to take in the sorrows of others. Purely selfish trouble tends to become a mean and sordid thing. If we are not yet freed from our own pain some element of a nobler nature will be imported into it when we can find room for the larger thoughts that the contemplation of the distresses of others arouses. But a greater change than this has taken place. The "man who hath seen affliction" now feels himself to be in the presence of God. Speaking for others as well as for himself he pours out his lamentations before God. In the first part of the elegy he had only mentioned the Divine name as that of his great Antagonist; now it is the name of his close Confidant.

Then the elegist is here giving voice to the people's penitent confession and prayer. This is another feature of the changed situation. An unqualified admission of the truth that the sufferings of Israel are just the merited punishment of the people's sin has come between the complaints with which the poem opens, and the renewed expressions of grief.

Still, when all due allowance is made for these improvements, the renewed outburst of grief is sufficiently dismal. The people are supposed to represent themselves as being hunted down like helpless fugitives, and slain without pity by God, who has wrapped Himself in a mantle of anger, which is as a cloud impenetrable to the prayers of His miserable victims.* This description of their helpless state follows immediately after an outpouring of prayer. It would seem, therefore, that the poet conceived that this particular utterance was hindered from reaching the ear of God. Now in many cases it may be that a feeling such as is here expressed is purely subjective and imaginary. The soul's cry of agony passes out into the night, and dies away into silence, without eliciting a whisper of response. Yet it is not necessary to conclude that the cry is not heard. The closest attention may be the most silent. But, it may be objected, this possibility only aggravates the evil; for it is better not to hear at all than to hear and not to heed. Will any one attribute such stony indifference to God? God may attend, and yet He may not speak to us—speech not being the usual form of Divine response. He may be helping us most effectually in silence, unperceived by us, at the very moment when we imagine that He has completely deserted us. If we were more keenly alive to the signs of His coming we should be less hasty to despair at the failure of our prayers. The priests of Baal may scream, "O Baal, hear us!" from morning to night till their frenzy sinks into despair; but that is no reason why men and women who worship a spiritual God should come to the conclusion that their inability to wrest a sign from heaven is itself a sign of desertion by Him to whom they call. The oracle may be dumb; but the God whom we worship is not limited to the utterance of prophetic voices for the expression of His will. He hears, even if in silence; and, in truth, He also answers, though we are too deaf in our unbelief to discern the still small voice of His Spirit.

But can we say that the idea of the Divine dis-

* iii. 44.

regard of prayer is always and only imaginary? Are the clouds that come between us and God invariably earth-born? Does He never really wrap Himself in the garment of wrath? Surely we dare not say so much. The anger of God is as real as His love. No being can be perfectly holy and not feel a righteous indignation in the presence of sin. But if God is angry, and while He is so, He cannot at the same time be holding friendly intercourse with the people who are provoking His wrath. Then the Divine anger must be as a thick, impervious curtain between the prayers of the sinful and the gracious hearing of God. The universal confession of the need of an atonement is a witness to the perception of this condition by mankind. Whether we are dealing with the crude notions of ancient sacrifice, or with the high thoughts that circle about Calvary, the same spiritual instinct presses for recognition. We may try to reason it down, but it persistently reasserts itself. Most certainly it is not the teaching of Scripture that the only condition of salvation is prayer. The Gospel is not to the effect that we are to be saved by our own petitions. The penitent is taught to feel that without Christ and the cross his prayers are of no avail for his salvation. Even if they knew no respite still they would never atone for sin. Is not this an axiom of evangelical doctrine? Then the prayers that are offered in the old unreconciled condition must fall back on the head of the vain petitioner, unable to penetrate the awful barrier that he has himself caused to be raised between his cries and the heavens where God dwells.

Turning from the contemplation of the hopeless failure of prayer the lament naturally falls into an almost despairing wail of grief. The state of the Jews is painted in the very darkest colours. God has made them as no better than the refuse people cast out of their houses, or the very sweepings of the streets—not fit even to be trampled under foot of men.* This is their position among the nations. The poet seems to be alluding to, the exceptional severity with which the obstinate defenders of Jerusalem had been treated by their exasperated conquerors. The neighbouring tribes had been compelled to succumb beneath the devastating wave of the Babylonian invasion; but since none of them had offered so stubborn a resistance to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar none of them had been punished by so severe a scourge of vengeance. So it has been repeatedly with the unhappy people who have encountered unparalleled persecutions through the long weary ages of their melancholy history. In the days of Antiochus Epiphanes the Jews were the most insulted and cruelly outraged victims of Syrian tyranny. When their long tragedy reached a climax at the final siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the more liberal-minded Roman government laid on them harsh punishments of exile, slavery, torture, and death, such as it rarely inflicted on a fallen foe—for with statesmanlike wisdom the Romans preferred, as a rule, conciliation to extermination; but in the case of this one unhappy city of Jerusalem the almost unique fate of the hated and dreaded city of Carthage was repeated. So it was in the Middle Ages, as “*Ivanhoe*” vividly shows; and so it is to-day in the East of Europe, as the fierce *Juden-hetze* is continually proving. The irony of history is nowhere more apparent than in the

fact that the “favoured” people, the “chosen” people of Jehovah, should have been treated so continuously as “the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples.” As privilege and responsibility always go hand in hand, so also do blessing and suffering—the Jew hated, the Church persecuted, the Christ crucified. We cannot say that this paradox is simply “a mysterious dispensation of Providence;” because in the case of Israel, at all events in the early ages, the unparalleled misery was traced to the abuse of unparalleled favour. But this does not exhaust the mystery, for in the most striking instances innocence suffers. We can have no satisfaction in our view of these contradictions till we see the glory of the martyr’s crown and the even higher glory of the triumph of Christ and His people over failure, agony, insult, and death; but just in proportion as we are able to lift up the eyes of faith to the blessedness of the unseen world, we shall be able to discover that even here and now there is a pain that is better than pleasure, and a shame that is truest glory. These truths, however, are not readily perceived at the time of endurance, when the iron is entering into the soul. The elegist feels the degradations of his people most keenly, and he represents them complaining how their enemies rage at them as with open mouths—belching forth gross insults, shouting curses, like wild beasts ready to devour their hapless victims.* There seems to be nothing in store for them but the terrors of death, the pit of destruction.†

At the contemplation of this extremity of hopeless misery the poet drops the plural number, in which he has been personating his people, as abruptly as he assumed it a few verses earlier, and bewails the dread calamities in his own person.‡ Then, in truly Jeremiah-like fashion, he describes his incessant weeping for the woes of the wretched citizens of Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. The reference to “the daughters of my city”§ seems to be best explained as a figurative expression for the neighbouring places, all of which it would seem had shared in the devastation produced by the great wave of conquest which had overwhelmed the capital. But the previous mention of “the daughter of my people,”|| followed as it is by this phrase about “the daughters of my city,” strikes a deeper note of compassion. These places contained many defenceless women, the indescribable cruelty of whose fate when they fell into the hands of the brutal heathen soldiery was one of the worst features of the whole ghastly scene; and the wretchedness of the once proud city and its dependencies when they were completely overthrown is finely represented so as to appeal most effectually to our sympathy by a metaphor that pictures them as hapless maidens, touching us like Spenser’s piteous picture of the forlorn Una, deserted in the forest and left a prey to its savage denizens. Like Una, too, the daughters in this metaphor claim the chivalry which our English poet has so exquisitely portrayed as awakened even in the breast of a wild animal. The woman of Europe is far removed from her sister in the East, who still follows the ancient type in submitting to the imputation of weakness as a claim for consideration. But this is because Europe has learnt that strength of character—in which woman can be at least the equal of man—is more potent in a community civilised

* iii. 45.

* iii. 46.

† iii. 47.

‡ iii. 48 ff.

§ iii. 51.

|| iii. 48.

in the Christian way than strength of muscle. Where the more brutal forces are let loose the duties of chivalry are always in requisition. Then it is apparent that deference to the claims of women for protection produces a civilising effect in softening the roughness of men. It is difficult to say it to-day in the teeth of the just claims that women are making, and still more difficult in face of what women are now achieving, in spite of many relics of barbarism in the form of unfair restrictions, but yet it must be asserted that the feebleness of femininity—in the old-fashioned sense of the word—pervades these poems, and is their most touching characteristic, so that much of the pathos and beauty of poetry such as that of these elegies is to be traced to representations of woman wronged and suffering and calling for the sympathy of all beholders.

The poet is moved to tears—quite unselfish tears, tears of patriotic grief, tears of compassion for helpless suffering. Here again the modern Anglo-Saxon habit makes it difficult for us to appreciate his conduct as it deserves. We think it a dreadful thing for a man to be seen weeping; and a feeling of shame accompanies such an outburst of unrestrained distress. But surely there are holy tears, and tears which it is an honour for any one to be capable of shedding. If mere callousness is the explanation of dry eyes in view of sorrow, there can be no credit for such a condition. This is not the restraint of tears. Nothing is easier than for the unfeeling not to weep. Nor can it be maintained that it is always necessary to restrain the outward expression of sympathy in accordance with its most natural impulses. Our Lord was strong; yet we could never wish that the evangelist had not had occasion to write the ever memorable sentence, "Jesus wept." Sufferers lose much, not only from lack of sympathy, but also from a shy concealment of the fellow-feeling that is truly experienced. There are seasons of keenest agony, when to weep with those who weep is the only possible expression of brotherly kindness; and this may be a very real act of love, appreciably alleviating suffering. A little courage on the part of Englishmen in daring to weep would knit the ties of brotherhood more closely. At present a chill reserve rather than any actual coldness of heart separates people who might be much more helpful to one another if they could but bring themselves to break down this barrier.

But while the poet is thus expressing his large patriotic grief he cannot forget his own private sorrows. They are all parts of one common woe. So he returns to his personal experience, and adds some graphic details that enable us to picture him in the midst of his misery.* Though he had never provoked the enemy, he was chased like a bird, flung into a dungeon, where a stone was hurled down upon him, and where the water was lying so deep that he was completely submerged. There is no reason to question that definite statements such as these represent the exact experience of the writer. At the first glance they call to our minds the persecutions inflicted on Jeremiah by his own people. But the allusion would be peculiarly inappropriate, and the cases do not quite fit together. The poet has been bewailing the sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Chaldeans, and he seems to identify his own

troubles in the closest way with the general flood of calamities that swept over his nation. It would be quite out of place for him to insert here a reminder of earlier troubles which his own people had inflicted upon him. Besides, the particulars do not exactly agree with what we learn of the prophet's hardships from his own pen. The dungeon into which he was flung was very foul, and he sank in the mire, but it is expressly stated that there was no water in it, and there is no mention of stoning.* There were many sufferers in that dark time of tumult and outrage whose fate was as hard as that of Jeremiah.

A graphic picture like this helps us to imagine the fearful accompaniments of the destruction of Jerusalem much better than any general summary. As we gaze at this one scene among the many miseries that followed the siege—the poet hunted out and run down, his capture and conveyance to the dungeon, apparently without a shadow of a trial, the danger of drowning and the misery of standing in the water that had gathered in a place so utterly unfit for human habitation, the needless additional cruelty of the stone-throwing—there rises before us a picture which cannot but impress our minds with the unutterable wretchedness of the sufferers from such a calamity as the siege of Jerusalem. Of course there must have been some special reason for the exceptionally severe treatment of the poet. What this was we cannot tell. If the same patriotic spirit burned in his soul in the midst of the war as we now find at the time of later reflection, it would be most reasonable to conjecture that the ardent lover of his country had done or said something to irritate the enemy, and possibly that as he devoted his poetic gifts at a subsequent time to lamenting the overthrow of his city, he may have employed them with a more practical purpose among the battle scenes to write some inspiring martial ode in which we may be sure he would not have spared the ruthless invader. But then he says his persecution was without a cause. He may have been undeservedly suspected of acting as a spy. It is only by chance that now and again we get a glimpse of the backwaters of a great flood such as that which was now devastating the land of Judah; most of the dreary scene is shrouded in gloom.

Lastly, we must not fail to remember, in reading these expressions of patriotic and personal grief, that they are the outpourings of the heart of the poet before God. They are all addressed to God's ear; they are all part of a prayer. Thus they illustrate the way in which prayer takes the form of confiding in God. It is a great relief to be able simply to tell Him everything. Perhaps, however, here we may detect a note of complaint; but if so it is not a note of rebellion or of unbelief. Although the evils from which the elegist and his people are suffering so grievously are attributed to God in the most unpromising manner, the writer does not hesitate to look to God for deliverance. Thus in the very midst of his lamentations he says that his weeping is to continue "till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven."† He will not cease weeping until this happens; but he does not expect to have to spend all the remainder of his days in tears. He is assured that God will hear, and answer, and deliver. The time of the Divine response is quite unknown to him; it may

* iii. 52 ff.

* Jer. xxxviii. 6.

iii. 50.

be still far off, and there may be much weary waiting to be endured first. But it will come, and if no one can tell how long the interval of trial may be, so also no one can say but that the deliverance may arrive suddenly and with a surprise of mercy. Thus the poet weeps on, but in undying hope.

This is the right attitude of the Christian mourner. We cannot penetrate the mystery of God's times; but that they are in His own hands is not to be denied. Therefore the test of faith is often given in the necessity for indefinite waiting. To the man who trusts God there is always a future. Whatever such a man may have to endure he should find a place in his plaint for the word "until." He is not plunged into everlasting night. He has but to endure until the day dawn.

CHAPTER XVII.

DE PROFUNDIS.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 55-66.

As this third elegy—the richest and the most elaborate of the five that constitute the Book of Lamentations—draws to a close it retains its curious character of variability, not aiming at any climax, but simply winding on till its threefold acrostics are completed by the limits of the Hebrew alphabet, like a river that is monotonous in the very succession of its changes, now flowing through a dark gorge, then rippling in clear sunlight, and again plunging into gloomy caverns. The beauty and brightness of this very variegated poem are found at its centre. Sadder thoughts follow. But these are not so wholly complaining as the opening passages had been. There is one thread of continuity that may be traced right through the series of changes which occupy the latter part of the poem. The poet having once turned to the refuge of prayer never altogether forsakes it. The meditations as much as the petitions that here occur are all directed to God.

A peculiarity of the last portion of the elegy that claims special attention is the interesting reminiscence with which the poet finds encouragement for his present prayers. He is recalling the scenes of that most distressing period of his life, the time when he had been cast into a flooded dungeon. If ever he had come near to death it must have been then: though his life was spared the misery of his condition had been extreme. While in this most wretched situation the persecuted patriot cried to God for help, and as he now recollects for his present encouragement, he received a distinct and unmistakable answer. The scene is most impressive. As it shapes itself to his memory, the victim of tyranny is in *the lowest dungeon*. This phrase suggests the thought of the awful Hebrew Sheol. So dark was his experience and so near was the sufferer to death, it seems to him as though he had been indeed plunged down into the very abode of the dead. Yet here he found utterance for prayer. It was the prayer of utter extremity, almost the last wild cry of a despairing soul, yet not quite, for that is no prayer at all, all prayer requiring some real faith, if only as a grain of mustard seed. Moreover, the poet states that he called upon the *name* of God.

Now in the Bible the name always stands for the attributes which it connotes. To call on God's name is to make mention of some of His known and revealed characteristics. The man who will do this is more than one "feeling after God;" he has a definite conception of the nature and disposition of the Being to whom he is addressing himself. Thus it happens that old, familiar ideas of God, as He had been known in the days of light and joy, rise up in the heart of the miserable man, and awaken a longing desire to seek the help of One so great and good and merciful. Just in proportion to the fulness of the meaning of the name of God as it is conceived by us, will our prayers win definiteness of aim and strength of wing. The altar to "an unknown god" can excite but the feeblest and vaguest devotion. Inasmuch as our Lord has greatly enriched the contents of the name of God by His full revelation of the Divine Father, to us Christians there has come a more definite direction and a more powerful impulse for prayer. Even though this is a prayer *de profundis* it is an enlightened prayer. We may believe that, like a star seen from the depths of a well which excludes the glare of day, the significance of the sacred Name shone out to the sufferer with a beauty never before perceived when he looked up to heaven from the darkness of his pit of misery.

It has been suggested that in this passage the elegist is following the sixty-ninth psalm, and that perhaps that psalm is his own composition and the expression of the very prayer to which he is here referring. At all events, the psalm exactly fits the situation; and therefore it may be taken as a perfect illustration of the kind of prayer alluded to. The psalmist is "in deep mire, where there is no standing;" he has "come into deep waters, where the floods overthrow" him; he is persecuted by enemies who hate him "without a cause;" he has been weeping till his eyes have failed. Meanwhile he has been waiting for God, in prayers mingled with confessions. It is his zeal for God's house that has brought him so near to death. He beseeches God that the flood may not be allowed to overwhelm him, nor "the pit shut her mouth upon him." He concludes with an invocation of curses upon the heads of his enemies. All these as well as some minor points agree very closely with our poet's picture of his persecutions and the prayer he here records.

Read in the light of the elegist's experience, such a prayer as that of the psalm cannot be taken as a model for daily devotion. It is a pity that our habitual use of the Psalter should encourage this application of it. The result is mischievous in several ways. It tends to make our worship unreal, because the experience of the psalmist, even when read metaphorically, as it was probably intended to be read, is by no means a type of the normal condition of human life. Besides, in so far as we bring ourselves to sympathise with this piteous outcry of a distressed soul, we reduce our worship to a melancholy plaint, when it should be a joyous anthem of praise. At the same time, we unconsciously temper the language we quote with the less painful feelings of our own experience, so that its force is lost upon us.

Yet the psalm is of value as a revelation of a soul's agony relieved by prayer; and there are occasions when its very words can be repeated

by men and women who are indeed overwhelmed by trouble. If we do not spoil the occasional by attempting to make it habitual it is wonderful to see how rich the Bible is in utterances to suit all cases and all conditions. Such an outpouring of a distressed heart as the elegist hints at and the psalmist illustrates, is itself full of profound significance. The stirring of a soul to its depths is a revelation of its depths. This revelation prevents us from taking petty views of human nature. No one can contemplate the Titanic struggle of Laocoön or the immeasurable grief of Niobe without a sense of the tragic greatness of which human life is capable. We live so much on the surface that we are in danger of forgetting that life is not always a superficial thing. But when a volcano bursts out of the quiet plain of everyday existence, we are startled into the perception that there must be hidden fires which we may not have suspected before. And, further, when the soul in its extremity is seen to be turning for refuge to God, the revelation of its Gethsemane gives a new meaning to the very idea of prayer. Here is prayer indeed, and at the sight of such a profound reality we are shamed into doubting whether we have ever begun to pray at all, so stiff and chill do our utterances to the Unseen now appear to be in comparison with this Jacob-like wrestling.

Immediately after mentioning the fact of his prayer the elegist adds that this was heard by God. His cry rose up from "the lowest dungeon" and reached the heights of heaven. And yet we cannot credit this to the inherent vigour of prayer. If a petition can thus wing its way to heaven, that is because it is of heavenly origin. There is no difficulty in making air to rise above water; the difficulty is to sink it; and if any could be taken to the bottom of the sea, the greater the depth descended the swifter would it shoot up. Since all true prayer is an inspiration it cannot spend itself until it has, so to speak, restored the equilibrium by returning to its natural sphere. But the elegist puts the case another way. In His great condescension God stoops to the very lowest depths to find one of His distressed children. It is not hard to make the prayer of the dungeon reach the ear of God, because God is in the dungeon. He is most near when He is most needed.

The prayer was more than heard; it was answered—there was a Divine voice in response to this cry to God, a voice that reached the ear of the desolate prisoner in the silence of his dungeon. It consisted of but two words, but those two words were clear and unmistakable, and quite sufficient to satisfy the listener. The voice said, "Fear not."* That was enough.

Shall we doubt the reality of the remarkable experience that the elegist here records? Or can we explain it away by reference to the morbid condition of the mind of a prisoner enduring the punishment of solitary confinement? It is said that this unnatural punishment tends to develop insanity in its miserable victims. But the poet is now reviewing the occurrence, which made so deep an impression on his mind at the time, in the calm of later reflection; and evidently *he* has no doubt of its reality. It has nothing in it of the wild fancy of a disordered brain. Lunacy raves; this simple message is calm. And it is just such a message as God might be expected

to give if He spoke at all—just like Him, we may say. To this remark some doubting critic may reply, "Exactly; and therefore the more likely to have been imagined by the expectant worshipper." But such an inference is not psychologically correct. The reply is not in harmony with the tone of the prayer, but directly opposed to it. Agony and terror cannot generate an assurance of peace and safety. The poison does not secrete its own antidote. Here is an indication of the presence of another voice, because the words breathe another spirit. Besides, this is not an unparalleled experience.

Most frequently, no doubt, the answer to prayer is not vocal, and yet the reality of it may not be any the less certain to the seeking soul. It may be most definite, although it comes in a deed rather than in a word. Then the grateful recipient can exclaim with the psalmist—

"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles."*

Here is an answer, but not a spoken one, only an action, in saving from trouble. In other cases, however, the reply approaches nearer the form of a message from heaven. When we remember that God is our Father the wonder is not that at rare intervals these voices have been heard, but rather that they are so infrequent. It is so easy to become the victim of delusions that some caution is requisite to assure ourselves of the existence of Divine utterances. The very idea of the occurrence of such phenomena is discredited by the fact that those persons who profess most eagerly to have heard supernatural voices are commonly the subjects of hysteria; and when the voices become frequent this fact is taken by physicians as a symptom of approaching insanity. Among semi-civilised people madness is supposed to be closely allied to inspiration. The *mantis* is not far from the mad man. Such a man is not the better off for the march of civilisation. The ancients would have honoured him as a prophet; we shut him up in a lunatic asylum. But these discouraging considerations do not exhaust the question. Delusions are not in themselves disproofs of the existence of the occurrences they emulate. Each case must be taken on its own merits; and when, as in that which is now under our consideration, the character of the incident points to a conviction of its solid reality, it is only a mark of narrowness of thought to refuse to lift it out of the category of idle fancies.

But, quite apart from the question of the sounding of Divine voices in the bodily ear, the more important truth to be considered is that in some way, if only by spiritual impression, God does most really speak to His children, and that He speaks now as surely as He spoke in the days of Israel. We have no new prophets and apostles who can give us fresh revelations in the form of additions to our Bible. But that is not what is meant. The elegist did not receive a statement of doctrine in answer to his prayer, nor, on this occasion, even help for the writing of his inspired poetry. The voice to which he here alludes was of quite a different character.

This was in the olden times; but if then, why not also now? Evidently the elegist regarded it as a rare and wonderful occurrence—a single experience to which he looked back in after

* iii. 57.

* Psalm xxxiv. 6.

years with the interest one feels in a vivid recollection which rises like a mountain, clean cut against the sky, above the mists that so quickly gather on the low plains of the uneventful past. Perhaps it is only in one of the crises of life that such an indubitable message is sent—when the soul is in the lowest dungeon, *in extremis*, crying out of the darkness, helpless if not yet hopeless, overwhelmed, almost extinguished. But if we listened for it, who can tell but that the voice might not be so rare? We do not believe in it; therefore we do not hear it. Or the noise of the world's great loom and the busy thoughts of our own hearts drown the music that still floats down from heaven to ears that are tuned to catch its notes; for it does not come in thunder, and we must ourselves be still if we would hear the still small voice, inwardly still, still in soul, stifling the chatter of self, stopping our ears to the din of the world. There are those to-day who tell us with calm assurance, not at all in the visionary's falsetto notes, that they have known just what is here described by the poet—in the silence of a mountain valley, in the quiet of a sick chamber, even in the noisy crowd at a railway station.

When this is granted it is still well for us to remember that we are not dependent for Divine consolation on voices which to many must ever be as dubious as they are rare. This short message of two words is in effect the essence of teachings that can be gathered as freely from almost every page of the Bible as flowers from a meadow in May. We have the "more sure word of prophecy," and the burden of it is the same as the message of the voice that comforted the poet in his dungeon.

That message is wholly reassuring—"Fear not." So said God to the patriarch: "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;"* and to His people through the prophet of the restoration: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob;"† and Jesus to His disciples in the storm: "Be of good cheer: it is I: be not afraid";‡ and our Lord again in His parting address: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful";§ and the glorified Christ to His terrified friend John, when He laid His right hand on him with the words: "Fear not; I am the first and the last; and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever more, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."|| This is the word that God is continually speaking to His faint-hearted children. When "the burthen of the mystery," and

"the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world"

oppress, when the greater sorrows threaten to crush outright, listening for the voice of God, we may hear the message of love from a Father's heart as though spoken afresh to each of us; for we have but to acquaint ourselves with Him to be at peace.

The elegist does not recall this scene from his past life merely in order to indulge in the pleasures of memory—generally rather melancholy pleasures, and even mocking if they are in sharp contrast to the present. His object is to find encouragement for renewed hope in the efficacy of prayer. In the complaint that he has put

into the mouth of His people He has just been depicting the failure of prayer. But now he feels that if for a time God has wrapped Himself in a mantle of wrath this cannot be for ever, for He who was so gracious to the cry of His servant on that ever-memorable occasion will surely attend again to the appeal of distress. This is always the greatest encouragement for seeking help from God. It is difficult to find much satisfaction in what is called with an awkward inconsequence of diction the "philosophy of prayer"; the spirit of philosophy is so wholly different from the spirit of prayer. The great justification for prayer is the experience of prayer. It is only the prayerless man who is wholly sceptical on this subject. The man of prayer cannot but believe in prayer; and the more he prays and the oftener he turns to this refuge in all times of need the fuller is his assurance that God hears and answers him.

Considering how God acted as his advocate when he was in danger in the earlier crisis, and then redeemed his life, the poet points to this fact as a plea in his new necessity.* God will not desert the cause He has adopted. Men feel a peculiar interest in those whom they have already helped, an interest that is stronger than the sense of gratitude, for we are more attracted to our dependants than to our benefactors. If God shares this feeling, how strongly must He be drawn to us by His many former favours! The language of the elegist gains a great enrichment of meaning when read in the light of the Christian Gospel. In a deep sense, of which he could have had but the least glimmering of apprehension, we can appeal to God as the Redeemer of our life, for we can take the Cross of Christ as our plea. St. Paul makes use of this strongest of all arguments when He urges that if God gave His Son, and if Christ died for us, all other needful blessings, since they cannot involve so great a sacrifice, will surely follow. Accordingly, we can pray in the language of the "Dies Iræ"—

"Wearily for me Thou soughtest,
On the Cross my life Thou boughtest,
Lose not all for which Thou wroughtest."

Rising from the image of the advocate to that of the magistrate the distressed man begs God to judge his cause.† He would have God look at his enemies—how they wrong him, insult him, make him the theme of their jesting songs.‡

It would have been more to our taste if the poem had ended here, if there had been no remaining letters in the Hebrew alphabet to permit the extension of the acrostics beyond the point we have now reached. We cannot but feel that its tone is lowered at the close. The writer here proceeds to heap imprecations on the heads of his enemies. It is vain for some commentators to plead the weak excuse that the language is "prophetic." This is certainly more than the utterance of a prediction. No unprejudiced reader can deny that it reveals a desire that the oppressors may be blighted and blasted with ruin, and even if the words were only a foretelling of a divinely-decreed fate they would imply a keen sense of satisfaction in the prospect, which they describe as something to be gloated over. We cannot expect this Jewish patriot to anticipate our Lord's intercession and excuse for His enemies. Even St. Paul so far

* Gen. xv. 1. † Isa. xli. 14. ‡ Mark vi. 50.
§ John xiv. 27. || Rev. i. 17, 18.

* iii. 58.

† iii. 59.

‡ iii. 60-3.

forgot himself as to treat the High Priest in a very different manner from his Master's behaviour. But we may see here one of the worst effects of tyranny—the dark passion of revenge that it rouses in its victims. The provocation was maddening, and not only of a private nature. Think of the situation—the beloved city sacked and destroyed, the sacred temple a heap of smouldering ruins, village homesteads all over the hills of Judah wrecked and deserted; slaughter, outrage, unspeakable wrongs endured by wives and maidens, little children starved to death. Is it wonderful that the patriot's temper was not the sweetest when he thought of the authors of such atrocities? There is no possibility of denying the fact—the fierce fires of Hebrew hatred for the oppressors of the much-suffering race here burst into a flame, and towards the end of this finest of elegies we read the dark imprecation, "Thy curse upon them!"*

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONTRASTS.

LAMENTATIONS iv. 1-12.

IN form the fourth elegy is slightly different from each of its predecessors. Following the characteristic plan of the Book of Lamentations, it is an acrostic of twenty-two verses arranged in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. In it we meet with the same curious transposition of two letters that is found in the second and third elegies; it has also the peculiar metre of Hebrew elegaic poetry—the very lengthy line, broken into two unequal parts. But, like the first and second, it differs from the third elegy, which repeats the acrostic letters in three successive lines, in only using each acrostic once at the beginning of a fresh verse; and it differs from all the three first elegies, which are arranged in triplets, in having only two lines in each verse.

This poem is very artistically constructed in the balancing of its ideas and phrases. The opening section of it, from the beginning to the twelfth verse, consists of a pair of duplicate passages—the first from verse one to verse six, the second from verse seven to verse eleven, the twelfth verse bringing this part of the poem to a close by adding a reflection on the common subject of the twin passages. Thus the parallelism which we usually meet with in individual verses is here extended to two series of verses, we might perhaps say, two *stanzas*, except that there is no such formal division.

In each of these elaborately-wrought sections the elegist brings out a rich array of similes to enforce the tremendous contrast between the original condition of the people of Jerusalem and their subsequent wretchedness. The details of the two descriptions follow closely parallel lines, with sufficient diversity, both in idea and in illustration, to avoid tautology and to serve to heighten the general effect by mutual comparisons. Both passages open with images of beautiful and costly natural objects to which the *élite* of Jerusalem are compared. Next comes the violent contrast of their state after the overthrow of the city. Then turning aside to more distant scenes, each of which is more or less repellent—

the lair of wild beasts in the first case, in the second the battle-field—the poet describes the much more degraded and miserable condition of his people. Both passages direct especial attention to the fate of children—the first to their starvation, the second to a perfectly ghastly scene. At this point in each part the previous daintiness of the upbringing of the more refined classes is contrasted with the condition of degradation worse than that of savages to which they have been reduced. Each passage concludes with a reference to those deeper facts of the case which make it a sign of the wrath of heaven against exceptionally guilty sinners.

The elegist begins with an evident allusion to the consequences of the burning of the temple, which we learn from the history was effected by the Babylonian general Nebuzar-adan.* The costly splendour with which this temple at Jerusalem was decorated allowed of a rare glitter of gold, such as Josephus describes when writing of the later temple; gold not like that of the domes of St. Mark's, mellowed by the climate of Venice to a sober depth of hue, but all ablaze with dazzling radiance. The first effect of the smoke of a great conflagration would be to cloud and soil this somewhat raw magnificence, so that the choice gold became dull. That the precious stones stolen from the temple treasury would be flung carelessly about the streets, as our Authorised Version would seem to suggest, is not to be supposed in the case of the sack of a city by a civilised army, whatever might happen if a Vandal host swept through it. "The stones of the sanctuary,"† however, might be the stones with which the building had been constructed. Still, even with this interpretation the statement seems very improbable that the invaders would take the trouble to cart these huge blocks about the city in order to distribute them in heaps at all the street corners. We are driven to the conclusion that the poet is speaking metaphorically, that he is meaning the Jews themselves, or perhaps the more favoured classes, "the noble sons of Zion" of whom he writes openly in the next verse.‡ This interpretation is confirmed when we consider the comparison with the parallel passage, which starts at once with a reference to the "princes."§ It seems likely then that the gold that has been so sullied also represents the choicer part of the people. The writer deplores the destruction of his beloved sanctuary, and the image of that calamity is in his mind at the present time; and yet it is not this that he is most deeply lamenting. He is more concerned with the fate of his people. The patriot loves the very soil of his native land, the loyal citizen the very streets and stones of his city. But if such a man is more than a dreamer or a sentimentalist, flesh and blood must mean infinitely more to him than earth and stones. The ruin of a city is something else than the destruction of its buildings; an earthquake or a fire may effect this, and yet, like Chicago, the city may rise again in greater splendour. The ruin that is most deplorable is the ruin of human lives.

This somewhat aristocratic poet, the mouth-piece of an aristocratic age, compares the sons of the Jewish nobility to purest gold. Yet he tells us that they are treated as common earthen vessels, perhaps meaning in contrast to the ves-

* iii. 65.

* 2 Kings xxv. 9.
† iv. 1.

‡ iv. 2.
§ iv. 7.

sels of precious metal used in the palaces of the great. They are regarded as of no more value than potter's work, though formerly they had been prized as the dainty art of a goldsmith. This first statement only treats of insult and humiliation. But the evil is worse. The jackals that he knows must be prowling about the deserted ruins of Jerusalem even while he writes suggest a strange, wild image to the poet's mind.* These fierce creatures suckle their young, though not in the tame manner of domestic animals. It is singular that the nurture of princes amid the refinements of wealth and luxury should be compared to the feeding of their cubs by scavengers of the wilderness. But our thoughts are thus directed to the wide extent, the universal exercise of maternal instincts throughout the animal world, even among the most savage and homeless creatures. Startling indeed is it to think that such instincts should ever fail among men, or even that circumstances should ever hinder the natural performance of the functions to which they point with imperious urgency. Although the second passage tells of the violent reversal of the natural feelings of maternity under the maddening influence of famine, here we read how starvation has simply stopped the tender ministry which mothers render to their infants, with a vague hint at some cruelty on the part of the Jewish mothers. A comparison with the supposed conduct of ostriches in leaving their eggs suggests that this is negative cruelty; their hearts being frozen with agony, the wretched mothers lose all interest in their children. But then there is not food for them. The calamities of the times have stanchied the mother's milk; and there is no bread for the older children.† It is the extreme reversal of their fortunes that makes the misery of the children of princely homes most acute; even those who do not suffer the pangs of hunger are flung down to the lowest depths of wretchedness. The members of the aristocracy have been accustomed to live luxuriously; now they wander about the streets devouring whatever they can pick up. In the old days of luxury they used to recline on scarlet couches; now they have no better bed than the filthy dunghill.‡

The passage concludes with a reflection on the general character of this dreadful condition of Israel.§ It must be closely connected with the sins of the people. The drift of the context would lead us to judge that the poet does not mean to compare the guilt of Jerusalem with that of Sodom, but rather the fate of the two cities. The punishment of Israel is greater than that of Sodom. But this is punishment; and the odious comparison would not be made unless the sin had been of the blackest dye. Thus in this elegy the calamities of Jerusalem are again traced back to the ill-doings of her people. The awful fate of the cities of the plain stands out in the ancient narrative as the exceptional punishment of exceptional wickedness. But now in the race for a first place in the history of doom Jerusalem has broken the record. Even Sodom has been eclipsed in the headlong course by the city once most favoured by heaven. It seems well-nigh impossible. What could be worse than total destruction by fire from heaven? The elegist considers that there are two points in the fate of Jerusalem that confer a gloomy pre-

eminence in misery. The doom of Sodom was sudden, and man had no hand in it; but Jerusalem fell into the hands of man—a calamity which David judged to be worse than falling into the hands of God; and she had to endure a long, lingering agony.

Passing on to the consideration of the parallel section, we see that the author follows the same lines, though with considerable freshness of treatment. Still directing especial attention to the tremendous change in the fortunes of the aristocracy, he begins again by describing the splendour of their earlier state. This had been advertised to all eyes by the very complexion of their countenances. Unlike the toilers who were necessarily bronzed by working under a southern sun, these delicately nurtured persons had been able to preserve fair skins in the shady seclusion of their cool palaces, so that in the hyperbole of the poem they could be described as "purer than snow" and "whiter than milk."* Yet they had no sickly pallor. Their health had been well attended to; so that they were also ruddy as "corals," while their dark hair† glistened "like sapphires." But now see them! Their faces are "darker than blackness."‡ We need not enquire after a literal explanation of an expression which is in harmony with the extravagance of Oriental language, although doubtless exposure to the weather, and the grime and smoke of the scenes these children of luxury had passed through, must have had a considerable effect on their effeminate countenances. The language here is evidently figurative. So it is throughout the passage. The whole aspect of the lives and fortunes of these delicately nurtured lordlings has been reversed. They tell their story by the gloom of their countenances and by the shrivelled appearance of their bodies. They can no longer be recognised in the streets, so piteous a change have their misfortunes wrought in them. Withered and wizened, they are reduced to skin and bone by sheer famine. Sufferers from such continuous calamities as these fallen princes are passing through are treated to a worse fate than that which overtook their brethren who fell in the war. The sword is better than hunger. The victims of war, stricken down in the heat of battle but in the midst of plenty, so that they leave the fruits of the field behind them untouched because no longer needed,§ are to be counted happy in being taken from the evil to come.

The gruesome horror of the next scene is beyond description.|| More than once history has had to record the absolute extinction, nay, we must say the insane reversal, of maternal instincts under the influence of hunger. We could not believe it possible if we did not know that it had occurred. It is a degradation of what we hold to be most sacred in human nature; perhaps it is only possible where human nature has been degraded already, for we must not forget that in the present case the women who are driven below the level of she-wolves are not chil-

* iv. 7.

† iv. 7. "Hair." According to a slight emendation of the text recommended by recent criticism.

‡ iv. 8.

§ So perhaps we should understand ver. 9, applying the last clause to the fallen warriors. In the Revised Version, however, this is rendered so as to refer to the famished people who pine away for lack of the fruits of the earth. Yet another rendering is "fade away. . . like the growth of the fields."

|| iv. 10.

* iv. 3.

† iv. 4.

‡ iv. 5.

§ iv. 6.

dren of nature, but the daughters of an effete civilisation who have been nursed in the lap of luxury. This is the climax. Imagination itself could scarcely go further. And yet according to his custom throughout, the elegist attributes these calamities of his people to the anger of God. Such things seem to indicate a very "fury" of Divine wrath; the anger must be fierce indeed to kindle such "a fire in Zion."* But now the very foundations of the city are destroyed even that terrible thirst for retribution must be satisfied.

These are thoughts which we as Christians do not care to entertain; and yet it is in the New Testament that we read that "our God is a consuming fire;"† and it is of our Lord that John the Baptist declares: "He will thoroughly purge His threshing-floor."‡ If God is angry at all His anger cannot be light; for no action of His is feeble or ineffectual. The subsequent restoration of Israel shows that the fires to which the elegist here calls our attention were purgatorial. This fact must profoundly affect our view of their character. Still they are very real, or the Book of Lamentations would not have been written.

In view of the whole situation so graphically portrayed by means of the double line of illustrations the poet concludes this part of his elegy with a device that reminds us of the function of the chorus in the Greek drama. We see the kings of all other nations in amazement at the fate of Jerusalem.§ The mountain city had the reputation of being an impregnable fortress, at least so her fond citizens imagined. But now she has fallen. It is incredible! The news of this wholly unexpected disaster is supposed to send a shock through foreign courts. We are reminded of the blow that stunned St. Jerome when a rumour of the fall of Rome reached the studious monk in his quiet retreat at Bethlehem. Men can tell that a severe storm has been raging out in the Atlantic if they see unusually great rollers breaking on the Cornish crags. How huge a calamity must that be the mere echo of which can produce a startling effect in far countries! But could these kings really be so astonished, seeing that Jerusalem had been captured twice before? The poet's language rather points to the overweening pride and confidence of the Jews, and it shows how great the shock to them must have been since they could not but regard it as a wonder to the world. Such then is the picture drawn by our poet with the aid of the utmost artistic skill in bringing out its striking effects. Now before we turn away from it let us ask ourselves wherein its true significance may be said to lie. This is a study in black and white. The very language is such; and when we come to consider the lessons that language sets forth with so much sharpness and vigour, we shall see that they too partake of the same character.

The force of contrasts—that is the first and most obvious characteristic of the scene. We are very familiar with the heightening of effects by this means, and it is needless to repeat the trite lessons that have been derived from the application of it to life. We know that none suffer so keenly from adversity as those who were once very prosperous. Marius in the Mamer-

tine dungeon, Napoleon at St. Helena, Nebuchadnezzar among the beasts, Dives in Hell, are but notorious illustrations of what we may all see on the smaller canvas of every-day life. Great as are the hardships of the children of the "slums," it is not to them, but to the unhappy victims of a violent change of circumstances, that the burden of poverty is most heavy. We have seen this principle illustrated repeatedly in the Book of Lamentations. But now may we not go behind it, and lay hold of something more than an indubitable psychological law? While looking only at the reversals of fortune which may be witnessed on every hand, we are tempted to hold life to be little better than a gambling bout with high stakes and desperate play. Further consideration, however, should teach us that the stakes are not so high as they appear; that is to say, that the chances of the world do not so profoundly affect our fate as surface views would lead us to suppose. Such things as the pursuit of mere sensation, the life of external aims, the surrender to the excitement of the moment, are doubtless subject to the vicissitudes of contrast; but it is the teaching of our Lord that the higher pursuits are free from these evils. If the treasure is in heaven no thief can steal it, no moth or rust can corrupt it; and therefore, since where the treasure is there will the heart be also, it is possible to keep the heart in peace even among the changes that upset a purely superficial life with earthquake shocks. Sincere as is the lament of the elegist over the fate of his people, a subtle thread of irony seems to run through his language. Possibly it is quite unconscious; but if so it is the more significant, for it is the irony of fact which cannot be excluded by the simplest method of statement. It suggests that the grandeur which could be so easily turned to humiliation must have been somewhat tawdry at best.

But unhappily the fall of the pampered youth of Jerusalem was not confined to a reversal of external fortune. The elegist has been careful to point out that the miseries they endured were the punishments of their sins. Then there had been an earlier and much greater collapse. Before any foreign enemy had appeared at her gates the city had succumbed to a fatal foe bred within her own walls. Luxury had undermined the vigour of the wealthy; vice had blackened the beauty of the young. There is a fine gold of character which will be sullied beyond recognition when the foul vapours of the pit are permitted to break out upon it. The magnificence of Solomon's temple is poor and superficial in comparison with the beauty of young souls endowed with intellectual and moral gifts, like jewels of rarest worth. Man is not treated in the Bible as a paltry creature. Was he not made in the image of God? Jesus would not have us despise our own native worth. Hope and faith come from a lofty view of human nature and its possibilities. Souls are not swine; and therefore by all the measure of their superiority to swine souls are worth saving. The shame and sorrow of sin lie just in this fact, that it is so foul a degradation of so fair a thing as human nature. Here is the contrast that heightens the tragedy of lost souls. But then we may add, in its reversal this same contrast magnifies the glory of redemption—from so deep a pit does Christ bring back His ransomed, to so great a height does He raise them!

* iv. 11.
† Heb. xii. 29.

‡ Matt. iii. 12.
§ iv. 12.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEPERS.

LAMENTATIONS iv. 13-16.

PASSING from the fate of the princes to that of the prophets and priests, we come upon a vividly dramatic scene in the streets of Jerusalem amid the terror and confusion that precede the final act of the national tragedy. The doom of the city is attributed to the crimes of her religious leaders, whose true characters are now laid bare. The citizens shrink from the guilty men with the loathing felt for lepers, and shriek to them to depart, calling them unclean, and warning them not to touch any one by the way, because there is blood upon them. Dreading the awful treatment measured out to the victims of lynch-law, they stagger through the streets in a state of bewilderment, and stumble like blind men. Fugitives and vagabonds, with the mark of Cain upon them, driven out at the gates by the impatient mob, they can find no refuge even in foreign lands, for none of the nations will receive them.

We do not know whether the poet is here describing actual events, or whether this is an imaginary picture designed to express his own feelings with regard to the persons concerned. The situation is perfectly natural, and what is narrated may very well have happened just as it is described. But if it is not history it is still a revelation of character, a representation of what the writer knows to be the conduct of the moral lepers, and their deserts; and as such it is most suggestive.

In the first place there is much significance in the fact that the overthrow of Jerusalem is unhesitatingly charged to the account of the sins of her prophets and priests. These once venerated men are not merely no longer protected by the sanctity of their offices from the accusations that are brought against the laity; they are singled out for a charge of exceptionally heinous wickedness which is regarded as the root cause of all the troubles that have fallen upon the Jews. The second elegy had affirmed the failure of the prophets and the vanity of their visions.* This new and stronger accusation reads like a reminiscence of Jeremiah, who repeatedly speaks of the sins of the clerical class and the mischief resulting therefrom.† Evidently the terrible truth the prophet dwelt upon so much was felt by a disciple of his school to be of the most serious consequence.

The accusation is of the very gravest character. These religious leaders are charged with murder. If the elegist is recording historical occurrences he may be alluding to riots in which the feuds of rival factions had issued in bloodshed; or he may have had information of private acts of assassination. His language points to a condition in Jerusalem similar to that which was found in Rome at the Fifteenth Century, when popes and cardinals were the greatest criminals. The crimes were aggravated by the fact that the victims selected were the "righteous," perhaps men of the Jeremiah party, who had been persecuted by the officials of the State religion. But quite apart from these dark and

tragic events, the record of which has not been preserved, if the wicked policy of their clergy had brought down on the heads of the citizens of Jerusalem the mass of calamities that accompanied the siege of the city by the Babylonians, this policy was in itself a cause of great bloodshed. The men who invited the ruin of their city were in reality the murderers of all who perished in that calamity. We know from Jeremiah's statements on the subject that the false, time-serving, popular prophets were deceivers of the people, who allayed alarm by means of lies, saying "peace, peace; when there was no peace."* When the deception was discovered their angry dupes would naturally hold them responsible for the results of their wickedness.

The sin of these religious leaders of Israel consists essentially in betraying a sacred trust. The priest is in charge of the *Torah*—traditional or written; he must have been unfaithful to his law or he could not have led his people astray. If the prophet's claims are valid this man is the messenger of Jehovah, and therefore he must have falsified his message in order to delude his audience; if, however, he has not himself heard the Divine voice he is no better than a dervish, and in pretending to speak with the authority of an ambassador from heaven he is behaving as a miserable charlatan. In the case now before us the motive for the practice of deceit is very evident. It is thirst for popularity. Truth, right, God's will—these imperial authorities count for nothing, because the favour of the people is reckoned as everything. No doubt there are times when the temptation to descend to untruthfulness in the discharge of a public function is peculiarly pressing. When party feeling is roused, or when a mad panic has taken possession of a community, it is exceedingly difficult to resist the current and maintain what one knows to be right in conflict with the popular movement. But in its more common occurrence this treachery cannot plead any such excuse. That truth should be trampled under foot and souls endangered merely to enable a public speaker to refresh his vanity with the music of applause is about the most despicable exhibition of selfishness imaginable. If a man who has been set in a place of trust prostitutes his privileges simply to win admiration for his oratory, or at most in order to avoid the discomfort of unpopularity or the disappointment of neglect, his sin is unpardonable.

The one form of unfaithfulness on the part of these religious leaders of Israel of which we are specially informed is their refusal to warn their reckless fellow-citizens of the approach of danger, or to bring home to their hearers' consciences the guilt of the sin for which the impending doom was the just punishment. They are the prototypes of those writers and preachers who smooth over the unpleasant facts of life. It is not easy for any one to wear the mantle of Elijah, or echo the stern desert voice of John the Baptist. Men who covet popularity do not care to be reckoned pessimists; and when the gloomy truth is not flattering to their hearers they are sorely tempted to pass on to more congenial topics. This was apparent in the Deistic optimism that almost stifled spiritual life during the Eighteenth Century. Our age is far from being optimistic; and yet the same temptation threatens to smother religion to-day. In

* ii. 9, 14.

† Jer. vi. 13; viii. 10; xxiii. 11, 14; xxvi. 7 ff.

* Jer. vi. 14; viii. 11.

an aristocratic age the sycophant flatters the great; in a democratic age he flatters the people—who are then in fact the great. The peculiar danger of our own day is that the preacher should simply echo popular cries, and voice the demands of the majority irrespective of the question of their justice. Thrust into the position of a social leader with more urgency than his predecessors of any time since the age of the Hebrew prophets, it is expected that he will lead whither the people wish to go, and if he declines to do so he is denounced as retrograde. And yet as the messenger of Heaven he should consider it his supreme duty to reveal the whole counsel of God, to speak for truth and righteousness, and therefore to condemn the sins of the democracy equally with the sins of the aristocracy. Brave labour-leaders have fallen into disfavour for telling working-men that their worst enemies were their own vices—such as intemperance. The wickedness of a responsible teacher who treasonably neglects thus to warn his brethren of danger is powerfully expressed by Ezekiel's clear, antithetical statements concerning the respective guilt of the watchman and his fellow-citizen, which show conclusively that the greatest burden of blame must rest on the unfaithful watchman.*

In the hour of their exposure these wretched prophets and priests lose all sense of dignity, even lose their self-possession, and stumble about like blind men, helpless and bewildered. Their behaviour suggests the idea that they must be drunk with the blood they have shed, or overcome by the intoxication of their thirst for blood; but the explanation is that they cannot lift up their heads to look a neighbour in the face, because all their little devices have been torn to shreds, all their specious lies detected, all their empty promises falsified. This shame of dethroned popularity is the greatest humiliation. The unhappy man who has brought himself to live on the breath of fame cannot hide his fall in oblivion and obscurity as a private person may do. Standing in the full blaze of the world's observation which he has so eagerly focussed on himself, he has no alternative but to exchange the glory of popularity for the ignominy of notoriety.

Possibly the confusion consequent on their exposure is all that the poet is thinking of when he depicts the blind staggering of the prophets and priests. But it is not unreasonable to take this picture as an illustration of their moral condition, especially after the references to the faults of the prophets in the second elegy have directed our attention to their spiritual darkness and the vanity of their visions. When the refuge of lies in which they had trusted was swept away they would necessarily find themselves lost and helpless. They had so long worshipped falsehood, it had become so much their god that we might say, in it they had lived, and moved, and had their being. But now they have lost the very atmosphere of their lives. This is the penalty of deceit. The man who begins by using it as his tool becomes in time its victim. At first he lies with his eyes open; but the sure effect of this conduct is that his sight becomes dim and blurred, till, if he persist in the fatal course long enough, he is ultimately reduced to a condition of blindness. By continually mixing truth and falsehood together he loses

the power of distinguishing between them. It may be supposed that at an earlier stage of their decline, if the religious leaders of Israel had been honest with regard to their own convictions they must have admitted the possible genuineness of those prophets of ruin whom they had persecuted in deference to popular clamour. But they had rejected all such unwelcome thoughts so persistently that in course of time they had lost the perception of them. Therefore when the truth was flashed upon their unwilling minds by the unquestionable revelation of events they were as helpless as bats and owls suddenly driven out into the daylight by an earthquake that has flung down the crumbling ruins in which they had been sheltering themselves.

The discovery of the true character of these men was the signal for a yell of execration on the part of the people by flattering whom they had obtained their livelihood, or at least all that they most valued in life. This too must have been another shock of surprise to them. Had they believed in the essential fickleness of popular favour, they would never have built their hopes upon so precarious a foundation, for they might as well have set up their dwelling on the strand that would be flooded at the next turn of the tide. History is strewn with the wreckage of fallen popular reputations of all degrees of merit, from that of the conscientious martyr who had always looked to higher ends than the applause which once encircled him, to that of the frivolous child of fortune who had known of nothing better than the world's empty admiration. We see this both in Savonarola martyred at the stake and in Beau Nash starved in a garret. There is no more pathetic scene to be gathered from the story of religion in the present century than that of Edward Irving, once the idol of society, subsequently deserted by fashion, stationing himself at a street corner to proclaim his message to a chance congregation of idlers; and his mistake was that of an honest man who had been misled by a delusion. Incomparably worse is the fate of the fallen favourite who has no honesty of conviction with which to comfort himself when frowned at by the heartless world that had recently fawned upon him.

The Jews show their disgust and horror for their former leaders by pelting them with the leper call. According to the law the leper must go with rent clothes and flowing hair, and his face partly covered, crying, "Unclean, unclean."* It is evident that the poet has this familiar mournful cry in his mind when he describes the treatment of the prophets and priests. And yet there is a difference. The leper is to utter the humiliating word himself; but in the case now before us it is flung after the outcast leaders by their pitiless fellow-citizens. The alteration is not without significance. The miserable victim of bodily disease could not hope to disguise his condition. "White as snow," his well-known complaint was patent to every eye. But it is otherwise with the spiritual leprosy, sin. For a time it may be disguised, a hidden fire in the breast. When it is evident to others, too often the last man to perceive it is the offender himself; and when he himself is inwardly conscious of guilt he is tempted to wear a cloak of denial before the world. More es-

* Ezek. iii. 16-21.

* Lev. xiii. 45.

pecially is this the case with one who has been accustomed to make a profession of religion, and most of all with a religious leader. While the publican who has no character to sustain will snite his breast with self-reproaches and cry for mercy, the professional saint is blind to his own sins, partly no doubt because to admit their existence would be to shatter his profession.

But if the religious leader is slow to confess or even perceive his guilt, the world is keen to detect it and swift to cast it in his teeth. There is nothing that excites so much loathing; and justly so, for there is nothing that does so much harm. Such conduct is the chief provocative of practical scepticism. It matters not that the logic is unsound; men will draw rough and ready conclusions. If the leaders are corrupt the hasty inference is that the cause which is identified with their names must also be corrupt. Religion suffers more from the hypocrisy of some of her avowed champions than from the attacks of all the hosts of her pronounced foes. Accordingly a righteous indignation assails those who work such deadly mischief. But less commendable motives urge men in the same direction. Evil itself steals a triumph over good in the downfall of its counterfeit. If they knew themselves there must have been some hypocrisy on the side of the persecutors in the demonstrative zeal with which they hounded to death the once pampered children of fortune the moment they had fallen from the pedestal of respectability; for could these indignant champions of virtue deny that they had been willing accomplices in the deeds they so loudly denounced? or at least that they had not been reluctant to be pleasantly deceived, had not enquired too nicely into the credentials of the flatterers who had spoken smooth things to them? Considering what their own conduct had been, their eagerness in execrating the wickedness of their leaders was almost indecent. There is a Pecksniffian air about it. It suggests a sly hope that by thus placing themselves on the side of outraged virtue they were putting their own characters beyond the suspicion of criticism. They seem to have been too eager to make scapegoats of their clergy. Their action appears to show that they had some idea that even at the eleventh hour the city might be spared if it were rid of this plague of the blood-stained prophets and priests. And yet, however various and questionable the motives of the assailants may have been, there is no escape from the conclusion that the wickedness they denounced so eagerly richly deserved the most severe condemnation. Wherever we meet with it, this is the leprosy of society. Disguised for a time, a secret canker in the breast of unsuspected men, it is certain to break out at length; and when it is discovered it merits a measure of indignation proportionate to the previous deception.

Exile is the doom of these guilty prophets and priests. But even in their banishment they can find no place of rest. They wander from one foreign nation to another; they are permitted to stay with none of them. Unlike our English pretenders who were allowed to take up their abode among the enemies of their country, these Jews were suspected and disliked wherever they went. They had been unfaithful to Jehovah; yet they could not proclaim themselves devotees of Baal. The heathen were not prepared to draw fine distinctions between the various fac-

tions in the Israelite camp. The world only scoffs at the quarrels of the sects. Moreover, these false, worthless leaders had been the zealots of national feeling in the old boastful days when Jeremiah had been denounced by their party as a traitor. Then they had been the most exclusive of the Jews. As they had made their bed so must they lie on it. The poet suggests no term to this melancholy fate. Perhaps while he was writing his elegy the wretched men were to his own knowledge still journeying wearily from place to place. Thus like the fratricide Cain, like the Wandering Jew of mediæval legend, the fallen leaders of the religion of Israel find their punishment in a doom of perpetual homelessness. Is it too severe a penalty for the fatal deceit that wrought death, and so was equivalent to murder of the worst sort, cold-blooded, deliberate murder? There is a perfectly Dantesque appropriateness in it. The Inferno of the popularity-mongers is a homeless desert of unpopularity. Quiet, retiring souls and dreamy lovers of nature might derive rest and refreshment from a hermit life in the wilderness. Not so these slaves of society. Deprived of the support of their surrounding element—like jelly-fish flung on to the beach to shrivel up and perish—in banishment from city life such men must experience a total collapse. Just in proportion to the hollowness and unreality with which a man has made the pursuit of the world's applause the chief object of his life, is the dismal fate he will have to endure when, having sown the wind of vanity, he reaps the whirlwind of indignation. The ill-wind of his fellow-men is hard to bear; but behind it is the far more terrible wrath of God, whose judgment the miserable time-server has totally ignored while sedulously cultivating the favour of the world.

CHAPTER XX.

VAIN HOPES.

LAMENTATIONS iv. 17-20.

THE first part of the fourth elegy was specially concerned with the fate of the gilded youth of Jerusalem; the second and closely parallel part with that of the princes; the third introduced us to the dramatic scene in which the fallen priests and prophets were portrayed; now in the fourth part of the elegy the king and his courtiers are the prominent figures. While all the rest of the poem is written in the third person, this short section is composed in the first person plural. The arrangement is not exactly like that of the third elegy, in which, after speaking in his own person, the poet appears as the representative and spokesman of his people. The more simple form of the composition now under consideration would lead us to suppose that the pronoun "we" comes in for the most natural reason—viz., because the writer was himself an actor in the scene which he here describes. We must conclude, then, that he was one of the group of Zedekiah's personal attendants, or at least a member of a company of Jews which escaped at the time of the royal flight and took the same road when the citizens were scattered by the sack of the city.

The picture, however, is somewhat idealised.

Events that could only have taken place in succession are described as though they were all occurring in the present. We have first the anxious watching of the besieged for the advent of an army of relief; then the chase of their victims through the streets by the invaders—which must have been after they had broken into the city; next the flight and pursuit over the mountains; and lastly, the capture of the king. This setting of a succession of events in one scene as though they were contemporaneous is so far an imaginary arrangement that we must be on our guard against a too literal interpretation of the details. Evidently we have here a poetic picture, not the bare deposition of a witness.

The burden of the passage is the grievous disappointment of the court party at the failure of their fond hopes. But Jeremiah was directly opposed to that party, and though our author was not the great prophet himself we have abundant evidence that he was a faithful disciple who echoed the very thoughts and shared the deepest convictions of his master. How then can he now appear as one of the court party? It is just possible that he was no friend of Jeremiah at the time he is now describing. He may have been converted subsequently by the logic of facts, or by the more potent influence of the discipline of adversity, a possibility which would give peculiar significance to the personal confessions contained in the previous elegy, with its account of "the man who had seen affliction." But the poetic form of the section dealing with the court, and the fact that all it describes is expressed in the present tense, prevent us from pressing this conjecture to a definite conclusion. It would be enough if we could suppose, as there is no difficulty in doing, that in the general confusion our poet found himself in unexpected companionship with the flying court. Thus he would witness their experiences.

We have, then, in this place an expression of the attitude of the court party in the midst of the great calamities that have overtaken them. It is emphatically one of profound disappointment. These deluded people had been sanguine to the last, and proudly sceptical of danger, with an infatuation almost amounting to insanity which had blinded them to the palpable lessons of defeats already endured—for we must not forget that Jerusalem had been taken twice before this. Naturally their disappointment was proportionate to their previous elation.

The hopes that had been thus rudely dashed to the ground had been based on a feeling of the sacred inviolability of Jerusalem. This feeling had been sedulously nurtured by a bastard form of religion. Like the worship of Rome in Virgil's day, a sort of cult of Jerusalem had now grown up. Men who had no faith in Jehovah put their trust in Jerusalem. The starting-point and excuse of this singular creed are to be traced to the deep-rooted conviction of the Jews that their city was the chosen favorite of Jehovah, and that therefore her God would certainly protect her. But this idea was treated most inconsistently when people coolly ignored the Divine will while boldly claiming Divine favour. In course of time even that position was abandoned, and Jerusalem became practically a fetich. Then, while faith in the destiny of the city was cherished as a superstition, prophets such as Jeremiah, who directed men's thoughts to God, were silenced and persecuted. This folly

of the Jews has its counterpart in the exaltation of the papacy during the Middle Ages. The Pope claimed to be seated on his throne by the authority of Christ; but the papacy was really put in the place of Christ. Similarly people who trust in the Church, their City of God, rather than in her Lord, have fallen into an error like that of the Jews, who put confidence in their city rather than in their own God. So have those who confide in their own election instead of looking to the Divine Sovereign who, they declare, has named them in His eternal decrees; and those again who set reliance on their religion, its rites and creeds; and lastly, those who trust in their very faith as itself a saving power. In all these cases, the city, the Pope, the election, the Church, the religion, the faith are simply idols, no more able to protect the superstitious people who put them in the place of God than the ark that was captured in battle when the Jews tried to use it as a talisman, or even the fish-god Dagon that lay shattered before it in the Philistine temple.

But now we find the old-established faith in Jerusalem so far undermined that it has to be supplemented by other grounds of hope. In particular there are two of these—the king and a foreign ally. The ally is mentioned first because the poet starts from the time when men still hoped that the Egyptians would espouse the cause of Israel, and come to the help of the little kingdom against the hosts of Babylon. There was much to be said in favour of this expectation. In the past Egypt had been in alliance with the people now threatened. The two great kingdoms of the Nile and the Euphrates were rivals; and the aggressive policy of Babylon had brought her into conflict with Egypt. The Pharaohs might be glad to have Israel preserved as a "buffer state." Indeed, negotiations had been carried on with that end in view. Nevertheless the dreams of deliverance built on this foundation were doomed to disappointment. The poet shows us the anxious Jews on their city towers straining their eyes till they are weary in watching for the relief that never comes. They could look down through the gap in the hills towards Bethlehem and the south country, and the dust of an army would be visible from afar in the clear Syrian atmosphere; but, alas! no distant cloud promises the approach of the deliverer. We are reminded of the siege of Lucknow; but in the hour of the Jews' great need there is no sign corresponding to the welcome music of the Scotch air that ravished the ears of the British garrison.

Faithful prophets had repeatedly warned the Jews against this false ground of hope. In a former generation Isaiah had cautioned his contemporaries not to lean on "this broken reed" * Egypt; and at the present crisis Jeremiah had followed with similar advice, predicting the failure of the Egyptian alliance, and replying to the messengers of Zedekiah who had come to solicit the prophet's prayers: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel: Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city; and they shall take it, and burn it with fire." † Though regarded at the time as unpatriotic and even

* Isa. xxxvi. 6.

† Jer. xxxvii. 7, 8.

reasonable, this advice proved to be sound, and the predictions of the messenger of Jehovah correct. Now that we can read the events in the light of history we have no difficulty in perceiving that even as a matter of state policy the counsel of Isaiah and Jeremiah was wise and statesmanlike. Babylon was quite irresistible. Even Egypt could not stand against the powerful Empire that was making itself master of the world. Besides, alliance with Egypt involved the loss of liberty, for it had to be paid for, and the weak ally of a great kingdom was no better than a tributary state. Meanwhile Israel was embroiled in quarrels from which she should have tried, as far as possible, to keep herself aloof.

But the prophets shewed that deeper questions than such as concern political diplomacy were at stake. In happier days the arm of Providence had been laid bare, and Jerusalem saved without a blow, when the destroying angel of pestilence swept through the Assyrian host. It is true Jerusalem had to submit soon after this; but the lesson was being taught that her safety really consisted in submission. This was the kernel of Jeremiah's unpopular message. Historically and politically that too was justified. It was useless to attempt to stem the tide of one of the awful marches of a world-conquering army. Only the obstinacy of a fanatical patriotism could have led the Jews of this period to hold out so long against the might of Babylon, just as the very same obstinacy encouraged their mad descendants in the days of Titus to resist the arms of Rome. But then the prophets were constantly preaching to heedless ears that there was real safety in submission, that a humble measure of escape was to be had by simply complying with the demands of the irresistible conquerors. Proud patriots might despise this consolation, preferring to die fighting. But that was scarcely the case with the fugitives; these people had neither the relief that is the reward of a quiet surrender, nor the glory that accompanies death on the battle-field. To those who could hear the deeper notes of prophetic teaching the safety of surrender meant a much more valuable boon. The submission recommended was not merely to be directed to King Nebuchadnezzar; primarily it consisted in yielding to the will of God. People who will not turn to this one true refuge from all danger and trouble are tempted to substitute a variety of vain hopes. Most of us have our Egypt to which we look when the vision of God has become dim in the soul. The worldly cynicism that echoes and degrades the words of the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity," is really the product of the decay of dead hopes. It would not be so sour if it had not been disappointed. Yet so persistent is the habit of castle-building, that the cloudland in which many previous structures of fancy have melted away is resorted to again and again by an eager throng of fresh aerial architects. After experience has confirmed the warning that riches take to themselves wings and flee away, and in face of our Lord's advice not to lay up treasures where thieves break through and steal, and where moth and rust consume, we see men as eager as ever to scrape wealth together, as ready to put all their trust in it when it has to come to them, as astonished and dismayed when it has failed them. Ambition was long ago proved to be a frail bubble; yet ambition never wants for

slaves. The cup of pleasure has been drained so often that the world should know by this time how very nauseous its dregs are; and still feverish hands are held out to grasp it.

Now this obstinate disregard of the repeated lessons of experience is too remarkable a habit of life to be reckoned as a mere accident. There must be some adequate causes to account for it. In the first place, it testifies with singular force to the vitality of what we may call the faculty of hope itself. Disappointment does not kill the tendency to reach forth to the future, because this tendency comes from within, and is not a mere response to impressions. In persons of a sanguine temperament this may be taken to be a constitutional peculiarity; but it is too widespread to be disposed of as nothing more than a freak of nature. It is rather to be considered an instinct, and as such a part of the original constitution of man. How then has it come to be? Must we not attribute the native hopefulness of mankind to the deliberate will and purpose of the Creator? But in that case must we not say of this, as we can say with certainty of most natural instincts: He who has given the hunger will also supply the food with which to satisfy it? To reject that conclusion is to land ourselves in a form of pessimism that is next door to atheism. Schopenhauer rests the argument by means of which he thinks to establish a pessimistic view of the universe largely on the delusiveness of natural instincts which promise a satisfaction never attained; but in reasoning in this way he is compelled to describe the Supreme Will that he believes to be the ultimate principle of all things as a non-moral power. The mockery of human existence to which his philosophy reduces us is impossible in view of the Fatherhood of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Shelley, contrasting our fears and disappointments with the "clear keen joyance" of the skylark, bewails the fact that

"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not."

If this is the end of the matter, evolution is a mocking progress, for it leads to the pit of despair. If the large vision that takes in past and future only brings sorrow, it would have been better for us to have retained the limited range of animal perceptions. But faith sees in the very experience of disappointment a ground for fresh hope. The discovery that the height already attained is not the summit of the mountain, although it appeared to be when viewed from the plain, is a proof that the summit is higher than we had supposed. Meanwhile, the awakening of desires for further climbing is a sign that the disappointments we have experienced hitherto are not occasions for despair. If, as Shelley goes on to say—

"Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest
thought,"

the sadness cannot be without mitigation, for there must be an element of sweetness in it from the first; and if so this must point to a future when this sadness itself shall pass away. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews argues on these lines when he draws the conclusion from the repeated disappointments of the hopes of Israel in conjunction with the repeated promises of God that "there remaineth therefore a rest

for the people of God." * Instincts are God's promises written in the Book of Nature. Seeing that our deepest instincts are not satisfied by any of the common experiences of life, they must point to some higher satisfaction.

Here we are brought to the explanation of the disappointment itself. We must confess, in the first instance, that it arises from the perverse habit of looking for satisfaction in objects that are too low, objects that are unworthy of human nature. This is one of the strongest evidences of a fall. The more mind and heart are corrupted by sin the more will hope be dragged down to inferior things. But the story does not end at this point. God is educating us through illusions. If all our aspirations were fulfilled on earth we should cease to hope for what was higher than earth. Hope is purged and elevated by the discovery of the vanity of its pursuits.

These considerations will be confirmed when we follow the elegist in his treatment of the disappointment of the second ground of hope, that which was found in the royalist's confidence in his sovereign. The poetic account of the events which ended in the capture of Zedekiah seems to consist in a blending of metaphor with history. The image of the chase underlies the whole description. It has been pointed out that with the narrowness of eastern streets and the simplicity of the weapons of ancient warfare, it would be impossible for the Chaldeans to pick out their victims and shoot them down from outside the walls. But when they had effected an entrance they would not simply make the streets dangerous, for then they would be breaking into the houses where the people are here supposed to be hiding. The language seems more fit for the description of a faction fight, such as often occurred in Paris at the time of the French Revolution, than an account of the sack of a city by a foreign enemy. But the hunting image is in the poet's mind, and the whole picture is coloured by it. After the siege the fugitives are pursued over the mountains. Taking the route across the Mount of Olives and so down to the Jordan, that which David had followed in his flight from Absalom, they would soon find themselves in a difficult wilderness country. They had despaired of their lives in the city, exclaiming: "Our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come." † Now they are in sore extremities. The swift pursuit suggests Jeremiah's image of the eagles on the wing overtaking their quarry. "Behold, he shall come up as clouds," said the prophet, "and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles." ‡ There was no possibility of escape from such persistent foes. At the same time, ambuscades were in waiting among the many caves that honeycomb these limestone mountains—in the district where the traveller in the parable of "The good Samaritan" fell among thieves. The king himself was taken like a hunted animal caught in a trap, though, as we learn from the history, not till he had reached Jericho. §

The language in which Zedekiah is described is singularly strong. He is "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord." The hope of the fugitives had been "to live under his shadow among the nations." || It is startling to find such words applied to so weak and worth-

less a ruler. It cannot be the expression of sycophancy; for the king and his kingdom had disappeared before the elegy was written. Zedekiah was not so bad as some of his predecessors. Like Louis XVI., he reaped the long accumulating retribution of the sins of his ancestors. Yet after making due allowance for the exuberance of the Oriental style, we must feel that the language is out of proportion to the possibilities of the most courtly devotion of the time. Evidently the kingly idea means more than the prosaic personality of any particular monarch. The romantic enthusiasm of Cavaliers and Nonjurors for the Stuarts was not to be accounted for by the merits and attractions of the various successive sovereigns and pretenders towards whom it was directed. The doctrine of the Divine right of kings is always associated with vague thoughts of power and glory that are never realised in history. This is most strikingly evident in the Hebrew conception of the status and destiny of the line of David. But in that one supreme case of devotion to royalty the dream of the ages ultimately came to be fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, though in a very different manner from the anticipation of the Jews. There is something pathetic in the last shred of hope to which the fugitives were clinging. They had lost their homes, their city, their land; yet even in exile they clung to the idea that they might keep together under the protection of their fallen king. It was a delusion. But the strange faith in the destiny of the Davidic line that here passes into fanaticism is the seed-bed of the Messianic ideas which constitute the most wonderful part of Old Testament prophecy. By a blind but divinely guided instinct the Jews were led to look through the failure of their hopes on to the appointed time when One should come who only could give them satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEBT OF GUILT EXTINGUISHED.

LAMENTATIONS iv. 21, 22.

ONE after another the vain hopes of the Jews melt in mists of sorrow. But just as the last of these flickering lights is disappearing a gleam of consolation breaks out from another quarter, like the pale yellow streak that may sometimes be seen low on the western sky of a stormy day just before nightfall, indicating that the setting sun is behind the clouds, although its dying rays are too feeble to penetrate them. Hope is scarcely the word for so faint a sign of comfort as this melancholy fourth elegy affords in lifting the curtain of gloom for one brief moment; but the bare, negative relief which the prospect of an end to the accumulation of new calamities offers is a welcome change in itself, besides being a hint that the tide may be on the turn.

It is quite characteristic of our poet's sombre tones that even in an attempt to touch on brighter ideas than usually occupy his thoughts, he should illustrate the improving prospects of Israel by setting them in contrast to a sardonic description of the fate of Edom. This neighbouring nation is addressed in the time of her elation over the fall of Jerusalem. The extension of her terri-

* Heb. iv. 9.

† iv. 18.

‡ Jer. iv. 13.

§ 2 Kings xxv. 4, 5; Jer. xxxix. 4, 5.

|| iv. 20.

tory to the land of Uz in Arabia—Job's country—is mentioned to show that she is in a position of exceptional prosperity. The poet mockingly encourages the jealous people to "rejoice and be glad" at the fate of their rival. The irony of his language is evident from the fact that he immediately proceeds to pronounce the doom of Edom. The cup of God's wrath that Israel has been made to drink shall pass to her also; and she shall drink deeply of it till she is intoxicated and, like Noah, makes herself an object of shame. Thus will God visit the daughter of Edom with the punishment of her sins. The writer says that God will *discover* them. He does not mean by this phrase that God will find them out. They were never hidden from God; there are no discoveries for Him to make concerning any of us, because He knows all about us every moment of our lives. The phrase stands in opposition to the common Hebrew expression for the forgiveness of sins. When sins are forgiven they are said to be covered; therefore when they are said to be uncovered it is as though we were told that God does the reverse of forgiving them—strips them of every rag of apology, lays them bare. That is their condemnation. Nothing is more ugly than a naked sin.

The selection of this one neighbour of the Jews for special attention is accounted for by what contemporary prophets tell us concerning the behaviour of the Edomites when Jerusalem fell. They flew like vultures to a carcass. Ezekiel writes: "Thus saith the Lord God, Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them; therefore thus saith the Lord God, I will stretch out Mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it, and I will make it desolate from Teman; even unto Dedan shall they fall by the sword. And I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to Mine anger and according to My fury, and they shall know My vengeance, saith the Lord God."* Isaiah xxxiv. is devoted to a vivid description of the coming punishment of Edom. This race of rough mountaineers had seldom been on friendly terms with their Hebrew neighbours. Nations, like individuals, do not always find it easy to avoid quarrels with those who are closest to them. Neither blood relationship nor commerce prevents the outbreak of hostilities in a situation that gives many occasions for mutual jealousy. For centuries France and England, which should be the best friends if proximity generated friendship, regarded one another as natural enemies. Germany is even a nearer neighbour to France than England is, and the frontiers of the two great nations are studded with forts. It does not appear that the extension of the means of communication among the different countries is likely to close the doors of the temple of Janus. The greatest problem of sociology is to discover the secret of living in crowded communities among a variety of conflicting interests without any injustice, or any friction arising from the juxtaposition of different classes. It is far easier to keep the peace among backwoodsmen who live fifty miles apart in lonely forests. Therefore it is not a surprising thing that there were bitter feuds between Israel and Edom. But at the time of the Babylonian

invasion these had taken a peculiarly odious turn on the side of the southern people, one that was doubly offensive. The various tribes whom the huge Babylonian empire was swallowing up with insatiable greed should have forgotten their mutual differences in face of a common danger. Besides, it was a cowardly thing for Edom to follow the example of the Bedouin robbers, who hovered on the rear of the great armies of conquest like scavengers. To settle old debts by wreaking vengeance on a fallen rival in the hour of her humiliation was not the way to win the honours of war. Even to a calm student of history in later ages this long-past event shews an ugly aspect. How maddening must it have been to the victims! Accordingly we are not astonished to see that the doom of the Edomites is pronounced by Hebrew prophets with undisguised satisfaction. The proud inhabitants of the rock cities, the wonderful remains of which amaze the traveller in the present day, had earned the severe humiliation so exultingly described.

In all this it is very plain that the author of the Lamentations, like the Hebrew prophets generally, had an unhesitating belief in the supremacy of God over foreign nations that was quite as effective as His supremacy over Israel. On the other hand, iniquity is ascribed to Israel in exactly the same terms that are applied to foreign nations. Jehovah is not imagined to be a mere tribal divinity like the Moabite Chemosh; and the Jews are not held to be so much His favourites that the treatment measured out to them in punishment of sin is essentially different from that accorded to their neighbours.

To Israel, however, the doom of Edom is a sign of the return of mercy. It is not merely that the passion of revenge is thereby satisfied—a poor consolation, even if allowable. But in the overthrow of their most annoying tormentor the oppressed people are at once liberated from a very appreciable part of their troubles. At the same time they see in this event a clear sign that they are not selected for a solitary example of the vengeance of heaven against sin; that would have been indeed a hard destiny. But above all, this occurrence affords a reassuring sign that God who is thus punishing their enemies is ending the severe discipline of the Jews. In the very middle of the description of the coming doom of Edom we meet with an announcement of the conclusion of the long penance of Israel. This singular arrangement cannot be accidental; nor can it have been resorted to only to obtain the accentuation of contrast which we have seen is highly valued by the elegist. Since it is while contemplating the Divine treatment of the most spiteful of the enemies of Israel that we are led to see the termination of the chastisement of the Jews, we may infer that possibly the process in the mind of the poet took the same course. If so, the genesis of prophecy, which is usually hidden from view, here seems to come nearer the surface.

The language in which the improving prospect of the Jews is announced is somewhat obscure; but the drift of its meaning is not difficult to trace. The word rendered "punishment of iniquity" in our English versions—Revised as well as Authorised—at the beginning of the twenty-second verse, is one which in its original sense means simply "iniquity"; and in fact it is so translated further down in the same verse,

* Ezek. xxv. 12-14.

where it occurs a second time, and where the parallel word "sins" seems to settle the meaning. But if it has this meaning when applied to Edom in the later part of the verse is it not reasonable to suppose that it must also have it when applied to the daughter of Zion in an immediately preceding clause? The Septuagint and Vulgate Versions give it as "iniquity" in both cases. And so does a suggestion in the margin of the Revised Version. But if we accept this rendering, which commends itself to us as verbally most correct, we cannot reconcile it with the evident intention of the writer. The promise that God will no more carry His people away into captivity, which follows as an echo of the opening thought of the verse, certainly points to a cessation of punishment. Then the very idea that the iniquity of the Jews is accomplished is quite out of place here. What could we take it to mean? To say that the Jews had sinned to the full, had carried out all their evil intentions, had put no restraint on their wickedness, is to give a verdict which should carry the heaviest condemnation; it would be absurd to bring this forward as an introduction to a promise of a reprieve. It would be less incongruous to suppose the phrase to mean, as is suggested in the margin of the Revised Version, that the sin has come to an end, has ceased. That might be taken as a ground for the punishment to be stayed also. But it would introduce a refinement of theology out of keeping with the extreme simplicity of the ideas of these elegies. Moreover, in another place, as we have seen already,* the word "sins" seems to be used for the *punishment of sins*.† We have also met with the idea of the *fulfilment*, literally the *finishing*, of God's word of warning, with the necessary suggestion that there is to be no more infliction of the evil threatened.‡ Therefore, if it were not for the reappearance of the word in dispute where the primary meaning of it seems to be necessitated by the context, we should have no hesitation in taking it here in its secondary sense, as the punishment of iniquity. The German word *schuld*, with its double signification—*debt* and *guilt*—has been suggested as a happy rendering of the Hebrew original in both places; and perhaps this is the best that can be proposed. The debt of the Jews is paid; that of the Edomites has yet to be exacted.

We are brought then to the conclusion that the elegist here announces the extinction of the Jews' debt of guilt. Accordingly they are told that God will no more carry them away into captivity. This promise has occasioned much perplexity to people concerned for the literal exactness of Scripture. Some have tried to get it applied to the time subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, after which, it is said, the Jews were never again removed from their land. That is about the most extravagant instance of all the subterfuges to which literalists are driven when in a sore strait to save their theory. Certainly the Jews have not been exiled again—not since the last time. They could not be carried away from their land once more, for the simple reason that they have never been restored to it. Strictly speaking, it may be said indeed, something of the kind occurred on the suppression of the revolt under *Bar-cochba* in the second century of the Christian era. But all theories apart, it is contrary to the discovered

facts of prophecy to ascribe to the inspired messengers of God the purpose of supplying exact predictions concerning the events of history in far-distant ages. Their immediate message was for their own day, although we have found that the lessons it contains are suitable for all times. What consolation would it be for the fugitives from the ravaging hosts of Nebuchadnezzar to know that six hundred years later an end would come to the successive acts of conquerors in driving the Jews from Jerusalem, even if they were not told that this would be because at that far-off time there would commence one long exile lasting for two thousand years? But if the words of the elegist are for immediate use as a consolation to his contemporaries, it is unreasonable to press their negative statement in an absolute sense, so as to make it serve as a prediction concerning all future ages. It is enough for these sufferers to learn that the last of the series of successive banishments of Jews from their land by the Babylonian government has at length taken place.

But with this information there comes a deeper truth. The debt is paid. Yet this only at the commencement of the Captivity. Two generations must live in exile before the restoration will be possible. There is no reference to that event, which did not take place till the Babylonian power had been utterly destroyed by Cyrus. Still the deliverance into exile following the terrible sufferings of the siege and the subsequent flight is taken as the final act in the drama of doom. The long years of the Captivity, though they constituted an invaluable period of discipline, did not bring any fresh kind of punishment at all comparable with the chastisements already inflicted.

Thus we are brought face to face with the question of the satisfaction of punishment. We have no right to look to a single line of a poem for a final settlement of the abstract problem itself. Whether, as St. Augustine maintained, every sin is of infinite guilt because it is an offence against an infinite Being; whether, therefore, it would take eternity to pay the debts contracted during one short life on earth, and other questions of the same character, cannot be answered one way or the other from the words before us. Still there are certain aspects of the problem of human guilt to which our attention is here drawn.

In the first place, we must make a distinction between the national punishment of national wickedness and the personal consequences of personal wrongdoing. The nation only exists on earth, and it can only be punished on earth. Then the nation outlasts generations of individual lives, and so remains on earth long enough for the harvest of its actions to be reaped. Thus national guilt may be wiped out while the separate accounts of individual men and women still remain unsettled. Next we must remember that the exaction of the uttermost farthing is not the supreme end of the Divine government of the world. To suggest any such idea is to assimilate this perfect government to that of corrupt Oriental monarchies, the chief object of which in dealing with their provinces seems to have been to drain them of tribute. The payment of the debt of guilt in punishment, though just and necessary, cannot be a matter of any satisfaction to God. Again, when, as in the case now before us, the punish-

* Page 591.

† iii. 39.

‡ ii. 17.

ment of sin is a chastisement for the reformation of the corrupt nation on whom it is inflicted, it may not be necessary to make it exactly equivalent to the guilt for which it is the remedy rather than the payment. Lastly, even when we think of the punishment as direct retribution, we cannot say what means God may provide for the satisfaction of the due claims of justice. The second Isaiah saw in the miseries inflicted upon the innocent at this very time, a vicarious suffering by the endurance of which pardon was extended to the guilty; * and from the days of the Apostles, Christians have recognised in his language on this subject the most striking prophecy the Bible contains concerning the atonement wrought by our Lord in His sufferings and death. When we put all these considerations together, and also call to our assistance the New Testament teachings about the character of God and the object of the work of Jesus Christ, we shall see that there are various possibilities lying behind the thought of the end of chastisement which no bare statement of the abstract relations of sin, guilt, and doom would indicate.

It may be objected that all such ideas as those just expressed tend to generate superficial views of sin. Possibly they may be employed so as to encourage this tendency. But if so, it will only be by misinterpreting and abusing them. Certainly the elegist does not belittle the rigour of the Divine chastisement. It must not be forgotten that the phrase which gives rise to these ideas concerning the debt of guilt occurs in the doleful Book of Lamentations, and at the close of an elegy that bewails the awful fate of Jerusalem in the strongest language. But in point of fact it is not the severity of the punishment, beyond a certain degree, but the certainty of it that most affects the mind when contemplating the prospect of doom. Not only does the imagination fail to grasp that which is immeasurably vast in the pictures presented to it, but even the reason rises in revolt and questions the possibility of such torments, or the conscience ventures to protest against what appears to be unjust. In any of these cases the effect of the menace is neutralised by its very extravagance.

On the other hand, we have St. Paul's teaching about the goodness of God that leads us to repentance.† Thus we understand how it can be said that Christ—who is the most perfect revelation of God's goodness—was raised up to give "*repentance to Israel*" as well as "*remission of sins*."‡ It is at Calvary, not at Sanai, that sin looks most black. When a man sees his guilt in the light of his Saviour's love he is in no mood to apologise for it or to minimise his ill desert. If he then contemplates the prospect of the full payment of the debt it is with a feeling of the impossibility of ever achieving so stupendous a task. The punishment from which he would revolt as an injustice if it were held over him in a threat now presents itself to him of its own accord as something quite right and reasonable. He cannot find words strong enough to characterise his guilt, as he lies at the foot of the cross in absolute self-abasement. There is no occasion to fear that such a man will become careless about sin if he is comforted by a vision of hope. This is just what he needs to enable him to

rise up and accept the forgiveness in the strength of which he may begin the toilsome ascent towards a better life.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN APPEAL FOR GOD'S COMPASSION.

LAMENTATIONS v. 1-10.

UNLIKE its predecessors, the fifth and last elegy is not an acrostic. There is little to be gained by a discussion of the various conjectures that have been put forth to account for this change of style: as that the *crescendo* movement which reached its climax in the third elegy was followed by a *decrecendo* movement, the conclusion of which became more prosaic; that the feelings of the poet having been calmed down during the composition of the main part of his work, he did not require the restraints of an exceptionally artificial method any longer; that such a method was not so becoming in a prayer to God as it had been in the utterance of a lament. In answer to these suggestions, it may be remarked that some of the choicest poetry in the book occurs at the close of this last chapter, that the acrostic was taken before as a sign that the writer had his feelings well under command, and that prayers appear repeatedly in the alphabetical poems. Is it not enough to say that in all probability the elegies were composed on different occasions, and that when they were put together it was natural that one in which the author had not chosen to bind himself down to the peculiarly rigorous method employed in the rest of the book should have been placed at the end? Even here we have a reminiscence of the acrostic; for the poem consists of twenty-two verses—the number of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

It is to be observed, further, as regards the form of this elegy, that the author now adopts the parallelism which is the characteristic note of most Hebrew poetry. The Revisers break up the poem into two-line verses. But more strictly considered, each verse consists of one long line divided into two mutually balancing parts. Thus, while the third elegy consists of triplets, and the fourth of couplets, the fifth is still more brief, with its single line verses. In fact, while the ideas and sentiments are still elegiac and very like those found in the rest of the book, in structure this poem is more assimilated to the poetry contained in other parts of the Bible.

From beginning to end the fifth elegy is directly addressed to God. Brief ejaculatory prayers are frequent in the earlier poems, and the third elegy contains two longer appeals to God; but this last poem differs from the others in being entirely a prayer. And yet it does not consist of a string of petitions. It is a meditation in the presence of God, or, more accurately described, an account of the condition of the Jews spread out before God in order to secure His compassion. In the freedom and fulness of his utterance the poet reveals himself as a man who is not unfamiliar with the habit of prayer. It is of course only the delusion of the Pharisees to suppose that a prayer is valuable in proportion to its length. But on the other hand, it is

* Isa. liii. 4-6.

† Rom. ii. 4.

‡ Acts. v. 31.

clear that a person who is unaccustomed to prayer halts and stumbles because he does not feel at home in addressing God. It is only with a friend that we can converse in perfect freedom. One who has treated God as a stranger will be necessarily stiff and constrained in the Divine presence. It is not enough to assure such a person that God is his father. A son may feel peculiarly uncomfortable with his own father, if he has lived long in separation and alienation from his home. Freedom in the expression of confidences is a sure measure of the extent to which friendship is carried. Of course some people are more reserved than others; but still as in the same person his different degrees of openness or reserve with different people will mark his relative intimacy of friendship with them, so when a man has long accustomed himself to believe in the presence and sympathy of God, and has cultivated the habit of communing with his Father in heaven, his prayers will not be confined to set petitions; he will tell his Father whatever is in his heart. This, we have already seen, was what the elegist had learnt to do. But in the last of his poems he expresses more explicit and continuous confidences. He will have God know everything.

The prayer opens with a striking phrase—"Remember, O Lord," etc. The miserable condition of the Jews suggests to the imagination, if not to the reason, that God must have forgotten His people. It cannot be supposed that the elegist conceived of his God as Elijah mockingly described their silent, unresponsive divinity to the frantic priests of Baal, or that he imagined that Jehovah was really indifferent, after the manner of the denizens of the Epicurean Olympus. Nevertheless, neither philosophy nor even theology wholly determines the form of an earnest man's prayers. In practice it is impossible not to speak according to appearances. The aspect of affairs is sometimes such as to force home the feeling that God must have deserted the sufferer, or how could He have permitted the misery to continue unchecked? A dogmatic statement of the Divine omniscience, although it may not be disputed, will not remove the painful impression, nor will the most absolute demonstration of the goodness of God, of His love and faithfulness; because the overwhelming influence of things visible and tangible so fully occupies the mind that it has not room to receive unseen, spiritual realities. Therefore, though not to the reason still to the feelings, it is as though God had indeed forgotten His children in their deep distress.

Under such circumstances the first requisite is the assurance that God should remember the sufferers whom He appears to be neglecting. He never really neglects any of His creatures, and His attention is the all-sufficient security that deliverance must be at hand. But this is a truth that does not satisfy us in the bare statement of it. It must be absorbed, and permitted to permeate wide regions of consciousness, in order that it may be an actual power in the life. That, however, is only the subjective effect of the thought of the Divine remembrance. The poet is thinking of external actions. Evidently the aim of his prayer is to secure the attention of God as a sure preliminary to a Divine interposition. But even with this end in view the fact that God remembers is enough.

In appealing for God's attention the elegist

first makes mention of the *reproach* that has come upon Israel. This reference to humiliation rather than to suffering as the primary ground of complaint may be accounted for by the fact that the glory of God is frequently taken as a reason for the blessing of His people. That is done for His "name's sake."* Then the ruin of the Jews is derogatory to the honour of their Divine Protector. The peculiar relation of Israel to God also underlies the complaint of the second verse, in which the land is described as "our inheritance," with an evident allusion to the idea that it was received as a donation from God, not acquired in any ordinary human fashion. A great wrong has been done, apparently in contravention of the ordinance of Heaven. The Divine inheritance has been turned over to strangers. The very homes of the Jews are in the hands of aliens. From their property the poet passes on to the condition of the persons of the sufferers. The Jews are orphans; they have lost their fathers, and their mothers are widows. This seems to indicate that the writer considered himself to belong to the younger generation of the Jews,—that, at all events, he was not an elderly man. But it is not easy to determine how far his words are to be read literally. No doubt the slaughter of the war had carried off many heads of families, and left a number of women and children in the condition here described. But the language of poetry would allow of a more general interpretation. All the Jews felt desolate as orphans and widows. Perhaps there is some thought of the loss of God, the supreme Father of Israel. Whether this was in the mind of the poet or not, the cry to God to remember His people plainly implies that His sheltering presence was not now consciously experienced. Our Lord foresaw that His departure would smite His disciples with orphanage if He did not return to them.† Men who have hardened themselves in a state of separation from God fail to recognise their forlorn condition; but that is no occasion for congratulation, for the family that never misses its father can never have known the joys of true home life. Children of God's house can have no greater sorrow than to lose their heavenly Father's presence.

A peculiarly annoying injustice to which the Jews were subjected by their harsh masters consisted in the fact that they were compelled to buy permission to collect firewood from their own land and to draw water from their own wells.‡ The elegist deplores this grievance as part of the reproach of his people. The mere pecuniary fine of a series of petty exactions is not the chief part of the evil. It is not the pain of flesh that rouses a man's indignation on receiving a slap in the face; it is the insult that stings. There was more than insult in this grinding down of the conquered nation; and the indignities to which the Jews were subjected were only too much in accord with the facts of their fallen state. This particular exaction was an unmistakable symptom of the abject servitude into which they had been reduced.

The series of illustrations of the degradation of Israel seems to be arranged somewhat in the order of time and in accordance with the movements of the people. Thus, after describing the state of the Jews in their own land, the poet

* For example, Jer. xiv. 7.
† v. 4.

† John xiv. 18.

next follows the fortunes of his people in exile. There is no mercy for them in their flight. The words in which the miseries of this time are referred to are somewhat obscure. The phrase in the Authorised Version, "Our necks are under persecution,"* is rendered by the Revisers, "Our pursuers are upon our necks." It would seem to mean that the hunt is so close that fugitives are on the point of being captured; or perhaps that they are made to bow their heads in defeat as their captors seize them. But a proposed emendation substitutes the word "yoke" for "pursuers." If we may venture to accept this as a conjectural improvement—and later critics indulge themselves in more freedom in the handling of the text than was formerly permitted—the line points to the burden of captivity. The next line favours this idea, since it dwells on the utter weariness of the miserable fugitives. There is no rest for them. Palestine is a difficult country to travel in, and the wilderness south and east of Jerusalem is especially trying. The hills are steep and the roads rocky; for a multitude of famine-stricken men, women, and children, driven out over this homeless waste, a country that taxes the strength of the traveller for pleasure could not but be most exhausting. But the worst weariness is not muscular. Tired souls are more weary than tired bodies. The yoke of shame and servitude is more crushing than any amount of physical labour. On the other hand the yoke of Jesus is easy not because little work is expected of Christians, but for the more satisfactory reason that, being given in exchange for the fearful burden of sin, it is borne willingly and even joyously as a badge of honour.

Finally, in their exile the Jews are not free from molestation. In order to obtain bread they must abase themselves before the people of the land. The fugitives in the south must do homage to the Egyptians; the captives in the east to the Assyrians.† Here, then, at the very last stage of the series of miseries, shame and humiliation are the principal grievances deplored. At every point there is a reproach, and to this feature of the whole situation God's attention is especially directed.

Now the elegist turns aside to a reflection on the cause of all this evil. It is attributed to the sins of previous generations. The present sufferers are bearing the iniquities of their fathers. Here several points call for a brief notice. In the first place, the very form of the language is significant. What is meant by the phrase to *bear iniquity*? Strange mystical meanings are sometimes imported into it, such as an actual transference of sin, or at least a taking over of guilt. This is asserted of the sin-offering in the law, and then of the sin-bearing of Jesus Christ on the cross. It would indicate shallow ways of thinking to say that the simple and obvious meaning of an expression in one place is the only signification it is ever capable of conveying. A common process in the development of language is for words and phrases that originally contained only plain physical meanings to acquire in course of time deeper and more spiritual associations. We can never fathom all that is meant by the statement that Christ "His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree."‡ Still it is well to observe that there is a plain sense in which the Hebrew phrase was used. It

is clear in the case now before us, at all events, that the poet had no mystical ideas in mind. When he said that the children bore the sins of their fathers he simply meant that they reaped the consequences of those sins. The expression can mean nothing else here. It would be well, then, to remember this very simple explanation of it when we are engaged with the discussion of other and more difficult passages in which it occurs.

But if the language is perfectly unambiguous the doctrine it implies is far from being easy to accept. On the face of it, it seems to be glaringly unjust. And yet, whether we can reconcile it with our ideas of what is equitable or not there can be no doubt that it states a terrible truth; we gain nothing by blinking the fact. It was perfectly clear to people of the time of the Captivity that they were suffering for the persistent misconduct of their ancestors during a succession of generations. Long before this the Jews had been warned of the danger of continued rebellion against the will of God. Thus the nation had been treasuring up wrath for the day of wrath. The forbearance which permitted the first offenders to die in peace before the day of reckoning would assume another character for the unhappy generation on whose head the long-pent-up flood at length descended. It is not enough to urge in reply that the threat of the second commandment to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation was for *them that hate God*; because it is not primarily their own conduct, but the sins of their ancestors, in which the reason for punishing the later generations is found. If these sins were exactly repeated the influence of their parents would make the personal guilt of the later offenders less, not more, than that of the originators of the evil line. Besides, in the case of the Jews there had been some amendment. Josiah's reformation had been very disappointing; and yet the awful wickedness of the reign of Manasseh had not been repeated. The gross idolatry of the earlier times and the cruelties of Moloch worship had disappeared. At least, it must be admitted, they were no longer common practices of court and people. The publication of so great an inspired work as the Book of Deuteronomy had wrought a marked effect on the religion and morals of the Jews. The age which was called upon to receive the payment for the national sins was not really so wicked as some of the ages that had earned it. The same thing is seen in private life. There is nothing that more distresses the author of these poems than the sufferings of innocent children in the siege of Jerusalem. We are frequently confronted with evidences of the fact that the vices of parents inflict poverty, dishonour, and disease on their families. This is just what the elegist means when he writes of children bearing the iniquities of their fathers. The fact cannot be disputed.

Often as the problem that here starts up afresh has been discussed, no really satisfactory solution of it has ever been forthcoming. We must admit that we are face to face with one of the most profound mysteries of providence. But we may detect some glints of light in the darkness. Thus, as we have seen on the occasion of a previous reference to this question,* the fundamental principle in accordance with which these

* v. 5.

† v. 6.

‡ 1 Peter ii. 24.

* Page 562.

perplexing results are brought about is clearly one which on the whole makes for the highest welfare of mankind. That one generation should hand on the fruit of its activity to another is essential to the very idea of progress. The law of heredity and the various influences that go to make up the evil results in the case before us work powerfully for good under other circumstances; and that the balance is certainly on the side of good is proved by the fact that the world is moving forward, not backward, as would be the case if the balance of hereditary influence was on the side of evil. Therefore it would be disastrous in the extreme for the laws that pass on the punishment of sin to successive generations to be abolished; the abolition of them would stop the chariot of progress. Then we have seen that the solidarity of the race necessitates both mutual influences in the present and the continuance of influence from one age to another. The great unit *Man* is far more than the sum of the little units *men*. We must endure the disadvantages of a system which is so essential to the good of man. This, however, is but to fall back on the Leibnitzian theory of the best of all *possible* worlds. It is not an absolute vindication of the justice of whatever happens—an attainment quite beyond our reach.

But another consideration may shed a ray of light on the problem. The bearing of the sins of others is for the highest advantage of the sufferers. It is difficult to think of any more truly elevating sorrows. They resemble our Lord's passion; and of Him it was said that He was made perfect through suffering.* Without doubt Israel benefited immensely from the discipline of the Captivity, and we may be sure that the better "remnant" was most blessed by this experience, although it was primarily designed to be the chastisement of the more guilty. The Jews were regenerated by the baptism of fire. Then they could not ultimately complain of the ordeal that issued in so much good.

It is to be observed, however, that there were two currents of thought with regard to this problem. While most men held to the ancient orthodoxy, some rose in revolt against the dogma expressed in the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Just at this time the prophet Ezekiel was inspired to lead the Jews to a more just conception, with the declaration: "As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: *the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*"† This was the new doctrine. But how could it be made to square with the facts? By strong faith in it the disciples of the advanced school might bring themselves to believe that the course of events which had given rise to the old idea would be arrested. But if so they would be disappointed; for the world goes on in its unvarying way. Happily, as Christians, we may look for the final solution in a future life, when all wrongs shall be righted. It is much to know that in the great hereafter each soul will be judged simply according to its own character.

In conclusion, as we follow out the course of the elegy, we find the same views maintained that were presented earlier. The idea of ig-

nominy is still harped upon. The Jews complain that they are under the rule of servants.* Satraps were really the Great King's slaves, often simply household favourites promoted to posts of honour. Possibly the Jews were put in the power of inferior servants. The petty tyranny of such persons would be all the more persistently annoying, if, as often happens, servility to superiors had bred insolence in bullying the weak; and there was no appeal from the vexatious tyranny. This complaint would seem to apply to the people left in the land, for it is the method of the elegist to bring together scenes from different places as well as scenes from different times in one picture of concentrated misery. The next point is that food is only procured at the risk of life "because of the sword of the wilderness;"† which seems to mean that the country is so disorganised that hordes of Bedouins hover about and attack the peasants when they venture abroad to gather in their harvest. The fever of famine is seen on these wretched people; their faces burn as though they had been scorched at an oven.‡ Such is the general condition of the Jews, such is the scene on which God is begged to look down!

CHAPTER XXIII.

SIN AND SHAME.

LAMENTATIONS v. 11-18.

THE keynote of the fifth elegy is struck in its opening verse when the poet calls upon God to remember the *reproach* that has been cast upon His people. The preceding poems dwelt on the sufferings of the Jews; here the predominant thought is that of the humiliations to which they have been subjected. The shame of Israel and the sin which had brought it on are now set forth with point and force. If, as some think, the literary grace of the earlier compositions is not fully sustained in the last chapter of Lamentations—although in parts of it the feeling and imagination and art all touch the high-water mark—it cannot be disputed that the spiritual tone of this elegy indicates an advance on the four earlier poems. We have sometimes met with wild complaints, fierce recriminations, deep and terrible curses that seem to require some apology if they are to be justified. Nothing of the kind ruffles the course of this faultless meditation. There is not a single jarring note from beginning to end, not one phrase calling for explanation by reference to the limited ideas of Old Testament times or to the passion excited by cruelty, insult, and tyranny, not a line that reads painfully even in the clear light of the teachings of Jesus Christ. The vilest outrages are deplored; and yet, strange to say, no word of vindictiveness towards the perpetrators escapes the lips of the mourning patriot! How is this? The sin of the people has been confessed before as the source of all their misery; but since with it shame is now associated as the principal item in their affliction, we can see in this fresh development a decided advance towards higher views of the whole position.

May we not take this characteristic of the concluding chapter of the Book of Lamentations to be an indication of progress in the spiritual

* Heb. ii. 10.

† Ezek. xviii. 3, 4.

* v. 8.

† v. 9.

‡ v. 10.

experience of its author? Perhaps it is to be partially explained by the fact that the poem throughout consists of a prayer addressed directly to God. The wildest, darkest passions of the soul cannot live in the atmosphere of prayer. When men say of the persecutor, "Behold he prayeth," it is certain that he cannot any longer be "breathing threatening and slaughter." Even the feelings of the persecuted must be calmed in the presence of God. The serenity of the surroundings of the mercy-seat cannot but communicate itself to the feverish soul of the suppliant. To draw near to God is to escape from the tumults of earth and breathe the still, pure air of heaven. He is Himself so calm and strong, so completely sufficient for every emergency, that we begin to enter into His rest as soon as we approach His presence. All unawares, perhaps unsought, the peace of God steals into the heart of the man who brings his troubles to his Father in prayer.

Then the reflections that accompany prayer tend in the same direction. In the light of God things begin to assume their true proportions. We discover that our first fierce outcries were unreasonable, that we had been simply maddened by pain so that our judgment had been confused. A psalmist tells us how he understood the course of events which had previously perplexed him by taking his part in the worship of the sanctuary, when referring to his persecutors, the prosperous wicked, he exclaims, "Then understood I their end."* In drawing near to God we learn that vengeance is God's prerogative, that He will repay; therefore we can venture to be still and leave the vindication of our cause in His unerring hands. But, further, the very thirst for revenge is extinguished in the presence of God, and that in several ways: we see that the passion is wrong in itself; we begin to make some allowance for the offender; we learn to own kinship with the man while condemning his wickedness; above all, we awake to a keen consciousness of our own guilt.

This, however, is not a sufficient explanation of the remarkable change in tone that we have observed in the fifth elegy. The earlier poems contain prayers, one of which degenerates into a direct imprecation.† If the poet had wholly given himself to prayer in that case as he has done here, very possibly his tone would have been mollified. Still, we must look to other factors for a complete explanation. The writer is himself one of the suffering people. In describing their wrongs he is narrating his own, for he is "the man who has seen affliction." Thus he has long been a pupil in the school of adversity. There is no school at which a docile pupil learns so much. This man has graduated in sorrow. It is not surprising that he is not just what he was when he matriculated. We must not press the analogy too far, because, as we have seen, there is good reason to believe that none of the elegies were written until some time after the occurrence of the calamities to which they refer, that therefore they all represent the fruit of long brooding over their theme. And yet we may allow an interval to have elapsed between the composition of the earlier ones and that of the poem with which the book closes. This period of longer continued reflection may have been utilised in the process of clearing and refining the ideas of the poet. It

is not merely that the lessons of adversity impart fresh knowledge or a truer way of looking at life and its fortunes. They do the higher work of education—they develop culture. This, indeed, is the greatest advantage to be gained by the stern discipline of sorrow. The soul that has the grace to use it aright is purged and pruned, chastened and softened, lifted to higher views, and at the same time brought down from self-esteem to deep humiliation. Here we have a partial explanation of the mystery of suffering. This poem throws light on the terrible problem by its very existence, by the spirit and character which it exhibits. The calmness and self-restraint of the elegy, while they deepen the pathos of the whole scene, help us to see as no direct statement would do, that the chastisement of Israel has not been inflicted in vain. There must be good even in the awful miseries here described in such patient language.

The connection of shame with sin in this poem is indirect and along a line which is the reverse of the normal course of experience. The poet does not pass from sin to shame; he proceeds from the thought of shame to that of sin. It is the humiliating condition in which the Jews are found that awakens the idea of the shocking guilt of which this is the consequence. We often have occasion to acknowledge the fatal hindrance of pride to the right working of conscience. A lofty conception of one's own dignity is absolutely inconsistent with a due feeling of guilt. A man cannot be both elated and cast down at the same moment. If his elation is sufficiently sustained from within it will effectually bar the door to the entrance of those humbling thoughts which cannot but accompany an admission of sin. Therefore when this barrier is first removed, and the man is thoroughly humbled, he is open to receive the accusations of conscience. All his fortifications have been flung down. There is nothing to prevent the invading army of accusing thoughts from marching straight in and taking possession of the citadel of his heart.

The elegy takes a turn at the eleventh verse. Up to this point it describes the state of the people generally in their sufferings from the siege and its consequences. But now the poet directs attention to separate classes of people and the different forms of cruelty to which they are severally subjected in a series of intensely vivid pictures. We see the awful fate of matrons and maidens, princes and elders, young men and children. Women are subjected to the vilest abuse, neither reverence for motherhood nor pity for innocence affording the least protection. Men of royal blood and noble birth are killed and their corpses hung up in ignominy—perhaps impaled or crucified in accordance with the vile Babylonian custom. There is no respect for age or office. Neither is there any mercy for youth. In the East grinding is women's work; but, like Samson among the Philistines, the young men of the Jews are put in charge of the mills. The poet seems to indicate that they have to carry the heavy millstones in the march of the returning army with the spoils of the sacked city. The children are set to the slave task of Gibeonites. The Hebrew word here translated *children* might stand for young people who had reached adult years.* But in the present case the condition is that

* Psalm lxxiii. 17.

† Lam. iii. 65.

* v. 13.

of immature strength, for the burden of wood they are required to bear is too heavy for them and they stumble under it. This is the scene—outrage for the girls and women, slaughter for the leading men, harsh slavery for the children.

Next, passing from these exact details, the poet again describes the condition of the people more generally, and this time under the image of an interrupted feast, which is introduced by one more reference to the changes that have come upon certain classes. The elders are no longer to be seen at the gate administering the primitive forms of law entrusted to them. The young men are no longer to be heard performing on their musical instruments.* Still speaking for the people, the poet declares that the joy of their heart has ceased. Then the aspect of all life must be changed to them. Instead of the gay pictures of dancers in their revelry we have the waiting of mourners. The guest at a feast would be crowned with a garland of flowers. Such was once the appearance of Jerusalem in her merry festivities. But now the garland has fallen from her head.†

This imagery is a relief after the terrible realism of the immediately preceding pictures. We cannot bear to look continuously at scenes of agony, nor is it well that we should attempt to do so, because if we could succeed it would only be by becoming callous. Then the final result would be not to excite deeper sympathy, but the very reverse, and at the same time a distinctly lowering and coarsening effect would be produced in us. And yet we may not smother up abuses in order to spare our own feelings. There are evils that must be dragged out to the light in order that they may be execrated, punished, and destroyed. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" broke the back of American slavery before President Lincoln attacked it. Where, then, shall we find the middle position between repulsive realism and guilty negligence? We have the model for this in the Biblical treatment of painful subjects. Scripture never gloats over the details of crimes and vices; yet Scripture never flinches from describing such things in the plainest possible terms. If these subjects are ever to become the theme of art—and art claims the whole of life for her domain—imagination must carry us away to the secondary effects rather than vivify the hideous occurrences themselves. The passage before us affords an excellent illustration of this method. With a few keen, clear strokes the poet sketches in the exact situation. But he shows no disposition to linger on ghastly details. Though he does not shrink from setting them before us in unmistakable truth of form and colour, he hastens to a more ideal treatment of the subject, and relieves us with the imaginary picture of the spoiled banquet. Even Spenser sometimes excites a feeling of positive nausea when he enlarges on some most loathsome picture. It would be unendurable except that the great Elizabethan poet has woven the witchery of his dainty fancy into the fabric of his verse. Thus things can be said in poetry which would be unbearable in prose, because poetry refines with the aid of imagination the tale that it does not shrink from telling quite truly and most forcibly.

The change in the poet's style prepares for another effect. While we are contemplating the exact details of the sufferings of the different classes of outraged citizens, the insult and cruelty

and utter abomination of these scenes rouse our indignation against the perpetrators of the foulest crimes, and leave nothing but pity for the victims. It is not in the presence of such events that the sins of Israel can be brought home to the people or even called to mind. The attempt to introduce the thought of them there would seem to be a piece of heartless officiousness. And yet it is most important to perceive the connection between all this misery and the previous misconduct of the Jews which was its real cause. Accordingly intermediate reflections, while they let the scenes of blood and terror recede, touch on the general character of the whole in a way that permits of more heart-searching self-examination. Thus out of the brooding melancholy of this secondary grief we are led to a distinct confession of sin on the part of the people.*

This is the main result aimed at throughout the whole course of chastisement. Until it has been reached little good can be effected. When it is attained the discipline has already wrought its greatest work. As we saw at the outset, it is the shame of the situation that awakens a consciousness of guilt. Humbled and penitent, the chastened people are just in the position at which God can meet them in gracious pardon. Strictly speaking, perhaps we should say that this is the position to which the elegist desires to lead them by thus appearing as their spokesman. And yet we should not make too sharp a distinction between the poet and his people. The elegy is not a didactic work; the flavour of its gentle lines would be lost directly they lent themselves to pedagogic ends. It is only just to take the words before us quite directly, as they are written in the first person plural, for a description of the thoughts of at least the group of Jews with whom their author associated.

The confession of sin implies in the first place a recognition of its existence. This is more than a bare, undeniable recollection that the deed was done. It is possible by a kind of intellectual jugglery even to come to a virtual denial of this fact in one's own consciousness. But to admit the deed is not to admit the sin. The casuistry of self-defence before the court of self-judgment is more subtle than sound, as every one who has found out his own heart must be aware. In this matter, "the heart is deceitful above all things." † Now it is not difficult to take part in a decorous service where all the congregation are expected to denominate themselves miserable offenders, but it is an entirely different thing to retreat into the silent chamber of our own thought, and there calmly and deliberately, with full consciousness of what the words mean, confess to ourselves, "We have sinned." The sinking of heart, the stinging humiliation, the sense of self-loathing which such an admission produces, are the most miserable experiences in life. The wretchedness of it all is that there is no possibility of escaping the accuser when he is self. We can do nothing but let the shame of the deed burn in the conscience without any mollifying salve—until the healing of Divine forgiveness is received.

But, in the second place, confession of sin goes beyond the secret admission of it by the conscience, as in a case heard *in camera*. Chiefly it is a frank avowal of guilt before God. This is treated by St. John as an essential condition of forgiveness by God, when He says, "If we

* V. 14.

† V. 15, 16.

* V. 16.

† Jer. xvii. 9.

confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." * How far confession should also be made to our fellow-men is a difficult question. In bidding us confess our "faults one to another," † St. James may be simply requiring that when we have done anybody a wrong we should own it to the injured person. The harsh discipline of the white sheet is not found in apostolic times, the brotherly spirit of which is seen in the charity which "covereth a multitude of sins." ‡ And yet, on the other hand, the true penitent will always shrink from sailing under false colours. Certainly public offences call for public acknowledgment, and all sin should be so far owned that whether the details are known or not there is no actual deception, no hypocritical pretence at a virtue that is not possessed, no willingness to accept honours that are quite unmerited. Let a man never pretend to be sinless, nay, let him distinctly own himself a sinner, and, in particular, let him not deny or excuse any specific wickedness with which he is justly accused; and then for the rest, "to his own Lord he standeth or falleth." §

When the elegist follows his confession of sin with the words, "For this our heart is faint," etc., ¶ it is plain that he attributes the sense of failure and impotence to the guilt that has led to the chastisement. This faintness of heart and the dimness of sight that accompanies it, like the condition of a swooning person, suggests a very different situation from that of the hero struggling against a mountain of difficulties, or that of the martyr triumphing over torture and death. The humiliation is now accounted for, and the explanation of it tears to shreds the last rag of pride with which the fallen people might have attempted to hide it. The abject wretchedness of the Jews is admitted to be the effect of their own sins. No thought can be more depressing. The desolation of Mount Zion, where jackals prowl undisturbed as though it were the wilderness, ¶ is a standing testimony to the sin of Israel. Such is the degradation to which the people whom the elegist here represents are reduced. It is a condition of utter helplessness; and yet in it will rise the dawn of hope; for when man is most empty of self he is most ready to receive God. Thus it is that from the deepest pit of humiliation there springs the prayer of trust and hope with which the Book of Lamentations closes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EVERLASTING THRONE.

LAMENTATIONS v. 19-22.

WE have lingered long in the valley of humiliation. At the eleventh hour we are directed to look up from this scene of weary gloom to heavenly heights, radiant with sunlight. It is not by accident that the new attitude is suggested only at the very end of the last elegy. The course of the thought and the course of experience that underlies it have been preparing for the change. On entering the valley the traveller must look well to his feet; it is not till he has been a denizen of it for some time that he is able to lift up his eyes to other and brighter realms.

Thus at last our attention is turned from earth to heaven, from man to God. In this change of vision the mood which gave rise to the Lamentations disappears. Since earthly things lose their value in view of the treasures in heaven, the ruin of them also becomes of less account. Thus we read in the "Imitatio" :

"The life of man is always looking on the things of time,
Pleased with the pelf of earth,
Gloomy at loss,
Pricked by the least injurious word;
Life touched by God looks on the eternal,—
With it no cleaving unto time,
No frown when property is lost,
No sneer when words are harsh,—
Because it puts its treasure and its joy in heaven,
Where nothing fades."

The explanation of this sudden turn is to be found in the fact that for the moment the poet forgets himself and his surroundings in a rapt contemplation of God. This is the glory of adoration, the very highest form of prayer, that prayer in which a man comes nearest to the condition ascribed to angels and the spirits of the blessed who surround the throne and gaze on the eternal light. It is not to be thought of as an idle dreaming like the dreary abstraction of the Indian fanatic who has drilled himself to forget the outside world by reducing his mind to a state of vacancy while he repeats the meaningless syllable *Om*, or the senseless ecstasy of the monk of Mount Athos, who has attained the highest object of his ambition when he thinks he has beheld the sacred light within his own body. It is self-forgetful, not self-centred; and it is occupied with the contemplation of those great truths of the being of God, absorption in which is an inspiration. Here the worshipper is at the river of the water of life, from which if he drinks he will go away refreshed for the battle like the Red-cross knight restored at the healing fountain. It is the misfortune of our own age that it is impractical in the excess of its practicalness when it has not patience for those quiet, calm experiences of pure worship which are the very food of the soul.

The continuance of the throne of God is the idea that now lays hold of the elegist as he turns his thoughts from the miserable scenes of the ruined city to the glory above. This is brought home to his consciousness by the fleeting nature of all things earthly. He has experienced what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes as "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain." * The throne of David has been swept away; but above the earthly wreck the throne of God stands firm, all the more clearly visible now that the distracting influence of the lower object has vanished, all the more valuable now that no other refuge can be found. Men fall like leaves in autumn; one generation follows another in the swift march to death; dynasties which outlive many generations have their day, to be succeeded by others of an equally temporary character; kingdoms reach their zenith, decline, and fall. God only remains, eternal, unchangeable. His is the only throne that stands secure above every revolution.

The unwavering faith of our poet is apparent at this point after it has been tried by the most severe tests. Jerusalem has been destroyed, her king has fallen into the hands of the enemy, her

* 1 John i. 9.
† James v. 16.

‡ 1 Peter iv. 8.
§ Rom. xiv. 4.

¶ v. 17.
¶ ver. 18.

* Heb. xii. 27.

people have been scattered; and yet the elegist has not the faintest doubt that her God remains and that His throne is steadfast, immovable, everlasting. This faith reveals a conviction far in advance of that of the surrounding heathen. The common idea was that the defeat of a people was also the defeat of their gods. If the national divinities were not exterminated they were flung down from their thrones, and reduced to the condition of *jins*—demons who avenged themselves on their conquerors by annoying them whenever an opportunity for doing so arose, but with greatly crippled resources. No such notion is ever entertained by the author of these poems nor by any of the Hebrew prophets. The fall of Israel in no way affects the throne of God; it is even brought about by His will; it could not have occurred if He had been pleased to hinder it.

Thus the poet was led to find his hope and refuge in the throne of God, the circumstances of his time concurring to turn his thoughts in this direction, since the disappearance of the national throne, the chaos of the sacked city, and the establishment of a new government under the galling yoke of slaves from Babylon, invited the man of faith to look above the shifting powers of earth to the everlasting supremacy of heaven.

This idea of the elegist is in line with a familiar stream of Hebrew thought, and his very words have many an echo in the language of prophet and psalmist, as, for example, in the forty-fifth psalm, where we read, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."

The grand Messianic hope is founded on the conviction that the ultimate establishment of God's reign throughout the world will be the best blessing imaginable for all mankind. Sometimes this is associated with the advent of a Divinely anointed earthly monarch of the line of David. At other times God's direct sovereignty is expected to be manifested in the "Day of the Lord." The failure of the feeble Zedekiah seems to have discredited the national hopes centred in the royal family. For two generations they slumbered, to be awakened in connection with another disappointing descendant of David, Zerubbabel, the leader of the return. No king was ever equal to the satisfaction of these hopes until the Promised One appeared in the fulness of the times, until Jesus was born into the world to come forth as the Lord's Christ. Meanwhile, since the royal house is under a cloud, the essential Messianic hope turns to God alone. He can deliver His people, and He only. Even apart from personal hopes of rescue, the very idea of the eternal, just reign of God above the transitory thrones of men is a calming, reassuring thought.

It is strange that this idea should ever have lost its fascination among Christian people, who have so much more gracious a revelation of God than was given to the Jews under the old covenant; and yet our Lord's teachings concerning the Fatherhood of God have been set forth as the direct antithesis of the Divine sovereignty, while the latter has been treated as a stern and dreadful function from which it was natural to shrink with fear and trembling. But the truth is the two attributes are mutually illustrative; for he is a very imperfect father who does not rule his own house, and he is a very inadequate sovereign who does not seek to exercise parental

functions towards his people. Accordingly, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of the kingdom. Thus the good news declared by the first evangelists was due to the effect that the kingdom of God was at hand, and our Lord taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." For Christians, at least as much as for Jews, the eternal sovereignty of God should be a source of profound confidence, inspiring hope and joy.

Now the elegist ventures to expostulate with God on the ground of the eternity of His throne. God had not abdicated, though the earthly monarch had been driven from his kingdom. The overthrow of Zedekiah had left the throne of God untouched. Then it was not owing to inability to come to the aid of the suffering people that the eternal King did not intervene to put an end to their miseries. A long time had passed since the siege, and still the Jews were in distress. It was as though God had forgotten them or voluntarily forsaken them. This is a dilemma to which we are often driven. If God is almighty can He be also all-merciful? If what we knew furnished all the possible data of the problem this would be indeed a serious position. But our ignorance silences us.

Some hint of an explanation is given in the next phrase of the poet's prayer. God is besought to turn the people to Himself. Then they had been moving away from Him. It is like the old popular ideas of sunset. People thought the sun had forsaken the earth, when, in fact, their part of the earth had forsaken the sun. But if the wrong is on man's side, on man's side must be the amendment. Under these circumstances it is needless and unjust to speculate as to the cause of God's supposed neglect or forgetfulness.

There can be no reasonable doubt that the language of the elegy here points to a personal and spiritual change. We cannot water it down to the expression of a desire to be restored to Palestine. Nor is it enough to take it as a prayer to be restored to God's favour. The double expression,

"Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned."

points to a deeper longing, a longing for real conversion, the turning round of the heart and life to God, the return of the prodigal to his Father. We think of the education of the race, the development of mankind, the culture of the soul; and in so thinking we direct our attention to important truths which were not so well within the reach of our forefathers. On the other hand, are we not in danger of overlooking another series of reflections on which they dwelt more persistently? It is not the fact that the world is marching straight on to perfection in an unbroken line of evolution. There are breaks in the progress and long halts, deviations from the course and retrograde movements. We err and go astray, and then continuance in an evil way does not bring us out to any position of advance; it only plunges us down deeper falls of ruin. Under such circumstances, a more radical change than anything progress or education can produce is called for if ever we are even to recover our lost ground, not to speak of advancing to higher attainments. In the case of Israel it was clear that there could be no hope until the nation made a complete moral and religious evolution. The same necessity lies before every

soul that has drifted into the wrong way. This subject has been discredited by being treated too much in the abstract, with too little regard for the actual condition of men and women. The first question is, What is the tendency of the life? If that is away from God, it is needless to discuss theories of conversion; the fact is plain that in the present instance some conversion is needed. There is no reason to retain a technical term, and perhaps it would be as well to abandon it if it were found to be degenerating into a mere cant phrase. This is not a question of words. The urgent necessity is concerned with the actual turning round of the leading pursuits of life.

In the next place, it is to be observed that the turning here contemplated is positive in its aims, not merely a flight from the wrong way. It is not enough to cast out the evil spirit, and leave the house swept and garnished, but without a tenant to take care of it. Evil can only be overcome by good. To turn from sin to blank vacancy and nothingness is an impossibility. The great motive power must be the attraction of a better course rather than revulsion from the old life. This is the reason why the preaching of the gospel of Christ succeeds where pure appeals to conscience fail.

By his "Serious Call to the Unconverted" William Law started a few earnest men thinking; but he could not anticipate the Methodist revival, although he prepared the way for it. The reason seems to be that appeals to conscience are depressing, necessarily and rightly so; but some cheering encouragement is called for if energy is to be found for the tremendous effort of turning the whole life upon its axle. Therefore it is not the threat of wrath but the gospel of mercy that leads to what may be truly called conversion.

Then we may notice, further, that the particular aim of the change here indicated is to turn back to God. As sin is forsaking God, so the commencement of a better life must consist in a return to Him. But this is not to be regarded as a means towards some other end. We must not have the home-coming made use of as a mere convenience. It must be an end in itself, and the chief end of the prayer and effort of the soul, or it can be nothing at all. It appears as such in the passage now under consideration. The elegist writes as though he and the people whom he represents had arrived at the conviction that their supreme need was to be brought back into near and happy relations with God. The hunger for God breathes through these words. This is the truest, deepest, most Divine longing of the soul. When once it is awakened we may be sure that it will be satisfied. The hopelessness of the condition of so many people is not only that they are estranged from God, but that they have no desire to be reconciled to Him. Then the kindling of this desire is itself a great step towards the reconciliation.

And yet the good wish is not enough by itself to attain its object. The prayer is for God to turn the people back to Himself. We see here the mutual relations of the human and the Divine in the process of the recovery of souls. So long as there is no willingness to return to God nothing can be done to force that action on the wanderer. The first necessity, therefore, is to awaken the prayer which seeks restoration. But

this prayer must be for the action of God. The poet knows that it is useless simply to resolve to turn. Such a resolution may be repeated a thousand times without any result following, because the fatal poison of sin is like a snake bite that paralyses its victims. Thus we read in the "Theologia Germanica," "And in this bringing back and healing, I can, or may, or shall do nothing of myself, but simply yield to God, so that He alone may do all things in me and work, and I may suffer Him and all His work and His Divine will." The real difficulty is not to change our own hearts and lives; that is impossible. And it is not expected of us. The real difficulty is rather to reach a consciousness of our own disability. It takes the form of unwillingness to trust ourselves entirely to God for Him to do for us and in us just whatever He will.

The poet is perfectly confident that when God takes His people in hand to lead them round to Himself He will surely do so. If He turns them they will be turned. The words suggest that previous efforts had been made from other quarters, and had failed. The prophets, speaking from God, had urged repentance, but their words had been ineffectual. It is only when God undertakes the work that there is any chance of success. But then success is certain. This truth was illustrated in the preaching of the cross by St. Paul at Corinth, where it was found to be the power of God. It is seen repeatedly in the fact that the worst, the oldest, the most hardened are brought round to a new life by the miracle of redeeming power. Herein we have the root principle of Calvinism, the secret of the marvellous vigour of a system which, at the first blush of it, would seem to be depressing rather than encouraging. Calvinism directed the thoughts of its disciples away from self, and man, and the world, for the inspiration of all life and energy. It bade them confess their own impotence and God's almightiness. All who could trust themselves to such a faith would find the secret of victory.

Next, we see that the return is to be a renewal of a previous condition. The poet prays, "Renew our days as of old"—a phrase which suggests the recovery of apostates. Possibly here we have some reference to more external conditions. There is a hope that the prosperity of the former times may be brought back. And yet the previous line, which is concerned with the spiritual return to God, should lead us to take this one also in a spiritual sense. We think of Cowper's melancholy regret—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?"

The memory of a lost blessing makes the prayer for restoration the more intense. It is of God's exceeding lovingkindness that His compassions fail not, so that He does not refuse another opportunity to those who have proved faithless in the past. In some respects restoration is more difficult than a new beginning. The past will not come back. The innocence of childhood, when once it is lost, can never be restored. That first, fresh bloom of youth is irrecoverable. On the other hand, what the restoration lacks in one respect may be more than made up in other directions. Though the old paradise will not be regained, though it has withered long since, and the site of it has become

a desert, God will create new heavens and a new earth which shall be better than the lost past. And this new state will be a real redemption, a genuine recovery of what was essential to the old condition. The vision of God had been enjoyed in the old, simple days, and though to weary watchers sobered by a sad experience, the vision of God will be restored in the more blessed future.

In our English Bible the last verse of the chapter reads like a final outburst of the language of despair. It seems to say that the prayer is all in vain, for God has utterly forsaken His people. So it was understood by the Jewish critics who arranged to repeat the previous verse at the end of the chapter to save the omen, that the Book should not conclude with so gloomy a thought. But another rendering is now generally accepted, though our Revisers have only placed it in the margin. According to this we read, "*Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us,*" etc. There is still a melancholy tone in the sentence, as there is throughout the Book that it concludes; but this is softened, and now it by no means breathes the spirit of despair. Turn it round, and the phrase will even contain an encouragement. If God has not utterly rejected His people, assuredly He will attend to their

prayer to be restored to Him. But it cannot be that He has quite cast them off. Then it must be that He will respond and turn them back to Himself. If our hope is only conditioned by the question whether God has utterly forsaken us it is perfectly safe, because the one imaginable cause of shipwreck can never arise. There is but one thing that might make our trust in God vain and fruitless; and that one thing is impossible, nay, inconceivable. So wide and deep is our Father's love, so firm is the adamantine strength of His eternal fidelity, we may be absolutely confident that, though the mountains be removed and cast into the sea, and though the solid earth melt away beneath our feet, He will still abide as the Eternal Refuge of His children, and therefore that He will never fail to welcome all who seek His grace to help them return to Him in true penitence and filial trust. Thus we are led even by this most melancholy book in the Bible to see, as with eyes purged by tears, that the love of God is greater than the sorrow of man, and His redeeming power more mighty than the sin which lies at the root of the worst of that sorrow; the eternity of His throne, in spite of the present havoc of evil in the universe, assuring us that the end of all will be not a mournful elegy, but a pæan of victory.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

BY THE REV. GEORGE ADAM SMITH, M. A.

PART I.

INTRODUCTION.

As the following Exposition of the Book of Isaiah does not observe the canonical arrangement of the chapters, a short introduction is necessary upon the plan which has been adopted.

The size and the many obscurities of the Book of Isaiah have limited the common use of it in the English tongue to single conspicuous passages, the very brilliance of which has cast their context and original circumstance into deeper shade. The intensity of the gratitude with which men have seized upon the more evangelical passages of Isaiah, as well as the attention which apologists for Christianity have too partially paid to his intimations of the Messiah, has confirmed the neglect of the rest of the Book. But we might as well expect to receive an adequate conception of a great statesman's policy from the epigrams and perorations of his speeches as to appreciate the message, which God has sent to the world through the Book of Isaiah, from a few lectures on isolated, and often dislocated, texts. No book of the Bible is less susceptible of treatment apart from the history out of which it sprang than the Book of Isaiah; and it may be added, that in the Old Testament at least there is none which, when set in its original circumstance and methodically considered as a whole, appeals with greater power to the modern conscience. Patiently to learn how these great prophecies were suggested by, and first met, the actual occasions of human life, is vividly to hear them speaking home to life still.

I have, therefore, designed an arrangement which embraces all the prophecies, but treats them in chronological order. I will endeavour to render their contents in terms which appeal to the modern conscience; but, in order to be successful, such an endeavour presupposes the exposition of them in relation to the history which gave them birth. In these volumes, therefore, narrative and historical exposition will take precedence of practical application.

Every one knows that the Book of Isaiah breaks into two parts between chaps. xxxix. and xl. Part I. of this Exposition covers chaps. i.-xxxix. Part II. will treat of chaps. xl.-lxvi. Again, within chaps. i.-xxxix. another division is apparent. The most of these chapters evidently bear upon events within Isaiah's own career, but some imply historical circumstances that did not arise till long after he had passed away. Of the five books into which I have divided Part I., the first four contain the prophecies relating to Isaiah's time (740-701 B. C.), and the fifth the prophecies which refer to later events (chaps. xliii.-xiv. 23; xxiv.-xxvii.; xxxiv.; xxxv.).

The prophecies, whose subjects fall within Isaiah's times, I have taken in chronological order, with one exception. This exception is chap. i., which, although it was published near the end of the prophet's life, I treat of first, be-

cause, from its position as well as its character, it is evidently intended as a preface to the whole book. The difficulty of grouping the rest of Isaiah's oracles and orations is great. The plan I have adopted is not perfect, but convenient. Isaiah's prophesying was determined chiefly by four Assyrian invasions of Palestine: the first, in 734-732 B. C., by Tiglath-pileser II., while Ahaz was on the throne; the second by Salmanassar and Sargon in 725-720, during which Samaria fell in 721; the third by Sargon, 712-710; the fourth by Sennacherib in 701, which last three occurred while Hezekiah was king of Judah. But outside the Assyrian invasions there were three other cardinal dates in Isaiah's life: 740, his call to be a prophet; 727, the death of Ahaz, his enemy, and the accession of his pupil, Hezekiah; and 705, the death of Sargon, for Sargon's death led to the rebellion of the Syrian States, and it was this rebellion which brought on Sennacherib's invasion. Taking all these dates into consideration, I have placed in Book I. all the prophecies of Isaiah from his call in 740 to the death of Ahaz in 727; they lead up to and illustrate Tiglath-pileser's invasion; they cover what I have ventured to call the prophet's apprenticeship, during which the theatre of his vision was mainly the internal life of his people, but he gained also his first outlook upon the world beyond. Book II. deals with the prophecies from the accession of Hezekiah in 727 to the death of Sargon in 705—a long period, but few prophecies, covering both Salmanassar's and Sargon's campaigns. Book III. is filled with the prophecies from 705 to 702, a numerous group, called forth from Isaiah by the rebellion and political activity in Palestine consequent on Sargon's death and preliminary to Sennacherib's arrival. Book IV. contains the prophecies which refer to Sennacherib's actual invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem, in 701.

Of course, any chronological arrangement of Isaiah's prophecies must be largely provisional. Only some of the chapters are fixed to dates past possibility of doubt. The Assyriology which has helped us with these must yield further results before the controversies can be settled that exist with regard to the rest. I have explained in the course of the Exposition my reasons for the order which I have followed, and need only say here that I am still more uncertain about the generally received dates of chaps. x. 5-xi., xvii. 12-14 and xxxii. The religious problems, however, were so much the same during the whole of Isaiah's career that uncertainties of date, *if they are confined to the limits of that career*, make little difference to the exposition of the book.

Isaiah's doctrines, being so closely connected with the life of his day, come up for statement at many points of the narrative, in which this Exposition chiefly consists. But here and there I have inserted chapters dealing summarily with more important topics, such as The World in Isaiah's Day; The Messiah; Isaiah's Power of Prediction, with its evidence on the character of Inspiration; and the question, Had Isaiah a

Gospel for the Individual? A short index will guide the student to Isaiah's teaching on other important points of theology and life, such as holiness, forgiveness, monotheism, immortality, the Holy Spirit, etc.

Treating Isaiah's prophecies chronologically as I have done, I have followed a method which put me on the look-out for any traces of development that his doctrine might exhibit. I have recorded these as they occur, but it may be useful to collect them here. In chaps. ii.-iv. we have the struggle of the apprentice prophet's thoughts from the easy religious optimism of his generation, through unrelieved convictions of judgment for the whole people, to his final vision of the Divine salvation of a remnant. Again, chap. vii. following on chaps. ii.-vi. proves that Isaiah's belief in the Divine righteousness preceded, and was the parent of, his belief in the Divine sovereignty. Again, his successive pictures of the Messiah grow in contents, and become more spiritual. And again, he only gradually arrived at a clear view of the siege and deliverance of Jerusalem. One other fact of the same kind has impressed me since I wrote the exposition of chap. i. I have there stated that it is plain that Isaiah's conscience was perfect just because it consisted of two complementary parts: one of God the infinitely High, exalted in righteousness, far above the thoughts of His people, and the other of God the infinitely Near, concerned and jealous for all the practical details of their life. I ought to have added that Isaiah was more under the influence of the former in his earlier years, but that as he grew older and took a larger share in the politics of Judah it was the latter view of God to which he most frequently gave expression. Signs of a development like these may be fairly used to correct or support the evidence which Assyriology affords for determining the chronological order of the chapters.

But these signs of development are more valuable for the proof they give that the Book of Isaiah contains the experience and testimony of a real life: a life that learned and suffered and grew, and at last triumphed. There is not a single word about the prophet's birth, or childhood, or fortune, or personal appearance, or even of his death. But between silence on his origin and silence on his end—and perhaps all the more impressively because of these clouds by which it is bounded—there shines the record of Isaiah's spiritual life and of the unfaltering career which this sustained,—clear and whole, from his commission by God in the secret experience of his own heart to his vindication in God's supreme tribunal of history. It is not only one of the greatest, but one of the most finished and intelligible, lives in history. My main purpose in expounding the book is to enable English readers, not only to follow its course, but to feel, and to be elevated by, its Divine inspiration.

I may state that this Exposition is based upon a close study of the Hebrew text of Isaiah, and that the translations are throughout my own, except in one or two cases where I have quoted from the revised English version.

With regard to the Revised Version of Isaiah, which I have had opportunities of thoroughly testing, I would like to say that my sense of the immense service which it renders to English readers of the Bible is only exceeded by my

wonder that the Revisers have not gone just a very little farther, and adopted one or two simple contrivances which are in the line of their own improvements and would have greatly increased our large debt to them. For instance, why did they not make plain by inverted commas such undoubted interruptions of the prophet's own speech as that of the drunkards in chap. xxviii. 9, 10? Not to know that these verses are spoken in mockery of Isaiah, a mockery to which he replies in vv. 10-13, is to miss the meaning of the whole passage. Again, when they printed Job and the Psalms in metrical form, as well as the hymn of Hezekiah, why did they not do the same with other poetical passages of Isaiah, particularly the great Ode on the King of Babylon in chap. xiv.? This is utterly spoiled in the form in which the Revisers have printed it. What English reader would guess that it was as much a piece of metre as any of the Psalms? Again, why have they so consistently rendered by the misleading word "judgment" a Hebrew term that no doubt sometimes means an act of doom, but far oftener the abstract quality of justice? It is such defects, along with a frequent failure to mark the proper emphasis in a sentence, that have led me to substitute a more literal version of my own.

I have not thought it necessary to discuss the question of the chronology of the period. This has been done so often and so recently. See Robertson Smith's "Prophets of Israel," pp. 145. 402, 413, Driver's "Isaiah," p. 12, or any good commentary.

I append a chronological table and the publishers have added a map of Isaiah's world in illustration of chap. v.

TABLE OF DATES.

- B. C.
 745. Tiglath-pileser II. ascends the Assyrian Throne.
 740. Uzziah dies. Jotham becomes sole King of Judah. Isaiah's Inaugural Vision (Isa. vi.).
 735. Jotham dies. Ahaz succeeds. League of Syria and Northern Israel against Judah.
 734-732. Syrian Campaign of Tiglath-pileser II. Siege and Capture of Damascus. Invasion of Israel. Captivity of Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (Isa. ix. 1). Ahaz visits Damascus.
 727. Salmanassar IV. succeeds Tiglath-pileser II. Hezekiah succeeds Ahaz (or in 725?).
 725. Salmanassar marches on Syria.
 722 or 721. Sargon succeeds Salmanassar. Capture of Samaria. Captivity of all Northern Israel.
 720 or 719. Sargon defeats Egypt at Rafia.
 711. Sargon invades Syria (Isa. xx.). Capture of Ashdod.
 709. Sargon takes Babylon from Merodach-baladan.
 705. Murder of Sargon. Sennacherib succeeds.
 701. Sennacherib invades Syria. Capture of Coast Towns. Siege of Ekron and Battle of Eltekeh. Invasion of Judah. Submission of Hezekiah. Jerusalem spared. Return of Assyrians with the Rabshakeh to Jerusalem, while Sennacherib's Army marches on Egypt. Disaster to Sen-

nacherib's Army near Pelusium. Disappearance of Assyrians from before Jerusalem—all happening in this order.

697 or 696. Death of Hezekiah. Manasseh succeeds.

681. Death of Sennacherib.

607. Fall of Nineveh and Assyria. Babylon supreme. Jeremiah.

599. First Deportation of Jews to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

588. Jerusalem destroyed. Second Deportation of Jews.

538. Cyrus captures Babylon. First Return of Jewish Exiles, under Zerubbabel, happens soon after.

458. Second Return of Jewish Exiles, under Ezra.

BOOK I.

PREFACE AND PROPHECIES TO THE DEATH OF AHAZ.

727 B.C.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE LORD AND ITS CONCLUSION.

ISAIAH i.—His General Preface.

THE first chapter of the Book of Isaiah owes its position not to its date, but to its character. It was published late in the prophet's life. The seventh verse describes the land as overrun by foreign soldiery, and such a calamity befell Judah only in the last two of the four reigns over which the first verse extends Isaiah's prophesying. In the reign of Ahaz, Judah was invaded by Syria and Northern Israel, and some have dated chapter i. from the year of that invasion, 734 B. C. In the reign again of Hezekiah some have imagined, in order to account for the chapter, a swarming of neighbouring tribes upon Judah; and Mr. Cheyne, to whom regarding the history of Isaiah's time we ought to listen with the greatest deference, has supposed an Assyrian invasion in 711, under Sargon. But hardly of this, and certainly not of that, have we adequate evidence, and the only other invasion of Judah in Isaiah's lifetime took place under Sennacherib, in 701. For many reasons this Assyrian invasion is to be preferred to that by Syria and Ephraim in 734 as the occasion of this prophecy. But there is really no need to be determined on the point. The prophecy has been lifted out of its original circumstance and placed in the front of the book, perhaps by Isaiah himself, as a general introduction to his collected pieces. It owes its position, as we have said, to its character. It is a clear, complete statement of the points which were at issue between the Lord and His own all the time Isaiah was the Lord's prophet. It is the most representative of Isaiah's prophecies; a summary is found, perhaps better than any other single chapter of the Old Testament, of the substance of prophetic doctrine, and a very vivid illustration of the prophetic spirit and method. We propose to treat it here as introductory to the main subject and lines of

Isaiah's teaching, leaving its historical references till we arrive in due course at the probable year of its origin, 701 B. C.*

Isaiah's preface is in the form of a Trial or Assize. Ewald calls it "The Great Arraignment." There are all the actors in a judicial process. It is a Crown case, and God is at once Plaintiff and Judge. He delivers both the Complaint in the beginning (vv. 2, 3) and the Sentence in the end. The Assessors are Heaven and Earth, whom the Lord's herald invokes to hear the Lord's plea (ver. 2). The people of Judah are the Defendants. The charge against them is one of brutish, ingrate stupidity, breaking out into rebellion. The Witness is the prophet himself, whose evidence on the guilt of his people consists in recounting the misery that has overtaken their land (vv. 4-9), along with their civic injustice and social cruelty—sins of the upper and ruling classes (vv. 10, 17, 21-23). The people's Plea-in-defence, laborious worship and multiplied sacrifice, is repelled and exposed (vv. 10-17). And the Trial is concluded—"Come now, let us bring our reasoning to a close, saith the Lord"—by God's offer of pardon to a people thoroughly convicted (ver. 18). On which follow the Conditions of the Future: happiness is sternly made dependent on repentance and righteousness (vv. 19, 20). And a supplementary oracle is given (vv. 24-31), announcing a time of affliction, through which the nation shall pass as through a furnace; rebels and sinners shall be consumed, but God will redeem Zion, and with her a remnant of the people.

That is the plan of the chapter—a Trial at Law. Though it disappears under the exceeding weight of thought the prophet builds upon it, do not let us pass hurriedly from it, as if it were only a scaffolding.

That God should argue at all is the magnificent truth on which our attention must fasten, before we inquire what the argument is about. God reasons with man—that is the first article of religion according to Isaiah. Revelation is not magical, but rational and moral. Religion is reasonable intercourse between one intelligent Being and another. God works upon man first through conscience.

Over against the prophetic view of religion sprawls and reeks in this same chapter the popular—religion as smoky sacrifice, assiduous worship, and ritual. The people to whom the chapter was addressed were not idolaters.† Hezekiah's reformation was over. Judah worshipped her own God, whom the prophet introduces not as for the first time, but by Judah's own familiar names for Him—Jehovah, Jehovah of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel, the Mighty One, or Hero, of Israel. In this hour of extreme danger the people are waiting on Jehovah with great pains and cost of sacrifice. They pray, they sacrifice, they solemnise to perfection. But they do not *know*, they do not *consider*; this is the burden of their offence. To use a better word, they do not *think*. They are God's grown-up children (ver. 2)—*children*, that is to say, like the son of

* See p. 702.

† At least those to whom the first twenty-three verses were addressed. There is distinct blame of worshipping in the groves of Asherah in the appended oracle (vv. 24-31), which is proof that this oracle was given at an earlier period than the rest of the chapter—a fair instance of the very great difficulty we have in determining the dates of the various prophecies of Isaiah.

the parable, with native instincts for their God; and *grown-up*—that is to say, with reason and conscience developed. But they use neither, stupider than very beasts. "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." In all their worship conscience is asleep, and they are drenched in wickedness. Isaiah puts their life is an epigram—Wickedness and worship: "I cannot away," saith the Lord, "with wickedness and worship" (ver. 13).

But the pressure and stimulus of the prophecy lie in this, that although the people have silenced conscience and are steeped in a stupidity worse than ox or ass, God will not leave them alone. He forces Himself upon them. He compels them to think. In the order and calmness of nature (ver. 2), apart from catastrophe nor seeking to influence by any miracle, God speaks to men by the reasonable words of His prophet. Before He will publish salvation or intimate disaster He must rouse and startle conscience. His controversy precedes alike His peace and His judgments. An awakened conscience is His prophet's first demand. Before religion can be prayer, or sacrifice, or any acceptable worship, it must be a *reasoning together* with God.

That is what mean the arrival of the Lord, and the opening of the assize, and the call to know and consider. It is the terrible necessity which comes back upon men, however engrossed or drugged they may be, to pass their lives in moral judgment before themselves; a debate to which there is never any closure, in which forgotten things shall not be forgotten, but a man "is compelled to repeat to himself things he desires to be silent about, and to listen to what he does not wish to hear, . . . yielding to that mysterious power which says to him, Think. One can no more prevent the mind from returning to an idea than the sea from returning to a shore. With the sailor this is called the tide; with the guilty it is called remorse. God upheaves the soul as well as the ocean."* Upon that ever-returning and resistless tide Hebrew prophecy, with its Divine freight of truth and comfort, rises into the lives of men. This first chapter of Isaiah is just the parable of the awful compulsion to think which men call conscience. The stupidest of generations, formal and fat-hearted, are forced to consider and to reason. The Lord's court and controversy are opened, and men are whipped into them from His Temple and His Altar.

For even religion and religiousness, the common man's commonest refuge from conscience—not only in Isaiah's time—cannot exempt from this writ. Would we be judged by our moments of worship, by our *temple-treading*, which is Hebrew for church-going, by the wealth of our sacrifice, by our ecclesiastical position? This chapter drags us out before the austerity and incorruptibleness of Nature. The assessors of the Lord are not the Temple nor the Law, but Heaven and Earth—not ecclesiastical conventions, but the grand moral fundamentals of the universe, purity, order, and obedience to God. Religiousness, however, is not the only refuge from which we shall find Isaiah startling men with the trumpet of the Lord's assize. He is equally intolerant of the indulgent silence and compromises of the world, that give men courage to say, We are no worse than others. Men's lives, it is a constant truth of his, have

* "Les Misérables," "a Tempest in a Brain."

to be argued out not with the world, but with God. If a man will be silent upon shameful and uncomfortable things, he cannot. His thoughts are not his own; God will think them for him as God thinks them here for unthinking Israel. Nor are the practical and intellectual distractions of a busy life any refuge from conscience. When the politicians of Judah seek escape from judgment by plunging into deeper intrigue and a more bustling policy, Isaiah is fond of pointing out to them that they are only forcing judgment nearer. They do but sharpen on other objects the thoughts whose edge must some day turn upon themselves.

What is this questioning nothing holds away, nothing stills, and nothing wears out? It is the voice of God Himself, and its insistence is therefore as irresistible as its effect is universal. That is not mere rhetoric which opens the Lord's controversy: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken." All the world changes to the man in whom conscience lifts up her voice, and to the guilty Nature seems attentive and aware. Conscience compels heaven and earth to act as her assessors, because she is the voice, and they the creatures, of God. This leads us to emphasise another feature of the prophecy.

We have called this chapter a trial-at-law; but it is far more a *personal* than a legal controversy; of the formally forensic there is very little about it. Some theologies and many preachers have attempted the conviction of the human conscience by the technicalities of a system of law, or by appealing to this or that historical covenant, or by the obligations of an intricate and burdensome morality. This is not Isaiah's way. His generation is here judged by no system of law or ancient covenants, but by a living Person and by His treatment of them—a Person who is a Friend and a Father. It is not Judah and the law that are confronted; it is Judah and Jehovah. There is no contrast between the life of this generation and some glorious estate from which they or their forefathers have fallen; but they are made to hear the voice of a living and present God: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me." Isaiah begins where Saul of Tarsus began, who, though he afterwards elaborated with wealth of detail the awful indictment of the abstract law against man, had never been able to do so but for that first confronting with the Personal Deity, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Isaiah's ministry started from the vision of the Lord; and it was no covenant or theory, but the Lord Himself, who remained the prophet's conscience to the end.

But though the living God is Isaiah's one explanation of conscience, it is God in two aspects, the moral effects of which are opposite, yet complementary. In conscience men are defective by forgetting either the sublime or the practical, but Isaiah's strength is to do justice to both. With him God is first the infinitely High, and then equally the infinitely Near. "The Lord is exalted in righteousness!" yes, and sublimely above the people's vulgar identifications of His will with their own safety and success, but likewise concerned with every detail of their politics and social behaviour; not to be relegated to the Temple, where they were wont to confine Him, but by His prophet descending to their markets

and councils, with His own opinion of their policies, interfering in their intrigues, meeting Ahaz at the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field, and fastening *eyes of glory* on every pin and point of the dress of the daughters of Zion. He is no merely transcendent God. Though He be the High and Holy One, He will discuss each habit of the people, and argue upon its merits every one of their policies. His constant cry to them is "Come and let us reason together," and to hear it is to have a conscience. Indeed, Isaiah lays more stress on this intellectual side of the moral sense than on the other, and the frequency with which in this chapter he employs the expressions *know*, and *consider*, and *reason*, is characteristic of all his prophesying. Even the most superficial reader must notice how much this prophet's doctrine of conscience and repentance harmonises with the *metanoia* of New Testament preaching.

This doctrine, that God has an interest in every detail of practical life and will argue it out with men, led Isaiah to a revelation of God quite peculiar to himself. For the Psalmist it is enough that his soul *come to God, the living God*. It is enough for other prophets to awe the hearts of their generations by revealing *the Holy One*; but Isaiah, with his intensely practical genius, and sorely tried by the stupid inconsistency of his people, bends himself to make them understand that God is at least a *reasonable* Being. Do not, his constant cry is, and he puts it sometimes in almost as many words—do not act as if there were a fool on the throne of the universe, which you virtually do when you take these meaningless forms of worship as your only intercourse with Him, and beside them practise your rank iniquities, as if He did not see nor care. We need not here do more than mention the passages in which, sometimes by a word, Isaiah stings and startles self-conscious politicians and sinners beetle-blind in sin, with the sense that God Himself takes an interest in their deeds and has His own working plans for their life. On the land question in Judah (v. 9): "In mine ears, saith the Lord of Hosts." When the people were paralysed by calamity, as if it had no meaning or term (xxviii. 29): "This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in effectual working." Again, when they were panic-stricken, and madly sought by foolish ways their own salvation (xxx. 18): "For the Lord is a God of judgment"—i. e., of principle, method, law, with His own way and time for doing things—"blessed are all they that wait for Him." And again, when politicians were carried away by the cleverness and success of their own schemes (xxxix. 2): "Yet He also is wise," or, clever. It was only a personal application of this Divine attribute when Isaiah heard the word of the Lord give him the minutest directions for his own practice—as, for instance, at what exact point he was to meet Ahaz (vii. 3); or that he was to take a board and write upon it in the vulgar character (viii. 1); or that he was to strip frock and sandals, and walk without them for three years (xx). Where common men feel conscience only as something vague and inarticulate, a flavour, a sting, a foreboding, the obligation of work, the constraint of affection, Isaiah heard the word of the Lord, clear and decisive on

matters of policy, and definite even to the details of method and style.

Isaiah's conscience, then, was perfect, because it was two-fold: *God is holy; God is practical*. If there be the glory, the purity as of fire, of His Presence to overawe, there is His unceasing inspection of us, there is His interest in the smallest details of our life, there are His fixed laws, from regard for all of which no amount of religious sensibility may relieve us. Neither of these halves of conscience can endure by itself. If we forget the first we may be prudent and for a time clever, but will also grow self-righteous, and in time self-righteousness means stupidity too. If we forget the second we may be very devotional, but cannot escape becoming blindly and inconsistently immoral. Hypocrisy is the result either way, whether we forget how high God is or whether we forget how near.

To these two great articles of conscience, however—God is high and God is near—the Bible adds a greater third, God is Love. This is the uniqueness and glory of the Bible's interpretation of conscience. Other writings may equal it in enforcing the sovereignty and detailing the minutely practical bearings of conscience: the Bible alone tells man how much of conscience is nothing but God's love. It is a doctrine as plainly laid down as the doctrine about chastisement, though not half so much recognised—"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." What is true of the material pains and penalties of life is equally true of the inward convictions, frets, threats, and fears, which will not leave stupid man alone. To men with their obscure sense of shame, and restlessness, and servitude to sin the Bible plainly says, "You are able to sin because you have turned your back to the love of God; you are unhappy because you do not take that love to your heart; the bitterness of your remorse is that it is love against which you are ungrateful." Conscience is not the Lord's persecution, but His jealous pleading, and not the fierceness of His anger, but the reproach of His love. This is the Bible's doctrine throughout, and it is not absent from the chapter we are considering. Love gets the first word even in the indictment of this austere assize: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me." Conscience is already a Father's voice: the recollection, as it is in the parable of the prodigal, of a Father's mercy; the reproach, as it is with Christ's lamentation over Jerusalem, of outraged love. We shall find not a few passages in Isaiah, which prove that he was in harmony with all revelation upon this point, that conscience is the reproach of the love of God.

But when that understanding of conscience breaks out in a sinner's heart forgiveness cannot be far away. Certainly penitence is at hand. And therefore, because of all books the Bible is the only one which interprets conscience as the love of God, so is it the only one that can combine His pardon with His reproach, and as Isaiah now does in a single verse, proclaim His free forgiveness as the conclusion of His bitter quarrel. "Come, let us bring our reasoning to a close, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Our version, "Come, and let us reason together," gives no meaning here. So plain an offer of pardon is not reasoning to-

gether; it is bringing reasoning to an end; it is the settlement of a dispute that has been in progress. Therefore we translate, with Mr. Cheyne, "Let us bring our reasoning to an end." And how pardon can be the end and logical conclusion of conscience is clear to us, who have seen how much of conscience is love, and that the Lord's controversy is the reproach of His Father's heart, and His jealousy to make His own consider all His way of mercy towards them.

But the prophet does not leave conscience alone with its personal and inward results. He rouses it to its social applications. The sins with which the Jews are charged in this charge of the Lord are public sins. The whole people is indicted, but it is the judges, the princes, and counsellors who are denounced. Judah's disasters, which she seeks to meet by worship, are due to civic faults, bribery, corruption of justice, indifference to the rights of the poor and the friendless. Conscience with Isaiah is not what it is with so much of the religion of to-day, a *cul de sac*, into which the Lord chases a man and shuts him up to Himself, but it is a thoroughfare by which the Lord drives the man out upon the world and its manifold need of him. There is little dissection and less study of individual character with Isaiah. He has no time for it. Life is too much about him, and his God too much interested in life. What may be called the more personal sins—drunkenness, vanity of dress, thoughtlessness, want of faith in God and patience to wait for Him—are to Isaiah more social than individual symptoms, and it is for their public and political effects that he mentions them. Forgiveness is no end in itself, but the opportunity of social service; not a sanctuary in which Isaiah leaves men to sing its praises or form doctrines of it, but a gateway through which he leads God's people upon the world with the cry that rises from him here: "Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Before we pass from this form in which Isaiah figures religion we must deal with a suggestion it raises. No modern mind can come into this ancient court of the Lord's controversy without taking advantage of its open forms to put a question regarding the rights of man there. That God should descend to argue with men, what license does this give to men? If religion be reasonable controversy of this kind, what is the place of doubt in it? Is not doubt man's side of the argument? Has he not also questions to put—the Almighty from his side to arraign? For God has Himself here put man on a level with Him, saying, "Come, and let us reason together."

A temper of this kind, though not strange to the Old Testament, lies beyond the horizon of Isaiah. The only challenge of the Almighty which in any of his prophecies he reports as rising from his own countrymen is the bravado of certain drunkards (chaps. v. and xxviii.). Here and elsewhere it is the very opposite temper from honest doubt which he indicts—the temper that *does not know*, that *does not consider*. Ritualism and sensualism are to Isaiah equally false, because equally unthinking. The formalist and the fleshly he classes together, because of their stupidity. What does it matter whether a man's conscience and intellect be stifled in his own fat or under the clothes with

which he dresses himself? They are stifled, and that is the main thing. To the formalist Isaiah says, "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;" to the fleshly (chap. v.), "My people are gone into captivity for want of knowledge." But *knowing* and *considering* are just that of which doubt, in its modern sense, is the abundance, and not the defect. The mobility of mind, the curiosity, the moral sensitiveness, the hunger that is not satisfied with the chaff of formal and unreal answers, the spirit to find out truth for one's self, wrestling with God—this is the very temper Isaiah would have welcomed in a people whose sluggishness of reason was as justly blamed by him as the grossness of their moral sense. And if revelation be of the form in which Isaiah so prominently sets it, and the whole Bible bears him out in this—if revelation be this argumentative and reasonable process, then human doubt has its part in revelation. It is, indeed, man's side of the argument, and, as history shows, has often helped to the elucidation of the points at issue.

Merely intellectual scepticism, however, is not within Isaiah's horizon. He would never have employed (nor would any other prophet) our modern habits of doubt, except as he employs these intellectual terms, *to know* and *to consider*—viz., as instruments of moral search and conviction. Had he lived now he would have been found among those few great prophets who use the resources of the human intellect to expose the moral state of humanity; who, like Shakespeare and Hugo, turn man's detective and reflective processes upon his own conduct; who make himself stand at the bar of his conscience. And truly to have doubt of everything in heaven and earth, and never to doubt one's self, is to be guilty of as stiff and stupid a piece of self-righteousness as the religious formalists whom Isaiah exposes. But the moral of the chapter is plainly what we have shown it to be, that a man cannot stifle doubt and debate about his own heart or treatment of God; whatever else he thinks about and judges, he cannot help judging himself.

NOTE ON THE PLACE OF NATURE IN THE ARGUMENT OF THE LORD.

The office which the Bible assigns to Nature in the controversy of God with man is fourfold—Assessor, Witness, Man's Fellow-Convict, and Doomster or Executioner. Taking these backward:—1. Scripture frequently exhibits Nature as the *doomster of the Lord*. Nature has a terrible power of flashing back from her vaster surfaces the guilty impressions of man's heart; at the last day her thunders shall peal the doom of the wicked, and her fire devour them. In those prophecies of the book of Isaiah which relate to his own time this use is not made of Nature, unless it be in his very earliest prophecy in chap. ii. and in his references to the earthquake (v. 25). To Isaiah the sentences and scourges of God are political and historical, the threats and arms of Assyria. He employs the violence of Nature only as metaphors for Assyrian rage and force. But he often promises fertility as the effect of the Lord's pardon, and when the prophets are writing about Nature, it is difficult to say whether they are to be understood literally or poetically. But, at any rate, there is much larger use made of physical catastrophes and convulsions in those other prophecies which do not relate to Isaiah's own time, and are now generally thought not to be his. Compare chaps. xiii. and xiv. 2. The representation of the earth as the *fellow-convict* of guilty man, sharing his curse, is very vivid in Isaiah xxiv.—xxvii. In the prophecies relating to his own time Isaiah, of course, identifies the troubles that afflict the land with the sin of the people, of Judah. But these are due to political causes—viz., the Assyrian invasion. 3. In the Lord's court of judgment the prophets sometimes employ Nature as a *witness* against man, as, for instance, the prophet Micah (vi. 1. ff). Nature is full of associations; the enduring mountains have memories

from old, they have been constant witnesses of the dealing of God with His people. 4. Or lastly, Nature may be used as the great *assessor* of the conscience, sitting to expound the principles on which God governs life. This is Isaiah's favourite use of Nature. He employs her to corroborate his statement of the Divine law and illustrate the ways of God to men, as in the end of chap. xxviii. and no doubt in the opening verse of this chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE THREE JERUSALEMS.

ISAIAH ii.-iv.

740-735 B. C.

AFTER the general introduction, in chap. i., to the prophecies of Isaiah, there comes another portion of the book, of greater length, but nearly as distinct as the first. It covers four chapters, the second to the sixth, all of them dating from the same earliest period of Isaiah's ministry, before 735 B. C. They deal with exactly the same subjects, but they differ greatly in form. One section (chaps. ii.-iv.) consists of a number of short utterances—evidently not all spoken at the same time, for they conflict with one another—a series of consecutive prophecies, that probably represent the stages of conviction through which Isaiah passed in his prophetic apprenticeship; a second section (chap. v.) is a careful and artistic restatement, in parable and oration, of the truths he has thus attained; while a third section (chap. vi.) is narrative, probably written subsequently to the first two, but describing an inspiration and official call, which must have preceded them both. The more one examines chaps. ii.-vi., and finds that they but express the same truths in different forms, the more one is confirmed in some such view of them as this, which, it is believed, the following exposition will justify. Chaps. v. and vi. are twin appendices to the long summary in ii.-iv.: chap. v. a public vindication and enforcement of the results of that summary, chap. vi. a private vindication to the prophet's heart of the very same truths, by a return to the secret moment of their original inspiration. We may assign 735 B. C., just before or just after the accession of Ahaz, as the date of the latest of these prophecies. The following is their historical setting.

For more than half a century the kingdom of Judah, under two powerful and righteous monarchs, had enjoyed the greatest prosperity. Uzziah strengthened the borders, extended the supremacy and vastly increased the resources of his little State, which, it is well to remember, was in its own size not larger than three average Scottish counties. He won back for Judah the port of Elah on the Red Sea, built a navy, and restored the commerce with the far East, which Solomon began. He overcame, in battle or by the mere terror of his name, the neighbouring nations—the Philistines that dwelt in cities, and the wandering tribes of desert Arabs. The Ammonites brought him gifts. With the wealth, which the East by tribute or by commerce poured into his little principality, Uzziah fortified his borders and his capital, undertook large works of husbandry and irrigation, organised a powerful standing army, and supplied it with a siege artillery capable of slinging arrows and stones. "His name spread far abroad, for he was marvellously helped till he was strong."

His son Jotham (740-735 B. C.) continued his father's policy with nearly all his father's success. He built cities and castles, quelled a rebellion among his tributaries, and caused their riches to flow faster still into Jerusalem. But while Jotham bequeathed to his country a sure defence and great wealth, and to his people a strong spirit and prestige among the nations, he left another bequest, which robbed these of their value—the son who succeeded him. In 735 Jotham died and Ahaz became king. He was very young, and stepped to the throne from the harem. He brought to the direction of the government the petulant will of a spoiled child, the mind of an intriguing and superstitious woman. It was when the national policy felt the paralysis consequent on these that Isaiah published at least the later part of the prophecies now marked off as chaps. ii.-iv. of his book. "My people," he cries—"my people! children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths."

Isaiah had been born into the flourishing nation while Uzziah was king. The great events of that monarch's reign were his education, the still grander hopes they prompted the passion of his virgin fancy. He must have absorbed as the very temper of his youth this national consciousness which swelled so proudly in Judah under Uzziah. But the accession of such a king as Ahaz, while it was sure to let loose the passions and follies fostered by a period of rapid increase in luxury, could not fail to afford to Judah's enemies the long-deferred opportunity of attacking her. It was an hour both of the manifestation of sin and of the judgment of sin—an hour in which, while the majesty of Judah, sustained through two great reigns, was about to disappear in the follies of a third, the majesty of Judah's God should become more conspicuous than ever. Of this Isaiah had been privately conscious, as we shall see, for five years. "In the year that king Uzziah died," (740), the young Jew "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." Startled into prophetic consciousness by the awful contrast between an earthly majesty that had so long fascinated men, but now sank into a leper's grave, and the heavenly, which rose sovereign and everlasting above it, Isaiah had gone on to receive conviction of his people's sin and certain punishment. With the accession of Ahaz, five years later, his own political experience was so far developed as to permit of his expressing in their exact historical effects the awful principles of which he had received foreboding when Uzziah died. What we find in chaps. ii.-iv. is a record of the struggle of his mind towards this expression; it is the summary, as we have already said, of Isaiah's apprenticeship.

"The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." We do not know anything of Isaiah's family or of the details of his upbringing. He was a member of some family of Jerusalem, and in intimate relations with the Court. It has been believed that he was of royal blood, but it matters little whether this be true or not. A spirit so wise and masterful as his did not need social rank to fit it for that intimacy with princes which has doubtless suggested the legend of his royal descent. What does matter is Isaiah's citizenship in Jerusalem, for this colours all his prophecy. More than

Athens to Demosthenes, Rome to Juvenal, Florence to Dante, is Jerusalem to Isaiah. She is his immediate and ultimate regard, the centre and return of all his thoughts, the hinge of the history of his time, the one thing worth preserving amidst its disasters, the summit of those brilliant hopes with which he fills the future. He has traced for us the main features of her position and some of the lines of her construction, many of the great figures of her streets, the fashions of her women, the arrival of embassies, the effect of rumours. He has painted her aspect in triumph, in siege, in famine, and in earthquake; war filling her valleys with chariots, and again nature rolling tides of fruitfulness up to her gates; her moods of worship and panic and profligacy—till we see them all as clearly as the shadow following the sunshine, and the breeze the breeze, across the cornfields of our own summers.

If he takes wider observation of mankind, Jerusalem is his watch-tower. It is for her defence he battles through fifty years of statesmanship, and all his prophecy may be said to travail in anguish for her new birth. He was never away from her walls, but not even the psalms of the captives by the rivers of Babylon, with the desire of exile upon them, exhibit more beauty and pathos than the lamentations which Isaiah poured upon Jerusalem's sufferings or the visions in which he described her future solemnity and peace.

It is not with surprise, therefore, that we find the first prophecies of Isaiah directed upon his mother city: "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." There is little about Judah in these chapters: the country forms but a fringe to the capital.

Before we look into the subject of the prophecy, however, a short digression is necessary on the manner in which it is presented to us. It is not a reasoned composition or argument we have here; it is a vision, it is the word which Isaiah *saw*. The expression is vague, often abused and in need of defining. Vision is not employed here to express any magical display before the eyes of the prophet of the very words which he was to speak to the people, or any communication to his thoughts by dream or ecstasy. They are higher qualities of "vision" which these chapters unfold. There is, first of all, the power of forming an ideal, of seeing and describing a thing in the fulfilment of all the promise that is in it. But these prophecies are much more remarkable for two other powers of inward vision, to which we give the names of insight and intuition—insight into human character, intuition of Divine principles—"clear knowledge of what man is and how God will act"—a keen discrimination of the present state of affairs in Judah, and unreasoned conviction of moral truth and the Divine will. The original meaning of the Hebrew word *saw*, which is used in the title to this series, is to cleave, or split; then to see into, to see through, to get down beneath the surface of things and discover their real nature. And what characterises the bulk of these visions is *penetrativeness*, the keenness of a man who will not be deceived by an outward show that he delights to hold up to our scorn, but who has a conscience for the inner worth of things and for their future consequences. To lay stress on the moral meaning of the prophet's vision is not to grudge, but to emphasise its inspiration by God.

Of that inspiration Isaiah was himself assured. It was God's Spirit that enabled him to see thus keenly; for he saw things keenly, not only as men count moral keenness, but as God Himself sees them, in their value in His sight and in their attractiveness for His love and pity. In this prophecy there occurs a striking expression—"the eyes of the glory of God." It was the vision of the Almighty Searcher and Judge, burning through man's pretence, with which the prophet felt himself endowed. This then was the second element in his vision—to penetrate men's hearts as God Himself penetrated them, and constantly, without squint or blur, to see right from wrong in their eternal difference. And the third element is the intuition of God's will, the perception of what line of action He will take. This last, of course, forms the distinct prerogative of Hebrew prophecy, that power of vision which is its climax; the moral situation being clear, to see then how God will act upon it.

Under these three powers of vision Jerusalem, the prophet's city, is presented to us—Jerusalem in three lights, really three Jerusalems. First, there is flashed out (chap. ii. 2-5) a vision of the ideal city, Jerusalem idealised and glorified. Then comes (ii. 6-iv. 1) a very realistic picture, a picture of the actual Jerusalem. And lastly at the close of the prophecy (iv. 2-6) we have a vision of Jerusalem as she shall be after God has taken her in hand—very different indeed from the ideal with which the prophet began. Here are three successive motives or phases of prophecy, which, as we have said, in all probability summarise the early ministry of Isaiah, and present him to us *first*, as the idealist or visionary; *second*, as the realist or critic; and, *third*, as the prophet proper or revealer of God's actual will.

✓ I. THE IDEALIST (ii. 1-5).

All men who have shown our race how great things are possible have had their inspiration in dreaming of the impossible. Reformers, who at death were content to have lived for the moving forward but one inch of some of their fellow-men, began by believing themselves able to lift the whole world at once. Isaiah was no exception to this human fashion. His first vision was that of a Utopia, and his first belief that his countrymen would immediately realise it. He lifts up to us a very grand picture of a vast commonwealth centred in Jerusalem. Some think he borrowed it from an older prophet; Micah has it also; it may have been the ideal of the age. But, at any rate, if we are not to take verse 5 in scorn, Isaiah accepted this as his own. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it." The prophet's own Jerusalem shall be the light of the world, the school and temple of the earth, the seat of the judgment of the Lord, when He shall reign over the nations, and all mankind shall dwell in peace beneath Him. It is a glorious destiny, and as its light shines from the far-off horizon, *the latter days*, in which the prophet sees it, what wonder that he is possessed and cries aloud, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord!" It seems to the young prophet's hopeful heart as if at once that ideal would be realised, as if by his own word he could lift his people to its fulfilment.

But that is impossible, and Isaiah perceives so as soon as he turns from the far-off horizon to the city at his feet, as soon as he leaves to-morrow alone and deals with to-day. The next verses of the chapter—from verse 6 onwards—stand in strong contrast to those which have described Israel's ideal. There Zion is full of the law and Jerusalem of the word of the Lord, the one religion flowing over from this centre upon the world. Here into the actual Jerusalem they have brought all sorts of foreign worship and heathen prophets; "they are replenished from the East, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and strike hands with the children of strangers." There all nations come to worship at Jerusalem; here her thought and faith are scattered over the idolatries of all nations. The ideal Jerusalem is full of spiritual blessings; the actual, of the spoils of trade. There the swords are beat into ploughshares and the spears into pruning-hooks; here are vast and novel armaments, horses and chariots. There the Lord alone is worshipped; here the city is crowded with idols. The real Jerusalem could not possibly be more different from the ideal, nor its inhabitants as they are from what the prophet had confidently called on them to be.

II. THE REALIST (ii. 6-iv. 1).

Therefore Isaiah's attitude and tone suddenly change. The visionary becomes a realist, the enthusiast a cynic, the seer of the glorious city of God the prophet of God's judgment. The recoil is absolute in style, temper, and thought, down to the very figures of speech which he uses. Before, Isaiah had seen, as it were, a lifting process at work, "Jerusalem in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills." Now he beholds nothing but depression. "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and haughty, upon all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Nothing in the great civilisation, which he had formerly glorified, is worth preserving. The high towers, fenced walls, ships of Tarshish, treasures and armour must all perish; even the hills lifted by his imagination shall be bowed down, and "the Lord alone be exalted in that day." This recoil reaches its extreme in the last verse of the chapter. The prophet, who had believed so much in man as to think possible an immediate commonwealth of nations, believes in man now so little that he does not hold him worth preserving: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

Attached to this general denunciation are some satiric descriptions, in the third chapter, of the anarchy to which society in Jerusalem is fast being reduced under its childish and effeminate king. The scorn of these passages is scathing; "the eyes of the glory of God" burn through every rank, fashion, and ornament in the town. King and court are not spared; the elders and princes are rigorously denounced. But by far the most striking effort of the prophet's boldness is his prediction of the overthrow of Jerusalem itself (ver. 8). What it cost Isaiah to utter and the people to hear we can only partly measure. To his own passionate patriotism it must have felt like treason, to the blind optimism

of the popular religion it doubtless appeared the rankest heresy—to aver that the holy city, inviolate and almost unthreatened since the day David brought to her the ark of the Lord, and destined by the voice of her prophets, including Isaiah himself, to be established upon the tops of the mountains, was now to fall into ruin. But Isaiah's conscience overcomes his sense of consistency, and he who has just proclaimed the eternal glory of Jerusalem is provoked by his knowledge of her citizens' sins to recall his words and intimate her destruction. It may have been that Isaiah was partly emboldened to so novel a threat, by his knowledge of the preparations which Syria and Israel were already making for the invasion of Judah. The prospect of Jerusalem, as the centre of a vast empire subject to Jehovah, however natural it was under a successful ruler like Uzziah, became, of course, unreal when every one of Uzziah's and Jotham's tributaries had risen in revolt against their successor, Ahaz. But of these outward movements Isaiah tells us nothing. He is wholly engrossed with Judah's sin. It is his growing acquaintance with the corruption of his fellow-countrymen that has turned his back on the ideal city of his opening ministry, and changed him into a prophet of Jerusalem's ruin. "Their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His glory." Judge, prophet, and elder, all the upper ranks and useful guides of the people, must perish. It is a sign of the degradation to which society shall be reduced, when Isaiah with keen sarcasm pictures the despairing people choosing a certain man to be their ruler because he alone has a coat to his back! (iii. 6).

With increased scorn Isaiah turns lastly upon the women of Jerusalem (iii. 16-iv. 2), and here perhaps the change which has passed over him since his opening prophecy is most striking. One likes to think of how the citizens of Jerusalem took this alteration in their prophet's temper. We know how popular so optimistic a prophecy as that of the mountain of the Lord's house must have been, and can imagine how men and women loved the young face, bright with a far-off light, and the dream of an ideal that had no quarrel with the present. "But what a change is this that has come over him, who speaks not of to-morrow, but of to-day, who has brought his gaze from those distant horizons to our streets, who stares every man in the face (iii. 9), and makes the women feel that no pin and trimming, no ring and bracelet, escape his notice! Our loved prophet has become an impudent scorners!" Ah, men and women of Jerusalem, beware of those eyes! "The glory of God" is burning in them; they see you through and through, and they tell us that all your armour and the "show of your countenance," and your foreign fashions are as nothing, for there are corrupt hearts below. This is your judgment, that "instead of sweet spices there shall be rottenness, and instead of a girdle a rope, and instead of well-set hair baldness, and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth, and branding instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn, and she shall be desolate and sit upon the ground!"

This was the climax of the prophet's judgment. If the salt have lost its savour, where-with shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good

for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot. If the women are corrupt the state is moribund.

III. THE PROPHET OF THE LORD (iv. 2-6).

Is there, then, no hope for Jerusalem? Yes, but not where the prophet sought it at first, in herself, and not in the way he offered it—by the mere presentation of an ideal. There is hope, there is more—there is certain salvation in the Lord, but it only comes after judgment. Contrast that opening picture of the new Jerusalem with this closing one, and we shall find their difference to lie in two things. There the city is more prominent than the Lord, here the Lord is more prominent than the city; there no word of judgment, here judgment sternly emphasised as the indispensable way towards the blessed future. A more vivid sense of the Person of Jehovah Himself, a deep conviction of the necessity of chastisement: these are what Isaiah has gained during his early ministry, without losing hope or heart for the future. The bliss shall come only when the Lord shall “have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning.” It is a corollary of all this that the participants of that future shall be many fewer than in the first vision of the prophet. The process of judgment must weed men out, and in place of all nations coming to Jerusalem, to share its peace and glory, the prophet can speak now only of Israel—and only of a remnant of Israel. “The escaped of Israel, the left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem.” This is a great change in Isaiah’s ideal, from the supremacy of Israel over all nations to the bare survival of a remnant of his people.

Is there not in this threefold vision a parallel and example for our own civilisation and our thoughts about it? All work and wisdom begin in dreams. We must see our Utopias before we start to build our stone and lime cities.

“It takes a soul
To move a body; it takes a high-souled man
To move the masses even to a cleaner sty;
It takes the ideal to blow an inch inside
The dust of the actual.”

But the light of our ideals dawns upon us only to show how poor by nature are the mortals who are called to accomplish them. The ideal rises still as to Isaiah only to exhibit the poverty of the real. When we lift our eyes from the hills of vision, and rest them on our fellow-men, hope and enthusiasm die out of us. Isaiah’s disappointment is that of every one who brings down his gaze from the clouds to the streets. Be our ideal ever so desirable, be we ever so persuaded of its facility, the moment we attempt to apply it we shall be undeceived. Society cannot be regenerated all at once. There is an expression which Isaiah emphasises in his moment of cynicism: “The show of their countenance doth witness against them.” It tells us that when he called his countrymen to turn to the light he lifted upon them he saw nothing but the exhibition of their sin made plain. When we bring light to a cavern whose inhabitants have lost their eyes by the darkness, the light does not make them see; we have to give them eyes again. Even so no vision or theory

of a perfect state—the mistake which all young reformers make—can regenerate society. It will only reveal social corruption, and sicken the heart of the reformer himself. For the possession of a great ideal does not mean, as so many fondly imagine, work accomplished; it means work revealed—work revealed so vast, often so impossible, that faith and hope die down, and the enthusiast of yesterday becomes the cynic of to-morrow. “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted?” In this despair, through which every worker for God and man must pass, many a warm heart has grown cold, many an intellect become paralysed. There is but one way of escape, and that is Isaiah’s. It is to believe in God Himself; it is to believe that He is at work, that His purposes to man are saving purposes, and that with Him there is an inexhaustible source of mercy and virtue. So from the blackest pessimism shall arise new hope and faith, as from beneath Isaiah’s darkest verses that glorious passage suddenly bursts like uncontrollable spring from the very feet of winter. “For that day shall the spring of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” This is all it is possible to say. There must be a future for man, because God loves him, and God reigns. That future can be reached only through judgment, because God is righteous.

To put it another way: All of us who live to work for our fellow-men or who hope to lift them higher by our word begin with our own visions of a great future. These visions, though our youth lends to them an original generosity and enthusiasm, are, like Isaiah’s, largely borrowed. The progressive instincts of the age into which we are born and the mellow skies of prosperity combine with our own ardour to make our ideal one of splendour. Persuaded of its facility, we turn to real life to apply it. A few years pass. We not only find mankind too stubborn to be forced into our moulds, but we gradually become aware of Another Moulder at work upon our subject, and we stand aside in awe to watch His operations. Human desires and national ideals are not always fulfilled; philosophic theories are discredited by the evolution of fact. Uzziah does not reign for ever; the sceptre falls to Ahaz: progress is checked, and the summer of prosperity draws to an end. Under duller skies ungilded judgment comes to view, cruel and inexorable, crushing even the peaks on which we built our future, yet purifying men and giving earnest of a better future, too. And so life, that mocked the control of our puny fingers, bends groaning to the weight of an Almighty Hand. God also, we perceive as we face facts honestly, has His ideal for men; and though He works so slowly towards His end that our restless eyes are too impatient to follow His order, He yet reveals all that shall be to the humbled heart and the soul emptied of its own visions. Awed and chastened, we look back from His Presence to our old ideals. We are still able to recognise their grandeur and generous hope for men. But we see now how utterly unconnected they are with the present—castles in the air, with no ladders to them from the earth. And even if they were accessible, still to our eyes, purged by gazing on God’s own ways, they would no more appear desirable. Look

back on Isaiah's early ideal from the light of his second vision of the future. For all its grandeur, that picture of Jerusalem is not wholly attractive. Is there not much national arrogance in it? Is it not just the imperfectly idealised reflection of an age of material prosperity such as that of Uzziah's was? Pride is in it, a false optimism, the highest good to be reached without moral conflict. But here is the language of pity, rescue with difficulty, rest only after sore struggle and stripping, salvation by the bare arm of God. So do our imaginations for our own future or for that of the race always contrast with what He Himself has in store for us, promised freely out of His great grace to our unworthy hearts, yet granted in the end only to those who pass towards it through discipline, tribulation, and fire.

This, then, was Isaiah's apprenticeship, and its net result was to leave him with the remnant for his ideal: the remnant and Jerusalem secured as its rallying-point.

CHAPTER III.

THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD, OR TRUE PATRIOTISM THE CONSCIENCE OF OUR COUNTRY'S SINS.

ISAIAH v.; ix. 8-x. 4.

735 B. C.

THE prophecy contained in these chapters belongs, as we have seen, to the same early period of Isaiah's career as chapters ii.-iv., about the time when Ahaz ascended the throne after the long and successful reigns of his father and grandfather, when the kingdom of Judah seemed girt with strength and filled with wealth, but the men were corrupt and the women careless, and the earnest of approaching judgment was already given in the incapacity of the weak and woman-ridden king. Yet although this new prophecy issues from the same circumstances as its predecessors, it implies these circumstances a little more developed. The same social evils are treated, but by a hand with a firmer grasp of them. The same principles are emphasised—the righteousness of Jehovah and His activity in judgment—but the form of judgment of which Isaiah had spoken before in general terms looms nearer, and before the end of the prophecy we get a view at close quarters of the Assyrian ranks.

Besides, opposition has arisen to the prophet's teaching. We saw that the obscurities and inconsistencies of chapters ii.-iv. are due to the fact that that prophecy represents several stages of experience through which Isaiah passed before he gained his final convictions. But his countrymen, it appears, have now had time to turn on these convictions and call them in question: it is necessary for Isaiah to vindicate them. The difference, then, between these two sets of prophecies, dealing with the same things, is that in the former (chapters ii.-iv.), we have the obscure and tortuous path of a conviction struggling to light in the prophet's own experience; here, in chapter v., we have its careful array in the light and before the people.

The point of Isaiah's teaching against which

opposition was directed was of course its main point, that God was about to abandon Judah. This must have appeared to the popular religion of the day as the rankest heresy. To the Jews the honour of Jehovah was bound up with the inviolability of Jerusalem and the prosperity of Judah. But Isaiah knew Jehovah to be infinitely more concerned for the purity of His people than for their prosperity. He had seen the Lord "exalted in righteousness" above those national and earthly interests, with which vulgar men exclusively identified His will. Did the people appeal to the long time Jehovah had graciously led them for proof that He would not abandon them now? To Isaiah that gracious leading was but for righteousness' sake, and that God might make His own a holy people. Their history, so full of the favours of the Almighty, did not teach Isaiah, as it did the common prophets of his time, the lesson of Israel's political security, but the far different one of their religious responsibility. To him it only meant what Amos had already put in those startling words, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." Now Isaiah delivered this doctrine at a time when it brought him the hostility of men's passions as well as of their opinions. Judah was arming for war. Syria and Ephraim were marching upon her. To threaten his country with ruin in such an hour was to run the risk of suffering from popular fury as a traitor as well as from priestly prejudice as a heretic. The strain of the moment is felt in the strenuousness of the prophecy. Chapter v., with its appendix, exhibits more grasp and method than its predecessors. Its literary form is finished, its feeling clear. There is a tenderness in the beginning of it, an inexorableness in the end, and an eagerness all through which stamp the chapter as Isaiah's final appeal to his countrymen at this period of his career.

The chapter is a noble piece of patriotism—one of the noblest of a race who, although for the greater part of their history without a fatherland, have contributed more brilliantly than perhaps any other to the literature of patriotism, and that simply because, as Isaiah here illustrates, patriotism was to their prophets identical with religious privilege and responsibility. Isaiah carries this to its bitter end. Other patriots have wept to sing their country's woes; Isaiah's burden is his people's guilt. To others an invasion of their fatherland by its enemies has been the motive to rouse by song or speech their countrymen to repel it. Isaiah also hears the tramp of the invader; but to him is permitted no ardour of defence, and his message to his countrymen is that they must succumb, for the invasion is irresistible and of the very judgment of God. How much it cost the prophet to deliver such a message we may see from those few verses of it in which his heart is not altogether silenced by his conscience. The sweet description of Judah as a vineyard, and the touching accents that break through the roll of denunciation with such phrases as "My people are gone away into captivity unawares," tell us how the prophet's love of country is struggling with his duty to a righteous God. The course of feeling throughout the prophecy is very striking. The tenderness of the opening lyric seems ready to flow into gentle pleading with the whole people. But as the prophet turns to particular classes

and their sins his mood changes to indignation, the voice settles down to judgment; till when it issues upon that clear statement of the coming of the Northern hosts every trace of emotion has left it, and the sentences ring out as unflinching as the tramp of the armies they describe.

I. THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD (v. 1-7).

Isaiah adopts the resource of every misunderstood and unpopular teacher, and seeks to turn the flank of his people's prejudices by an attack in parable on their sympathies. Did they stubbornly believe it impossible for God to abandon a State He had so long and so carefully fostered? Let them judge from an analogous case in which they were all experts. In a picture of great beauty Isaiah describes a vineyard upon one of the sunny promontories visible from Jerusalem. Every care had been given it of which an experienced vinedresser could think, but it brought forth only wild grapes. The vinedresser himself is introduced, and appeals to the men of Judah and Jerusalem to judge between him and his vineyard. He gets their assent that all had been done which could be done, and fortified with that resolves to abandon the vineyard. "I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns." Then the stratagem comes out, the speaker drops the tones of a human cultivator, and in the omnipotence of the Lord of heaven he is heard to say, "I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." This diversion upon their sympathies having succeeded, the prophet scarcely needs to charge the people's prejudices in face. His point has been evidently carried. "For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant; and He looked for judgment, but behold oppression, for righteousness, but behold a cry."

The lesson enforced by Isaiah is just this, that in a people's civilisation there lie the deepest responsibilities, for that is neither more nor less than their cultivation by God; and the question for a people is not how secure does this render them, nor what does it count for glory, but how far is it rising towards the intentions of its Author? Does it produce those fruits of righteousness for which alone God cares to set apart and cultivate the peoples? On this depends the question whether the civilisation is secure, as well as the right of the people to enjoy and feel proud of it. There cannot be true patriotism without sensitiveness to this, for however rich be the elements that compose the patriot's temper, as piety towards the past, ardour of service for the present, love of liberty, delight in natural beauty, and gratitude for Divine favour, so rich a temper will grow rancid without the salt of conscience; and the richer the temper is, the greater must be the proportion of that salt. All prophets and poets of patriotism have been moralists and satirists as well. From Demosthenes to Tourgenieff, from Dante to Mazzini, from Milton to Russell Lowell, from Burns to Heine, one cannot recall any great patriot who has not known how to use the scourge as well as the trumpet. Many opportunities will present themselves to us of illustrating Isaiah's orations by the letters and speeches of Cromwell, who of moderns most

resembles the statesman-prophet of Judah; but nowhere does the resemblance become so close as when we lay a prophecy like this of Jehovah's vineyard by the side of the speeches in which the Lord Protector exhorted the Commons of England, although it was the hour of his and their triumph, to address themselves to their sins.

So, then, the patriotism of all great men has carried a conscience for their country's sins. But while this is always more or less a burden to the true patriot, there are certain periods in which his care for his country ought to be this predominantly, and need be little else. In a period like our own, for instance, of political security and fashionable religion, what need is there in patriotic displays of any other kind? but how much for patriotism of this kind—of men who will uncover the secret sins, however loathsome, and declare the hypocrisies, however powerful, of the social life of the people! These are the patriots we need in times of peace; and as it is more difficult to rouse a torpid people to their sins than to lead a roused one against their enemies, and harder to face a whole people with the support only of conscience than to defy many nations if you but have your own at your back, so these patriots of peace are more to be honoured than those of war. But there is one kind of patriotism more arduous and honourable still. It is that which Isaiah displays here, who cannot add to his conscience hope or even pity, who must hail his country's enemies for his country's good, and recite the long roll of God's favours to his nation only to emphasise the justice of His abandonment of them.

II. THE WILD GRAPES OF JUDAH (v. 8-24).

The *wild grapes* which Isaiah saw in the vineyard of the Lord he catalogues in a series of Woes (vv. 8-24), fruits all of them of love of money and love of wine. They are abuse of the soil (8-10, 17*), a giddy luxury which has taken to drink (11-16), a moral blindness and headlong audacity of sin which habitual avarice and drunkenness soon develop (18-21), and, again, a greed of drink and money—men's perversion of their strength to wine, and of their opportunities of justice to the taking of bribes (22-24). These are the features of corrupt civilisation not only in Judah, and the voice that deplores them cannot speak without rousing others very clamant to the modern conscience. It is with remarkable persistence that in every civilisation the two main passions of the human heart, love of wealth and love of pleasure, the instinct to gather and the instinct to squander, have sought precisely these two forms denounced by Isaiah in which to work their social havoc—appropriation of the soil and indulgence in strong drink. Every civilised community develops sooner or later its land-question and its liquor-question. "Questions" they are called by the superficial opinion that all difficulties may be overcome by the cleverness of men; yet problems through which there cries for remedy so

*Ewald happily suggests that verse 17 has dropped out of, and should be restored to, its proper position at the end of the first "woe," where it contributes to the development of the meaning far more than from where it stands in the text.

vast a proportion of our poverty, crime, and madness, are something worse than "questions." They are huge sins, and require not merely the statesman's wit, but all the patience and zeal of which a nation's conscience is capable. It is in this that the force of Isaiah's treatment lies. We feel he is not facing questions of State, but sins of men. He has nothing to tell us of what he considers the best system of land tenure, but he enforces the principle that in the ease with which land may be absorbed by one person the natural covetousness of the human heart has a terrible opportunity for working ruin upon society. "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land." We know from Micah that the actual process which Isaiah condemns was carried out with the most cruel evictions and disinheritances. Isaiah does not touch on its methods, but exposes its effects on the country—depopulation and barrenness,—and emphasises its religious significance. "Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without an inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. . . . Then shall lambs feed as in their pasture, and strangers shall devour the ruins of the fat ones"—i. e., of the luxurious landowners (9, 10, 17. See note on previous page). And in one of those elliptic statements by which he often startles us with the sudden sense that God Himself is acquainted with all our affairs, and takes His own interest in them, Isaiah adds, "All this was whispered to me by Jehovah: In mine ears—the Lord of hosts" (ver. 9).

During recent agitations in our own country one has often seen the "land laws of the Bible" held forth by some thoughtless demagogue as models for land tenure among ourselves; as if a system which worked well with a small tribe in a land they had all entered on equal footing, and where there was no opportunity for the industry of the people except in pasture and in tillage, could possibly be applicable to a vastly larger and more complex population, with different traditions and very different social circumstances. Isaiah says nothing about the peculiar land *laws* of his people. He lays down principles, and these are principles valid in every civilisation. God has made the land, not to feed the pride of the few, but the natural hunger of the many, and it is His will that the most be got out of a country's soil for the people of the country. Whatever be the system of land-tenure—and while all are more or less liable to abuse, it is the duty of a people to agitate for that which will be least liable—if it is taken advantage of by individuals to satisfy their own cupidity, then God will take account of them. There is a responsibility which the State cannot enforce, and the neglect of which cannot be punished by any earthly law, but all the more will God see to it. A nation's treatment of their land is not always prominent as a question which demands the attention of public reformers; but it ceaselessly has interest for God, who ever holds individuals to answer for it. The land-question is ultimately a religious question. For the management of their land the whole nation is responsible to God, but especially those who own or manage estates. This is a sacred office. When one not only remembers the nature of

land—how it is an element of life, so that if a man abuse the soil it is as if he poisoned the air or darkened the heavens—but appreciates also the multitude of personal relations which the landowner or factor holds in his hand—the peace of homes, the continuity of local traditions, the physical health, the social fearlessness and frankness, and the thousand delicate associations which their habitations entwine about the hearts of men—one feels that to all who possess or manage land is granted an opportunity of patriotism and piety open to few, a ministry less honourable and sacred than none other committed by God to man for his fellow-men.

After the land-sin Isaiah hurls his second Woe upon the drink-sin, and it is a heavier woe than the first. With fatal persistence the luxury of every civilisation has taken to drink; and of all the indictments brought by moralists against nations, that which they reserve for drunkenness is, as here, the most heavily weighted. The crusade against drink is not the novel thing that many imagine who observe only its late revival among ourselves. In ancient times there was scarcely a State in which prohibitive legislation of the most stringent kind was not attempted, and generally carried out with a thoroughness more possible under despots than where, as with us, the slow consent of public opinion is necessary. A horror of strong drink has in every age possessed those who from their position as magistrates or prophets have been able to follow for any distance the drifts of social life. Isaiah exposes as powerfully as ever any of them did in what the peculiar fatality of drinking lies. Wine is a mocker by nothing more than by the moral incredulity which it produces, enabling men to hide from themselves the spiritual and material effects of over-indulgence in it. No one who has had to do with persons slowly falling 'from moderate to immoderate drinking can mistake Isaiah's meaning when he says, "They regard not the work of the Lord; neither have they considered the operation of His hands." Nothing kills the conscience like steady drinking to a little excess; and religion, even while the conscience is alive, acts on it only as an opiate. It is not, however, with the symptoms of drink in individuals so much as with its aggregate effects on the nation that Isaiah is concerned. So prevalent is excessive drinking, so entwined with the social customs of the country and many powerful interests, that it is extremely difficult to rouse public opinion to its effects. And "so they go into captivity for lack of knowledge." Temperance reformers are often blamed for the strength of their language, but they may shelter themselves behind Isaiah. As he pictures it, the national destruction caused by drink is complete. It is nothing less than the people's *captivity*, and we know what that meant to an Israelite. It affects all classes: "Their honourable men are famished, and their multitude parched with thirst. . . . The mean man is bowed down, and the great man is humbled." But the want and ruin of this earth are not enough to describe it. The appetite of hell itself has to be enlarged to suffice for the consumption of the spoils of strong drink. "Therefore hell hath enlarged her desire and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth among them, de-

scend into it." The very appetite of hell has to be enlarged! Does it not truly seem as if the wild and wanton waste of drink were preventable, as if it were not, as many are ready to sneer, the inevitable evil of men's hearts choosing this form of issue, but a superfluous audacity of sin, which the devil himself did not desire or tempt men to? It is this feeling of the infernal gratuitousness of most of the drink-evil—the conviction that here hell would be quiet if only she were not stirred up by the extraordinarily wanton provocatives that society and the State offer to excessive drinking—which compels temperance reformers at the present day to isolate drunkenness and make it the object of a special crusade. Isaiah's strong figure has lost none of its strength to-day. When our judges tell us from the bench that nine-tenths of pauperism and crime are caused by drink, and our physicians that if only irregular tipping were abolished half the current sickness of the land would cease, and our statesmen that the ravages of strong drink are equal to those of the historical scourges of war, famine, and pestilence combined, surely to swallow such a glut of spoil *the appetite of hell must have been still more enlarged, and the mouth of hell made yet wider.*

The next three Woes are upon different aggravations of that moral perversity which the prophet has already traced to strong drink. In the first of these it is better to read, *draw punishment near with cords of vanity*, than *draw iniquity*. Then we have a striking antithesis—the drunkards mocking Isaiah over their cups with the challenge, as if it would not be taken up, "Let Jehovah make speed, and hasten His work of judgment, that we may see it," while all the time they themselves were dragging that judgment near, *as with cart-ropes*, by their persistent diligence in evil. This figure of sinners jeering at the approach of a calamity while they actually wear the harness of its carriage is very striking. But the Jews are not only unconscious of judgment, they are confused, as to the very principles of morality: "Who call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

In his fifth Woe the prophet attacks a disposition to which his scorn gives no peace throughout his ministry. If these sensualists had only confined themselves to their sensuality they might have been left alone; but with that intellectual bravado w^hich is equally born with "Dutch courage" of drink, they interfered in the conduct of the State, and prepared arrogant policies of alliance and war that were the distress of the sober-minded prophet all his days. "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight."

In his last Woe Isaiah returns to the drinking habits of the upper classes, from which it would appear that among the judges even of Judah there were "six-bottle men." They sustained their extravagance by subsidies, which we trust were unknown to the mighty men of wine who once filled the seats of justice in our own country. "They justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him." All these sinners, dead through their rejection of the law of Jehovah of hosts and the word of the Holy One of Israel, shall be like to the stubble, fit only for burning, and their blossom as the dust of the rotten tree.

III. THE ANGER OF THE LORD (v. 25; ix. 8-x. 4; v. 26-30).

This indictment of the various sins of the people occupies the whole of the second part of the oration. But a third part is now added, in which the prophet catalogues the judgments of the Lord upon them, each of these closing with the weird refrain, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still." The complete catalogue is usually obtained by inserting between the 25th and 26th verses of chapter v. the long passage from chapter ix., ver. 8, to chapter x., v. 4. It is quite true that as far as chapter v. itself is concerned it does not need this insertion; but ix. 8-x. 4 is decidedly out of place where it now lies. Its paragraphs end with the same refrain as closes v. 25, which forms, besides, a natural introduction to them, while v. 26-30 form as natural a conclusion. The latter verses describe an Assyrian invasion, and it was always in an Assyrian invasion that Isaiah foresaw the final calamity of Judah. We may, then, subject to further light on the exceedingly obscure subject of the arrangement of Isaiah's prophecies, follow some of the leading critics, and place ix. 8-x. 4 between verses 25-26 of chapter v.; and the more we examine them the more we shall be satisfied with our arrangement, for strung together in this order they form one of the most impressive series of scenes which even an Isaiah has given us.

From these scenes Isaiah has spared nothing that is terrible in history or nature, and it is not one of the least of the arguments for putting them together that their intensity increases to a climax. Earthquakes, armed raids, a great battle, and the slaughter of a people; prairie and forest fires, civil strife and the famine fever, that feeds upon itself; another battle-field, with its cringing groups of captives and heaps of slain; the resistless tide of a great invasion; and then, for final prospect, a desolate land by the sound of a hungry sea, and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof. The elements of nature and the elemental passions of man have been let loose together; and we follow the violent floods, remembering that it is sin that has burst the gates of the universe, and given the tides of hell full course through it. Over the storm and battle there comes booming like the storm-bell the awful refrain, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still." It is poetry of the highest order, but in him who reads it with a conscience mere literary sensations are sobered by the awe of some of the most profound moral phenomena of life. The persistence of Divine wrath, the long-lingering effects of sin in a nation's history, man's abuse of sorrow and his defiance of an angry Providence, are the elements of this great drama. Those who are familiar with "King Lear" will recognise these elements, and observe how similarly the ways of Providence and the conduct of men are represented there and here.

What Isaiah unfolds, then, is a series of calamities that have overtaken the people of Israel. It is impossible for us to identify every one of them with a particular event in Israel's history otherwise known to us. Some it is not difficult to recognise; but the prophet passes in a perplexing way from Judah to Ephraim and Ephraim to Judah, and in one case, where he repre-

sents Samaria as attacked by Syria and the Philistines, he goes back to a period at some distance from his own. There are also passages, as for instance x. 1-4, in which we are unable to decide whether he describes a present punishment or threatens a future one. But his moral purpose, at least, is plain. He will show how often Jehovah has already spoken to His people by calamity, and because they have remained hardened under these warnings, how there now remains possible only the last, worst blow of an Assyrian invasion. Isaiah is justifying his threat of so unprecedented and extreme a punishment for God's people as overthrow by this Northern people, who had just appeared upon Judah's political horizon. God, he tells Israel, has tried everything short of this, and it has failed; now only this remains, and this shall not fail. The prophet's purpose, therefore, being not an accurate historical recital, but moral impressiveness, he gives us a more or less ideal description of former calamities, mentioning only so much as to allow us to recognise here and there that it is actual facts which he uses for his purpose of condemning Israel to captivity, and vindicating Israel's God in bringing that captivity near. The passage thus forms a parallel to that in Amos, with its similar refrain: "Yet ye have not returned unto Me, saith the Lord" (Amos iv. 6-12), and only goes farther than that earlier prophecy in indicating that the instruments of the Lord's final judgment are to be the Assyrians.

Five great calamities, says Isaiah, have fallen on Israel and left them hardened: 1st, earthquake (v. 25); 2d, loss of territory (ix. 8-12); 3d, war and a decisive defeat (ix. 13-17); 4th, internal anarchy (ix. 18-21); 5th, the near prospect of captivity (x. 1-4).

1. THE EARTHQUAKE (v. 25).—Amos closes his series with an earthquake; Isaiah begins with one. It may be the same convulsion they describe, or may not. Although the skirts of Palestine both to the east and west frequently tremble to these disturbances, an earthquake in Palestine itself, up on the high central ridge of the land, is very rare. Isaiah vividly describes its awful simplicity and suddenness. "The Lord stretched forth His hand and smote, and the hills shook, and their carcases were like offal in the midst of the streets." More words are not needed, because there was nothing more to describe. The Lord lifted His hand; the hills seemed for a moment to topple over, and when the living recovered from the shock there lay the dead, flung like refuse about the streets.

2. THE LOSS OF TERRITORY (ix. 8-21).—So awful a calamity, in which the dying did not die out of sight nor fall huddled together on some far off battle-field, but the whole land was strewn with her slain, ought to have left indelible impression on the people. But it did not. The Lord's own word had been in it for Jacob and Israel (ix. 8), "that the people might know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria." But unhumiliated they turned in the stoutness of their hearts, saying, when the earthquake had passed: * "The bricks are fallen, but we will build with hewn stones;" † the "sycamores are cut down, but we will change them

into cedars." Calamity did not make this people thoughtful; they felt God only to endeavour to forget Him. Therefore He visited them the second time. They did not feel the Lord shaking their land, so He sent their enemies to steal it from them: "the Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they devour Israel with open mouth." What that had been for appalling suddenness this was for lingering and harassing—guerilla warfare, armed raids, the land eaten away bit by bit. "Yet the people do not return unto Him that smote them, neither seek they the Lord of hosts."

3. WAR AND DEFEAT (ix. 13-17).—The next consequent calamity passed from the land to the people themselves. A great battle is described, in which the nation is dismembered in one day. War and its horrors are told, and the apparent want of Divine pity and discrimination which they imply is explained. Israel has been led into these disasters by the folly of their leaders, whom Isaiah therefore singles out for blame. "For they that lead these people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed." But the real horror of war is that it falls not upon its authors, that its victims are not statesmen, but the beauty of a country's youth, the helplessness of the widow and orphan. Some question seems to have been stirred by this in Isaiah's heart. He asks, Why does the Lord not rejoice in the young men of His people? Why has He no pity for widow and orphan, that He thus sacrifices them to the sin of the rulers? It is because the whole nation shares the ruler's guilt; "every one is an hypocrite and an evil-doer, and every mouth speaketh folly." As ruler so people, is a truth Isaiah frequently asserts, but never with such grimness as here. War brings out, as nothing else does, the solidarity of a people in guilt.

4. INTERNAL ANARCHY (ix. 18-21).—Even yet the people did not repent; their calamities only drove them to further wickedness. The prophet's eyes are opened to the awful fact that God's wrath is but the blast that fans men's hot sins to flame. This is one of those two or three awful scenes in history, in the conflagration of which we cannot tell what is human sin and what Divine judgment. There is a panic wickedness, sin spreading like mania, as if men were possessed by supernatural powers. The physical metaphors of the prophet are evident: a forest or prairie fire, and the consequent famine, whose fevered victims feed upon themselves. And no less evident are the political facts which the prophet employs these metaphors to describe. It is the anarchy which has beset more than one corrupt and unfortunate people, when their misleaders have been overthrown: the anarchy in which each faction seeks to slaughter out the rest. Jealousy and distrust awake the lust for blood, rage seizes the people as fire the forest, "and no man spareth his brother." We have had modern instances of all this; these scenes form a true description of some days of the French Revolution, and are even a truer description of the civil war that broke out in Paris after her late siege.

"If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
'T will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself
Like monsters of the deep." *

* "King Lear," act. iv. sc. 2.

* Read past tenses, as in the margin of Revised Version for all the future tenses, or better, the historical present, down to the end of the chapter.

† It is part of the argument for connecting ix. 8 with v. 25 that this phrase would be very natural after the earthquake described in v. 25.

5. THE THREAT OF CAPTIVITY (x. 1-4).—Turning now from the past, and from the fate of Samaria, with which it would appear he has been more particularly engaged, the prophet addresses his own countrymen in Judah, and paints the future for them. It is not a future in which there is any hope. The day of their visitation also will surely come, and the prophet sees it close in the darkest night of which a Jewish heart could think—the night of captivity. Where, he asks his unjust countrymen—where “will ye then flee for help? and where will you leave your glory?” Cringing among the captives, lying dead beneath heaps of dead—that is to be your fate, who will have turned so often and then so finally from God. When exactly the prophet thus warned his countrymen of captivity we do not know, but the warning, though so real, produced neither penitence in men nor pity in God. “For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.”

6. THE ASSYRIAN INVASION (v. 26-30).—The prophet is, therefore, free to explain that cloud which has appeared far away on the northern horizon. God’s hand of judgment is still uplifted over Judah, and it is that hand which summons the cloud. The Assyrians are coming in answer to God’s signal, and they are coming as a flood, to leave nothing but ruin and distress behind them. No description by Isaiah is more majestic than this one, in which Jehovah, who has exhausted every nearer means of converting His people, lifts His undrooping arm with a “flag to the nations that are far off, and hisses” or whistles “for them from the end of the earth. And, behold, they come with speed, swiftly: there is no weary one nor straggler among them; none slumbers nor sleeps; nor loosed is the girdle of his loins, nor broken the latchet of his shoes; whose arrows are sharpened, and all their bows bent; their horses’ hoofs are like the flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind; a roar have they like the lion’s, and they roar like young lions; yea, they growl and grasp the prey, and carry it off, and there is none to deliver. And they growl upon him that day like the growling of the sea; and if one looks to the land, behold dark and distress, and the light is darkened in the cloudy heaven.”

Thus Isaiah leaves Judah to await her doom. But the tones of his weird refrain awaken in our hearts some thoughts which will not let his message go from us just yet.

It will ever be a question, whether men abuse more their sorrows or their joys; but no earnest soul can doubt, which of these abuses is the more fatal. To sin in the one case is to yield to a temptation; to sin in the other is to resist a Divine grace. Sorrow is God’s last message to man; it is God speaking in emphasis. He who abuses it shows that he can shut his ears when God speaks loudest. Therefore heartlessness or impenitence after sorrow is more dangerous than intemperance in joy; its results are always more tragic. Now Isaiah points out that men’s abuse of sorrow is twofold. Men abuse sorrow by mistaking it, and they abuse sorrow by defying it.

Men abuse sorrow by mistaking it, when they see in it nothing but a penal or expiatory force. To many men sorrow is what his devotions were to Louis XI., which having religiously performed, he felt the more brave to sin. So with

the Samaritans, who said in the stoutness of their hearts, “The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.” To speak in this way is happy, but heathenish. It is to call sorrow “bad luck;” it is to hear no voice of God in it, saying, “Be pure; be humble; lean upon Me.” This disposition springs from a vulgar conception of God, as of a Being of no permanence in character, easily irritated but relieved by a burst of passion, smartly punishing His people and then leaving them to themselves. It is a temper which says, “God is angry, let us wait a little; God is appeased, let us go ahead again.” Over against such vulgar views of a Deity with a temper Isaiah unveils the awful majesty of God in holy wrath: “For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.” How grim and savage does it appear to our eyes till we understand the thoughts of the sinners to whom it was revealed! God cannot dispel the cowardly thought, that He is anxious only to punish, except by letting His heavy hand abide till it purify also. The permanence of God’s wrath is thus an ennobling, not a stupefying doctrine.

Men also abuse sorrow by defying it, but the end of this is madness. “It forms the greater part of the tragedy of ‘King Lear,’ that the aged monarch, though he has given his throne away, retains his imperiousness of heart, and continues to exhibit a senseless, if sometimes picturesque, pride and selfishness in face of misfortune. Even when he is overthrown he must still command; he fights against the very elements; he is determined to be at least the master of his own sufferings and destiny. But for this the necessary powers fail him; his life thus disordered terminates in madness. It was only by such an affliction that a character like his could be brought to repentance, . . . to humility, which is the parent of true love, and that love in him could be purified. Hence the melancholy close of that tragedy.”* As Shakespeare has dealt with the king, so Isaiah with the people; he also shows us sorrow when it is defied bringing forth madness. On so impious a height man’s brain grows dizzy, and he falls into that terrible abyss which is not, as some imagine, hell, but God’s last purgatory. Shakespeare brings shattered Lear out of it, and Isaiah has a remnant of the people to save.

CHAPTER IV.

ISAIAH’S CALL AND CONSECRATION

ISAIAH vi.

740 B. C.; written 735? or 727?

It has been already remarked that in chapter vi. we should find no other truths than those which have been unfolded in chapters ii.-v.: the Lord exalted in righteousness, the coming of a terrible judgment from Him upon Judah, and the survival of a bare remnant of the people. But chapter vi. treats the same subjects with a difference. In chapters ii.-iv. they gradually appear and grow to clearness in connection with the circumstances of Judah’s history; in chapter

* Ulrici: “Shakespeare’s Dramatic Art.”

v. they are formally and rhetorically vindicated; in chapter vi. we are led back to the secret and solemn moments of their first inspiration in the prophet's own soul. It may be asked why chapter vi. comes last and not first in this series, and why in an exposition attempting to deal, as far as possible, chronologically with Isaiah's prophecies, his call should not form the subject of the first chapter. The answer is simple, and throws a flood of light upon the chapter. In all probability chapter vi. was written after its predecessors, and what Isaiah has put into it is not only what happened in the earliest moments of his prophetic life, but that spelt out and emphasised by his experience since. The ideal character of the narrative, and its date some years after the events which it relates, are now generally admitted. Of course the narrative is all fact. No one will believe that he, whose glance penetrated with such keenness the character of men and movements, looked with dimmer eye into his own heart. It is the spiritual process which the prophet actually passed through before the opening of his ministry. But it is that, developed by subsequent experience, and presented to us in the language of outward vision. Isaiah had been some years a prophet, long enough to make clear that prophecy was not to be for him what it had been for his predecessors in Israel, a series of detached inspirations and occasional missions, with short responsibilities, but a work for life, a profession and a career, with all that this means of postponement, failure, and fluctuation of popular feeling. Success had not come so rapidly as the prophet in his original enthusiasm had looked for, and his preaching had effected little upon the people. Therefore he would go back to the beginning, remind himself of that to which God had really called him, and vindicate the results of his ministry, at which people scoffed and his own heart grew sometimes sick. In chapter vi. Isaiah acts as his own remembrancer. If we keep in mind that this chapter, describing Isaiah's call and consecration to the prophetic office, was written by a man who felt that office to be the burden of a lifetime, and who had to explain its nature and vindicate its results to his own soul—grown somewhat uncertain, it may be, of her original inspiration—we shall find light upon features of the chapter that are otherwise most obscure.

I. THE VISION (vv. 1-4).

Several years, then, Isaiah looks back and says, "In the year King Uzziah died." There is more than a date given here; there is a great contrast suggested. Prophecy does not chronicle by time, but by experiences, and we have here, as it seems, the cardinal experience of a prophet's life.

All men knew of that glorious reign with the ghastly end—fifty years of royalty, and then a lazar-house. There had been no king like this one since Solomon; never, since the son of David brought the Queen of Sheba to his feet, had the national pride stood so high or the nation's dream of sovereignty touched such remote borders. The people's admiration invested Uzziah with all the graces of the ideal monarch. The chronicler of Judah tells us "that God helped him and made him to prosper, and his name spread far abroad, and he was marvellously

helped till he was strong;" he with the double name—Azariah, Jehovah-his-Helper; Uzziah, Jehovah-his-Strength. How this glory fell upon the fancy of the future prophet, and dyed it deep, we may imagine from those marvellous colours, with which in later years he painted the king in his beauty. Think of the boy, the boy that was to be an Isaiah, the boy with the germs of this great prophecy in his heart—think of him and such a hero as this to shine upon him, and we may conceive how his whole nature opened out beneath that sun of royalty and absorbed its light.

Suddenly the glory was eclipsed, and Jerusalem learned that she had seen her king for the last time: "The Lord smote the king so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, and he was cut off from the house of the Lord." Uzziah had gone into the temple, and attempted with his own hands to burn incense. Under a later dispensation of liberty he would have been applauded as a brave Protestant, vindicating the right of every worshipper of God to approach Him without the intervention of a special priesthood. Under the earlier dispensation of law his act could be regarded only as one of presumption, the expression of a worldly and irreverent temper, which ignored the infinite distance between God and man. It was followed, as sins of wilfulness in religion were always followed under the old covenant, by swift disaster. Uzziah suffered as Saul, Uzzah, Nadab, and Abihu did. The wrath, with which he burst out on the opposing priests brought on, or made evident as it is believed to have done in other cases, an attack of leprosy. The white spot stood out unmistakably from the flushed forehead, and he was thrust from the temple—"yea, himself also hastened to go out."

We can imagine how such a judgment, the moral of which must have been plain to all, affected the most sensitive heart in Jerusalem. Isaiah's imagination was darkened, but he tells us that the crisis was the enfranchisement of his faith. "In the year King Uzziah died"—it is as if a veil had dropped, and the prophet *saw* beyond what it had hidden, "the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up." That it is no mere date Isaiah means, but a spiritual contrast which he is anxious to impress upon us, is made clear by his emphasis of the rank and not the name of God. It is "the Lord sitting upon a throne—the Lord" absolutely, set over against the human prince. The simple antithesis seems to speak of the passing away of the young man's hero-worship and the dawn of his faith; and so interpreted, this first verse of chapter vi. is only a concise summary of that development of religious experience which we have traced through chapters ii.-iv. Had Isaiah ever been subject to the religious temper of his time, the careless optimism of a prosperous and proud people, who entered upon their religious services without awe, "trampling the courts of the Lord," and used them like Uzziah, for their *own* honour, who felt religion to be an easy thing, and dismissed from it all thoughts of judgment and feelings of penitence—if ever Isaiah had been subject to that temper, then once for all he was redeemed by this stroke upon Uzziah. And, as we have seen, there is every reason to believe that Isaiah did at first share the too easy public religion of his youth. That early vision of his (ii. 2-5), the

establishment of Israel at the head of the nations, to be immediately attained at his own word (v. 5) and without preliminary purification, was it not simply a less gross form of the king's own religious presumption? Uzziah's fatal act was the expression of the besetting sin of his people, and in that sin Isaiah himself had been a partaker. "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." In the person of their monarch the temper of the whole Jewish nation had come to judgment. Seeking the ends of religion by his own way, and ignoring the way God had appointed, Uzziah at the very moment of his insistence was hurled back and stamped unclean. The prophet's eyes were opened. The king sank into a leper's grave, but before Isaiah's vision the Divine majesty arose in all its loftiness. "I saw the Lord high and lifted up." We already know what Isaiah means by these terms. He has used them of God's supremacy in righteousness above the low moral standards of men, of God's occupation of a far higher throne than that of the national deity of Judah, of God's infinite superiority to Israel's vulgar identification of His purposes with her material prosperity or His honour with the compromises of her politics, and especially of God's seat as their Judge over a people, who sought in their religion only satisfaction for their pride and love of ease.

From this contrast the whole vision expands as follows:

Under the mistaken idea that what Isaiah describes is the temple in Jerusalem, it has been remarked, that the place of his vision is wonderful in the case of one who set so little store by ceremonial worship. This, however, to which our prophet looks is no house built with hands, but Jehovah's own heavenly *palace* (ver. 1—not *temple*); only Isaiah describes it in terms of the Jerusalem temple which was its symbol. It was natural that the temple should furnish Isaiah not only with the framework of his vision, but also with the platform from which he saw it. For it was in the temple that Uzziah's sin was sinned and God's holiness vindicated upon him. It was in the temple that, when Isaiah beheld the scrupulous religiousness of the people, the contrast of that with their evil lives struck him, and he summed it up in the epigram "wickedness and worship" (i. 13). It was in the temple, in short, that the prophet's conscience had been most roused, and just where the conscience is most roused there is the vision of God to be expected. Very probably it was while brooding over Uzziah's judgment on the scene of its occurrence that Isaiah beheld his vision. Yet for all the vision contained the temple itself was too narrow. The truth which was to be revealed to Isaiah, the holiness of God, demanded a wider stage and the breaking down of those partitions, which, while they had been designed to impress God's presence on the worshipper, had only succeeded in veiling Him. So while the seer keeps his station on the threshold of the earthly building, soon to feel it rock beneath his feet, as heaven's praise bursts like thunder on the earth, and while his immediate neighbourhood remains the same familiar *house*, all beyond is glorified. The veil of the temple falls away, and everything behind it. No ark nor mercy-seat is visible, but a throne and a court—the palace of God in heaven, as we have it also pictured in the eleventh and twenty-ninth Psalms. The Royal

presence is everywhere. Isaiah describes no face, only a Presence and a Session: "the Lord sitting on a throne, and His skirts filled the palace."

"No face; only the sight
Of a sweepy garment vast and white
With a hem that I could recognise."*

Around (not *above*, as in the English version) were ranged the hovering courtiers, of what shape and appearance we know not, except that they veiled their faces and their feet before the awful Holiness,—all wings and voice, perfect readiesses of praise and service. The prophet heard them chant in antiphon, like the temple choirs of priests. And the one choir cried out, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts;" and the other responded, "The whole earth is full of His glory."

It is by the familiar name Jehovah of hosts—the proper name of Israel's national God—that the prophet hears the choirs of heaven address the Divine Presence. But what they ascribe to the Deity is exactly what Israel will not ascribe, and the revelation they make of His nature is the contradiction of Israel's thoughts concerning Him.

What, in the first place, is *holiness*? We attach this term to a definite standard of morality or an unusually impressive fulness of character. To our minds it is associated with very positive forces, as of comfort and conviction—perhaps because we take our ideas of it from the active operations of the Holy Ghost. The original force of the term *holiness*, however, was not positive, but negative, and throughout the Old Testament, whatever modifications its meaning undergoes, it retains a negative flavour. The Hebrew word for holiness springs from a root which means *to set apart, make distinct, put at a distance from*. When God is described as the Holy One in the Old Testament it is generally with the purpose of withdrawing Him from some presumption of men upon His majesty or of negating their unworthy thoughts of Him. The Holy One is the Incomparable: "To whom, then, will ye liken Me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One" (xl. 25). He is the Unapproachable: "Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God?" (1 Sam. vi. 20). He is the Utter Contrast of man: "I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee" (Hosea xi. 9). He is the Exalted and Sublime: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place" (lvii. 15). Generally speaking, then, holiness is equivalent to separateness, sublimity—in fact, just to that loftiness or exaltation which Isaiah has already so often reiterated as the principal attribute of God. In their thrice-repeated *Holy* the seraphs are only telling more emphatically to the prophet's ears what his eyes have already seen, "the Lord high and lifted up." Better expression could not be found for the full idea of Godhead. This little word *Holy* radiates heaven's own breadth of meaning. Within its fundamental idea—distance or difference from man—what spaces are there not for every attribute of Godhead to flash? If the Holy One be originally He who is distinct from man and man's thoughts, and who impresses man from the beginning with the awful

* Browning's "Christmas Eve."

sublimity of the contrast in which He stands to him, how naturally may holiness come to cover not only that moral purity and intolerance of sin to which we now more strictly apply the term, but those metaphysical conceptions as well, which we gather up under the name "supernatural," and so finally, by lifting the Divine nature away from the change and vanity of this world, and emphasising God's independence of all beside Himself, become the fittest expression we have for Him as the Infinite and Self-existent. Thus the word *holy* appeals in turn to each of the three great faculties of man's nature, by which he can be religiously exercised—his conscience, his affections, his reason; it covers the impressions which God makes on man as a sinner, on man as a worshipper, on man as a thinker. The Holy One is not only the Sinless and Sin-abhorring, but the Sublime and the Absolute too.

But while we recognise the exhaustiveness of the series of ideas about the Divine Nature, which develop from the root meaning of holiness, and to express which the word *holy* is variously used throughout the Scriptures, we must not, if we are to appreciate the use of the word on this occasion, miss the motive of recoil which starts them all. If we would hear what Isaiah heard in the seraphs' song, we must distinguish in the three-fold ascription of holiness the intensity of recoil from the confused religious views and low moral temper of the prophet's generation. It is no scholastic definition of Deity which the seraphim are giving. Not for a moment is it to be supposed, that to that age, whose representative is listening to them, they are attempting to convey an idea of the Trinity. Their thrice-uttered *Holy* is not theological accuracy, but religious emphasis. This angelic revelation of the holiness of God was intended for a generation some of whom were idol-worshippers, confounding the Godhead with the work of their own hands or with natural objects, and none of whom were free from a confusion in principle of the Divine with the human and worldly, for which now sheer mental slovenliness, now a dull moral sense, and now positive pride was to blame. To worshippers who *trampled* the courts of the Lord with the careless feet, and looked up the temple with the unabashed faces, of routine, the cry of the seraphs, as they veiled their faces and their feet, travailed to restore that shuddering sense of the sublimity of the Divine Presence, which in the impressible youth of the race first impelled man, bowing low beneath the awful heavens, to name God by the name of the Holy. To men, again, careful of the legal forms of worship, but lawless and careless in their lives, the song of the seraphs revealed not the hard truth, against which they had already rubbed conscience trite, that God's law was inexorable, but the fiery fact that His whole nature burned with wrath towards sin. To men, once more, proud of their prestige and material prosperity, and presuming in their pride to take their own way with God, and to employ like Uzziah the exercises of religion for their own honour, this vision presented the real sovereignty of God: the Lord Himself seated on a throne *there*—just where they felt only a theatre for the display of their pride, or machinery for the attainment of their private ends. Thus did the three-fold cry of the angels meet the three-fold sinfulness of that generation of men.

But the first line of the seraph's song serves more than a temporary end. The Trisagion rings, and has need to ring, for ever down the Church. Everywhere and at all times these are the three besetting sins of religious people—callousness in worship, carelessness in life, and the temper which employs the forms of religion simply for self-indulgence or self-aggrandisement. These sins are induced by the same habit of contentment with mere form; they can be corrected only by the vision of the Personal Presence who is behind all form. Our organisation, ritual, law, and sacrament—we must be able to see them fall away, as Isaiah saw the sanctuary itself disappear, before God Himself, if we are to remain heartily moral and fervently religious. The Church of God has to learn that no mere multiplication of forms, nor a more æsthetic arrangement of them, will redeem her worshippers from callousness. Callousness is but the shell which the feelings develop in self-defence when left by the sluggish and impenetrative soul to beat upon the hard outsides of form. And nothing will fuse this shell of callousness but that ardent flame, which is kindled at touching of the Divine and human spirits, when forms have fallen away and the soul beholds with open face the Eternal Himself. As with worship, so with morality. Holiness is secured not by ceremonial, but by a reverence for a holy Being. We shall rub our consciences trite against moral maxims or religious rites. It is the effluence of a Presence, which alone can create in us, and keep in us, a clean heart. And if any object that we thus make light of ritual and religious law, of Church and sacrament, the reply is obvious. Ritual and sacrament are to the living God but as the wick of a candle to the light thereof. They are given to reveal Him, and the process is not perfect unless they themselves perish from the thoughts to which they convey Him. If God is not felt to be present, as Isaiah felt Him to be, to the exclusion of all forms, then these will be certain to be employed, as Uzziah employed them, for the sake of the only other spiritual being of whom the worshipper is conscious—himself. Unless we are able to forget our ritual in spiritual communion with the very God, and to become unconscious of our organisation in devout consciousness of our personal relation to Him, then ritual will be only a means of sensuous indulgence, organisation only a machinery for selfish or sectarian ends. The vision of God—this is the one thing needful for worship and for conduct.

But while the one verse of the antiphon reiterates what Jehovah of hosts is in Himself, the other describes what He is in revelation. "The whole earth is full of His glory." Glory is the correlative of holiness. Glory is that in which holiness comes to expression. Glory is the expression of holiness, as beauty is the expression of health. If holiness be as deep as we have seen, so varied then will glory be. There is nothing in the earth but it is the glory of God. "The fulness of the whole earth is His glory," is the proper grammatical rendering of the song. For Jehovah of hosts is not the God only of Israel, but the Maker of heaven and earth, and not the victory of Israel alone, but the wealth and the beauty of all the world is His glory. So universal an ascription of glory is the proper parallel to that of absolute Godhead, which is implied in holiness.

II. THE CALL (vv. 4-8).

Thus, then, Isaiah, standing on earth, on the place of a great sin, with the conscience of his people's evil in his heart, and himself not without the feeling of guilt, looked into heaven, and beholding the glory of God, heard also with what pure praise and readiness of service the heavenly hosts surrounded His throne. No wonder the prophet felt the polluted threshold rock beneath him, or that as where fire and water mingle there should be the rising of a great smoke. For the smoke described is not, as some have imagined, that of acceptable incense, thick billows swelling through the temple to express the completion and satisfaction of the seraphs' worship; but it is the mist which ever arises where holiness and sin touch each other. It has been described both as the obscurity that envelops a weak mind in presence of a truth too great for it, and the darkness that falls upon a diseased eye when exposed to the mid-day sun. These are only analogies, and may mislead us. What Isaiah actually felt was the dim-eyed shame, the distraction, the embarrassment, the blinding shock of a personal encounter with One whom he was utterly unfit to meet. For this was a personal encounter. We have spelt out the revelation sentence by sentence in gradual argument; but Isaiah did not reach it through argument or brooding. It was not to the prophet what it is to his expositors, a pregnant thought, that his intellect might gradually unfold, but a Personal Presence, which apprehended and overwhelmed him. God and he were there face to face. "Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because a man unclean of lips am I, and in the midst of a people unclean of lips do I dwell; for the King, Jehovah of hosts, mine eyes have beheld."

The form of the prophet's confession, "uncleanness of lips," will not surprise us as far as he makes it for himself. As with the disease of the body, so with the sin of the soul; each often gathers to one point of pain. Every man, though wholly sinful by nature, has his own particular consciousness of guilt. Isaiah being a prophet felt his mortal weakness most upon his lips. The inclusion of the people, however, along with himself under this form of guilt, suggests a wider interpretation of it. The lips are, as it were, the blossom of a man. "Grace is poured upon thy lips, therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also." It is in the blossom of a plant that the plant's defects become conspicuous; it is when all a man's faculties combine for the complex and delicate office of expression that any fault which is in him will come to the surface. Isaiah had been listening to the perfect praise of sinless beings, and it brought into startling relief the defects of his own people's worship. Unclean of lips these were indeed when brought against that heavenly choir. Their social and political sin—sin of heart and home and market—came to a head in their worship, and what should have been the blossom of their life fell to the ground like a rotten leaf beneath the stainless beauty of the seraphs' praise.

While the prophet thus passionately gathered his guilt upon his lips, a sacrament was preparing on which God concentrated His mercies to meet it. Sacrament and lips, applied mercy and presented sin, now come together. "Then flew

unto me one of the seraphim, and in his hand a glowing stone—with tongs had he taken it off the altar—and he touched my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and so thy iniquity passeth away and thy sin is atoned for."

The idea of this function is very evident, and a scholar who has said that it "would perhaps be quite intelligible to the contemporaries of the prophet, but is undoubtedly obscure to us," appears to have said just the reverse of what is right; for so simple a process of atonement leaves out the most characteristic details of the Jewish ritual of sacrifice, while it anticipates in an unmistakable manner the essence of the Christian sacrament. In a scene of expiation laid under the old covenant, we are struck by the absence of oblation or sacrificial act on the part of the sinner himself. There is here no victim slain, no blood sprinkled; an altar is only parenthetically suggested, and even then in its simplest form, of a hearth on which the Divine fire is continually burning. The "glowing stone," not "live coal" as in the English version, was no part of the temple furniture, but the ordinary means of conveying heat or applying fire in the various purposes of household life. There was, it is true, a carrying of fire in some of the temple services, as, for example, on the great Day of Atonement, but then it was effected by a small grate filled with living embers. In the household, on the other hand, when cakes had to be baked, or milk boiled, or water warmed, or in fifty similar applications of fire, a glowing stone taken from off the hearth was the invariable instrument. It is this swift and simple domestic process which Isaiah now sees substituted for the slow and intricate ceremonial of the temple—a seraph with a glowing stone in his hand, "with tongs had he taken it off the altar." And yet the prophet feels this only as a more direct expression of the very same idea, with which the elaborate ritual was inspired—for which the victim was slain, and the flesh consumed in fire, and the blood sprinkled. Isaiah desires nothing else, and receives no more, than the ceremonial law was intended to assure to the sinner—pardon of his sin and reconciliation to God. But our prophet will have conviction of these immediately, and with a force which the ordinary ritual is incapable of expressing. The feelings of this Jew are too intense and spiritual to be satisfied with the slow pageant of the earthly temple, whose performances to a man in his horror could only have appeared so indifferent and far away from himself as not to be really his own nor to effect what he passionately desired. Instead, therefore, of laying his guilt in the shape of some victim on the altar, Isaiah, with a keener sense of its inseparableness from himself, presents it to God upon his own lips. Instead of being satisfied with beholding the fire of God consume it on another body than his own, at a distance from himself, he feels that fire visit the very threshold of his nature, where he has gathered the guilt, and consume it there. The whole secret of this startling nonconformity to the law, on the very floor of the temple, is that for a man who has penetrated to the presence of God the legal forms are left far behind, and he stands face to face with the truth by which they are inspired. In that Divine Presence Isaiah is his own altar; he acts his guilt in his own person, and so he feels the expiatory fire come to his very self directly from the heavenly hearth. It is a rep-

lica of the fifty-first Psalm: "For Thou delightest not in sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." This is my sacrifice, my sense of guilt gathered here upon my lips: my "broken and contrite heart," who feel myself undone before Thee, "Lord, Thou wilt not despise."

It has always been remarked as one of the most powerful proofs of the originality and Divine force of Christianity, that from man's worship of God, and especially from those parts in which the forgiveness of sin is sought and assured, it did away with the necessity of a physical rite of sacrifice; that it broke the universal and immemorial habit by which man presented to God a material offering for the guilt of his soul. By remembering this fact we may measure the religious significance of the scene we now contemplate. Nearly eight centuries before there was accomplished upon Calvary that Divine Sacrifice for sin, which abrogated a rite of expiation, hitherto universally adopted by the conscience of humanity, we find a Jew, in the dispensation where such a rite was most religiously enforced, trembling under the conviction of sin, and upon a floor crowded with suggestions of physical sacrifice; yet the only sacrifice he offers is the purely spiritual one of confession. It is most notable. Look at it from a human point of view, and we can estimate Isaiah's immense spiritual originality; look at it from a Divine, and we cannot help perceiving a distinct foreshadow of what was to take place by the blood of Jesus under the new covenant. To this man, as to some others of his dispensation, whose experience our Christian sympathy recognises so readily in the Psalms, there was granted aforetime boldness to enter into the holiest. For this is the explanation of Isaiah's marvellous disregard of the temple ritual. It is all behind him. This man has passed within the veil. Forms are all behind him, and he is face to face with God. But between two beings in that position, intercourse by the far off and uncertain signals of sacrifice is inconceivable. It can only take place by the simple unfolding of the heart. It must be rational, intelligent, and by speech. When man is at such close quarters with God what sacrifice is possible but the sacrifice of the lips? Form for the Divine reply there must be some, for even Christianity has its sacraments, but like them this sacrament is of the very simplest form, and like them it is accompanied by the explanatory word. As Christ under the new covenant took bread and wine, and made the homely action of feeding upon them the sign and seal to His disciples of the forgiveness of their sins, so His angel under the old and sterner covenant took the more severe, but as simple and domestic form of fire to express the same to His prophet. And we do well to emphasise that the experimental value of this sacrament of fire is bestowed by the word attached to it. It is not a dumb sacrament, with a magical efficacy. But the prophet's mind is persuaded and his conscience set at peace by the intelligible words of the minister of the sacrament.

Isaiah's sin being taken away, he is able to discern the voice of God Himself. It is in the most beautiful accordance with what has already happened that he hears this not as command, but request, and answers not of compulsion, but of freedom. "And I heard the voice of the

Lord saying, Whom shall I send? and who will go for us? And I said, Here am I; send me." What spiritual understanding alike of the will of God and the responsibility of man, what evangelical liberty and boldness, are here! Here we touch the spring of that high flight Isaiah takes both in prophecy and in active service for the State. Here we have the secret of the filial freedom, the life-long sense of responsibility, the regal power of initiative, the sustained and unfaltering career, which distinguish Isaiah among the ministers of the old covenant, and stamp him prophet by the heart and for the life, as many of them are only by the office and for the occasion. Other prophets are the servants of the God of heaven; Isaiah stands next the Son Himself. On others the hand of the Lord is laid in irresistible compulsion; the greatest of them are often ignorant, by turns headstrong and craven, deserving correction, and generally in need of supplementary calls and inspirations. But of such scourges and such doles Isaiah's royal career is absolutely without a trace. His course, begun in freedom, is pursued without hesitation or anxiety; begun in utter self-sacrifice, it knows henceforth no moment of grudging or disobedience. "Esaiah is very bold," because he is so free and so fully devoted. In the presence of mind with which he meets each sudden change of politics during that bewildering half-century of Judah's history, we seem to hear his calm voice repeating its first, "Here am I." Presence of mind he always had. The kaleidoscope shifts: it is now Egyptian intrigue, now Assyrian force; now a false king requiring threat of displacement by God's own hero, now a true king, but helpless and in need of consolation; now a rebellious people to be condemned, and now an oppressed and penitent one to be encouraged:—different dangers, with different sorts of salvation possible, obliging the prophet to promise different futures, and to say things inconsistent with what he had already said. Yet Isaiah never hesitates; he can always say, "Here am I." We hear that voice again in the spontaneousness and versatility of his style. Isaiah is one of the great kings of literature, with every variety of style under his sway, passing with perfect readiness, as subject or occasion calls, from one to another of the tones of a superbly endowed nature. Everywhere this man impresses us with his personality, with the wealth of his nature and the perfection of his control of it. But the personality is consecrated. The "Here am I" is followed by the "send me." And its health, harmony, and boldness are derived, Isaiah being his own witness, from this early sense of pardon and purification at the Divine hands. Isaiah is indeed a king and a priest unto God—a king with all his powers at his own command, a priest with them all consecrated to the service of Heaven.

One cannot pass away from these verses without observing the plain answer which they give to the question, What is a call to the ministry of God? In these days of dust and distraction, full of party cries, with so many side issues of doctrine and duty presenting themselves, and the solid attractions of so many other services insensibly leading men to look for the same sort of attractiveness in the ministry, it may prove a relief to some to ponder the simple elements of Isaiah's call to be a professional and life-long prophet. Isaiah got no "call" in our conven-

tional sense of the word, no compulsion that he must go, no articulate voice describing him as the sort of man needed for the work, nor any of those similar "calls" which sluggish and craven spirits so often desire to relieve them of the responsibility or the strenuous effort needed in deciding for a profession which their conscience will not permit them to refuse. Isaiah got no such call. After passing through the fundamental religious experiences of forgiveness and cleansing, which are in every case the indispensable premises of life with God, Isaiah was left to himself. No direct summons was addressed to him, no compulsion was laid on him; but he heard the voice of God asking generally for messengers, and he on his own responsibility answered it for himself in particular. He heard from the Divine lips of the Divine need for messengers, and he was immediately full of the mind that he was the man for the mission, and of the heart to give himself to it. So great an example cannot be too closely studied by candidates for the ministry in our own day. Sacrifice is not the half-sleepy, half-reluctant submission to the force of circumstance or opinion, in which shape it is so often travestied among us, but the resolute self-surrender and willing resignation of a free and reasonable soul. There are many in our day who look for an irresistible compulsion into the ministry of the Church; sensitive as they are to the material bias by which men roll off into other professions, they pray for something of a similar kind to prevail with them in this direction also. There are men who pass into the ministry by social pressure or the opinion of the circles they belong to, and there are men who adopt the profession simply because it is on the line of least resistance. From which false beginnings rise the spent force, the premature stoppages, the stagnancy, the aimlessness and heartlessness, which are the scandals of the professional ministry and the weakness of the Christian Church in our day. Men who drift into the ministry, as it is certain so many do, become mere ecclesiastical flotsam and jetsam, incapable of giving carriage to any soul across the waters of this life, uncertain of their own arrival anywhere, and of all the waste of their generation, the most patent and disgraceful. God will have no drift-wood for His sacrifices, no drift-men for His ministers. Self-consecration is the beginning of His service, and a sense of our own freedom and our own responsibility is an indispensable element in the act of self-consecration. *We*—not God—have to make the decision. We are not to be dead, but living, sacrifices, and everything which renders us less than fully alive both mars at the time the sincerity of our surrender and reacts for evil upon the whole of our subsequent ministry.

III. THE COMMISSION (vv. 9-13).

A heart so resolutely devoted as we have seen Isaiah's to be was surely prepared against any degree of discouragement, but probably never did man receive so awful a commission as he describes himself to have done. Not that we are to suppose that this fell upon Isaiah all at once, in the suddenness and distinctness with which he here records it. Our sense of its awfulness will only be increased when we realise

that Isaiah became aware of it, not in the shock of a single discovery, sufficiently great to have carried its own anæsthetic along with it, but through a prolonged process of disillusion, and at the pain of those repeated disappointments, which are all the more painful that none singly is great enough to stupefy. It is just at this point of our chapter that we feel most the need of supposing it to have been written some years after the consecration of Isaiah, when his experience had grown long enough to articulate the dim forebodings of that solemn moment. "Go and say to this people, Hearing, hear ye, but understand not; seeing, see ye, but know not. Make fat the heart of this people, and its ears make heavy, and its eyes smear, lest it see with its eyes, and hear with its ears, and its heart understand, and it turn again and be healed." No prophet, we may be sure, would be asked by God to go and tell his audiences that in so many words, at the beginning of his career. It is only by experience that a man understands that kind of a commission,* and for the required experience Isaiah had not long to wait after entering on his ministry. Ahaz himself, in whose death-year it is supposed by many that Isaiah wrote this account of his consecration—the conduct of Ahaz himself was sufficient to have brought out the convictions of the prophet's heart in this startling form, in which he has stated his commission. By the word of the Lord and an offer of a sign from Him, Isaiah did make fat that monarch's heart and smear his eyes. And perverse as the rulers of Judah were in the examples and policies they set, the people were as blindly bent on following them to destruction. "Every one," said Isaiah, when he must have been for some time a prophet, "every one is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly."

But if that clear, bitter way of putting the matter can have come to Isaiah only with the experience of some years, why does he place it upon the lips of God, as they give him his commission? Because Isaiah is stating not merely his own singular experience, but a truth always true of the preaching of the word of God, and of which no prophet at the time of his consecration to that ministry can be without at least a foreboding. We have not exhausted the meaning of this awful commission when we say that it is only a forcible anticipation of the prophet's actual experience. There is more here than one man's experience. Over and over again are these words quoted in the New Testament, till we learn to find them true and always everywhere that the Word of God is preached to men,—the description of what would seem to be its necessary effect upon many souls. Both Jesus and Paul use Isaiah's commission of themselves. They do so like Isaiah at an advanced stage in their ministry, when the shock of misunderstanding and ejection has been repeatedly felt, but then not solely as an apt description of their own experience. They quote God's words to Isaiah as a prophecy fulfilled in their own case—that is to say, as the statement of a great principle or truth of which their own ministry is only another instance. Their own disappointments have roused them to the fact, that this

* Even Calvin, though in order to prove that Isaiah had been prophesying for some time before his inaugural vision, says that his commission implies some years actual experience of the obstinacy of the people.

is always an effect of the word of God upon numbers of men—to deaden their spiritual faculties. While Matthew and the book of Acts adopt the milder Greek version of Isaiah's commission, John gives a rendering that is even stronger than the original. "He hath blinded," he says of God Himself, "their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their hearts." In Mark's narrative Christ says that He speaks to them that are outside in parables, "for the purpose that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand, lest haply they should turn again and it should be forgiven them." We may suspect, in an utterance so strange to the lips of the Lord of salvation, merely the irony of His baffled love. But it is rather the statement of what He believed to be the necessary effect of a ministry like His own. It marks the direction, not of His desire, but of natural sequence.

With these instances we can go back to Isaiah and understand why he should have described the bitter fruits of experience as an imperative laid upon him by God. "Make fat the heart of this people, and its ears make heavy, and its eyes do thou smear." It is the fashion of the prophet's grammar, when it would state a principle or necessary effect, to put it in the form of a command. What God expresses to Isaiah so imperatively as almost to take our breath away; what Christ uttered with such abruptness that we ask, Does He speak in irony? what Paul laid down as the conviction of a long and patient ministry, is the great truth that the Word of God has not only a saving power, but that even in its gentlest pleadings and its purest Gospel, even by the mouth of Him who came, not to condemn, but to save the world, it has a power that is judicial and condemnatory.

It is frequently remarked by us as perhaps the most deplorable fact of our experience, that there exists in human nature an accursed facility for turning God's gifts to precisely the opposite ends from those for which He gave them. So common is man's misunderstanding of the plainest signs, and so frequent his abuse of the most evident favours of Heaven, that a spectator of the drama of human history might imagine its Author to have been a Cynic or Comedian, portraying for His own amusement the loss of the erring at the very moment of what might have been their recovery, the frustration of love at the point of its greatest warmth and expectancy. Let him look closer; however, and he will perceive, not a comedy, but a tragedy, for neither chance nor cruel sport is here at work, but free will and the laws of habit, with retribution and penalty. These actors are not puppets in the hand of a Power that moves them at will; each of them plays his own part, and the abuse and contradiction of which he is guilty are but the prerogative of his freedom. They are free beings who thus reject the gift of Divine assistance and so piteously misunderstand Divine truth. Look closer still, and you will see that the way they talk, the impression they accept of God's goodness, the effects of His judgments upon them, are determined not at the moment of their choice, and not by a single act of their will, but by the whole tenor of their previous life. In the sudden flash of some gift or opportunity, men reveal the stuff of which they are made, the disposition they have bred in them-

selves. Opportunity in human life is as often judgment as it is salvation. When we perceive these things, we understand that life is not a comedy, where chance governs or incongruous situations are invented by an Almighty Satirist for His own sport, but a tragedy, with all tragedy's pathetic elements of royal wills contending in freedom with each other, of men's wills clashing with God's: men the makers of their own destinies, and Nemesis not directing, but following their actions. We go back to the very fundamentals of our nature on this dread question. To understand what has been called "a great law in human degeneracy," that "the evil heart can assimilate good to itself and convert it to its nature," we must understand what free will means, and take into account the terrible influence of habit.

Now there is no more conspicuous instance of this law, than that which is afforded by the preaching of the Gospel of God. God's Word, as Christ reminds us, does not fall on virgin soil; it falls on soil already holding other seed. When a preacher stands up with the Word of God in a great congregation, vast as Scripture warrants us for believing his power to be, his is not the only power that is operative. Each man present has a life behind that hour and place, lying away in the darkness, silent and dead as far as the congregation are concerned, but in his own heart as vivid and loud as the voice of the preacher, though he be preaching never so forcibly. The prophet is not the only power in the delivery of God's Word, nor is the Holy Spirit the only power. That would make all preaching of the Word a mere display. But the Bible represents it as a strife. And now it is said of men themselves that they harden their hearts against the Word, and now—because such hardening is the result of previous sinning, and has therefore a judicial character—that God hardens their hearts. "Simon, Simon," said Christ to a face that spread out to His own all the ardour of worship, "Satan is desiring to have you, but I have prayed that your faith fail not." God sends His Word into our hearts; the Mediator stands by, and prays that it make us His own. But there are other factors in the operation, and the result depends on our own will; it depends on our own will, and it is dreadfully determined by our habits.

Now this is one of the first facts to which a young reformer or prophet awakes. Such an awakening is a necessary element in his education and apprenticeship. He has seen the Lord high and lifted up. His lips have been touched by the coal from off the altar. His first feeling is that nothing can withstand that power, nothing gainsay this inspiration. Is he a Nehemiah, and the hand of the Lord has been mighty upon him? Then he feels that he has but to tell his fellows of it to make them as enthusiastic in the Lord's work as himself. Is he a Mazzini, aflame from his boyhood with aspiration for his country, consecrated from his birth to the cause of duty? Then he leaps with joy upon his mission; he has but to show himself, to speak, to lead the way, and his country is free. Is he—to descend to a lower degree of prophecy—a Fourier, sensitive more than most to how anarchic society is, and righteously eager to settle it upon stable foundations? Then he draws his plans for reconstruction, he projects his phalanges and phalansteres, and believes that he has solved the

social problem. Is he—to come back to the heights—an Isaiah, with the Word of God in him like fire? Then he sees his vision of the perfect state; he thinks to lift his people to it by a word. "O house of Jacob," he says, "come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

For all of whom the next necessary stage of experience is one of disappointment, with the hard commission, "Make the heart of this people fat." They must learn that, if God has caught themselves young, and when it was possible to make them entirely His own, the human race to whom He sends them is old, too old for them to effect much upon the mass of it beyond the hardening and perpetuation of evil. Fourier finds that to produce his perfect State he would need to re-create mankind, to cut down the tree to the very roots, and begin again. After the first rush of patriotic fervour, which carried so many of his countrymen with him, Mazzini discovers himself in "a moral desert," confesses that the struggle to liberate his fatherland, which has only quickened him to further devotion in so great a cause, has been productive of scepticism in his followers, and has left them withered and hardened of heart, whom it had found so capable of heroic impulses. He tells us how they upbraided and scorned him, left him in exile, and returned to their homes, from which they had set out with vows to die for their country, doubting now whether there was anything at all worth living or dying for outside themselves. Mazzini's description of the first passage of his career is invaluable for the light which it throws upon this commission of Isaiah. History does not contain a more dramatic representation of the entirely opposite effects of the same Divine movement upon different natures. While the first efforts for the liberty of Italy materialised the greater number of his countrymen, whom Mazzini had persuaded to embark upon them, the failure and their consequent defection only served to strip this heroic soul of the last rags of selfishness, and consecrate it more utterly to the will of God and the duty that lay before it.

A few sentences from the confessions of the Italian patriot may be quoted, with benefit to our appreciation of what the Hebrew prophet must have passed through.

"It was the tempest of doubt, which I believe all who devote their lives to a great enterprise, yet have not dried and withered up their soul—like Robespierre—beneath some barren intellectual formula, but have retained a loving heart, are doomed, once at least, to battle through. My heart was overflowing with and greedy of affection, as fresh and eager to unfold to joy as in the days when sustained by my mother's smile, as full of fervid hope for others, at least, if not for myself. But during these fatal months there darkened round me such a hurricane of sorrow, disillusion, and deception as to bring before my eyes, in all its ghastly nakedness, a foreshadowing of the old age of my soul, solitary in a desert world, wherein no comfort in the struggle was vouchsafed to me. It was not only the overthrow for an indefinite period of every Italian hope, . . . it was the falling to pieces of that moral edifice of faith and love from which alone I had derived strength for the combat; the scepticism I saw arising round me on every side; the failure of faith in those who had solemnly bound themselves to pursue unshaken the path we had known at the outset to be choked with sorrows; the distrust I detected in those most dear to me, as to the motives and intentions which sustained and urged me onward in the evidently unequal struggle. . . . When I felt that I was indeed alone in the world, I drew back in terror at the void before me. There, in that moral desert, doubt came upon me. Perhaps I was wrong, and the world right? Perhaps my idea was indeed a dream? . . . One morning I awoke to find my mind tranquil and my spirit calmed, as one who has passed through a great danger. The first thought that passed across my spirit was, *Your sufferings are the temptations of egotism, and*

arise from a misconception of life. . . . I perceived that although every instinct of my heart rebelled against that fatal and ignoble definition of life which makes it to be a *search after happiness*, yet I had not completely freed myself from the dominating influence exercised by it upon the age. . . . I had been unable to realise the true ideal of love—love without earthly hope. . . . Life is a mission, duty therefore its highest law. From the idea of God I descended to faith in a mission and its logical consequence—duty the supreme rule of life: and having reached that faith, I swore to myself that nothing in this world should again make me doubt or forsake it. It was, as Dante says, passing through martyrdom to peace—'a forced and desperate peace,' I do not deny, for I fraternised with sorrow, and wrapped myself in it as in a mantle; but yet it was peace, for I learned to suffer without rebellion, and to live calmly and in harmony with my own spirit. I reverently bless God the Father for what consolations of affection—I can conceive of no other—He has vouchsafed to me in my later years; and in them I gather strength to struggle with the occasional return of weariness of existence. But even were these consolations denied me, I believe I should still be what I am. Whether the sun shine with the serene splendour of an Italian noon, or the leaden, corpse-like hue of the northern mist be above us, I cannot see that it changes our duty. God dwells above the earthly heaven, and the holy stars of faith and the future still shine within our souls, even though their light consume itself unreflected as the sepulchral lamp."

Such sentences are the best commentary we can offer on our text. The cases of the Hebrew and Italian prophets are wonderfully alike. We who have read Isaiah's fifth chapter know how his heart also was "overflowing with and greedy of affection," and in the second and third chapters we have seen "the hurricane of sorrow, disillusion, and deception darken round him." "The falling to pieces of the moral edifice of faith and love," "scepticism rising on every side," "failure of faith in those who had solemnly bound themselves," "distrust detected in those most dear to me"—and all felt by the prophet as the effect of the sacred movement God had inspired him to begin:—how exact a counterpart it is to the cumulative process of brutalising which Isaiah heard God lay upon him, with the imperative "Make the heart of this people fat!" In such a morally blind, deaf, and dead-hearted world Isaiah's faith was indeed "to consume itself unreflected like the sepulchral lamp." The glimpse into his heart given us by Mazzini enables us to realise with what terror Isaiah faced such a void. "O Lord, how long?" This, too, breathes the air of "a forced and desperate peace," the spirit of one who, having realised life as a mission, has made the much more rare recognition that the logical consequence is neither the promise of success nor the assurance of sympathy, but simply the acceptance of duty, with whatever results and under whatever skies it pleases God to bring over him.

"Until cities fall into ruin without an inhabitant,
And houses without a man,
And the land be left desolately waste,
And Jehovah have removed man far away,
And great be the desert in the midst of the land;
And still if there be a tenth in it,
Even it shall be again for consuming.
Like the terebinth, and like the oak,
Whose stock when they are felled remaineth in them,
The holy seed shall be its stock."

The meaning of these words is too plain to require exposition, but we can hardly over-emphasise them. This is to be Isaiah's one text throughout his career. "Judgment shall pass through; a remnant shall remain." All the policies of his day, the movement of the world's forces, the

devastation of the holy land, the first captivities of the holy people, the reiterated defeats and disappointments of the next fifty years—all shall be clear and tolerable to Isaiah as the fulfilling of the sentence to which he listened in such "forced and desperate peace" on the day of his consecration. He has had the worst branded into him; henceforth no man nor thing may trouble him. He has seen the worst, and knows there is a beginning beyond. So when the wickedness of Judah and the violence of Assyria alike seem most unrestrained—Assyria most bent on destroying Judah, and Judah least worthy to live—Isaiah will yet cling to this, that a remnant must remain. All his prophecies will be variations of this text; it is the key to his apparent paradoxes. He will proclaim the Assyrians to be God's instrument, yet devote them to destruction. He will hail their advance on Judah, and yet as exultingly mark its limit, because of the determination in which he asked the question, "O Lord, how long?" and the clearness with which he understood the *until*, that came in answer to it. Every prediction he makes, every turn he seeks to give to the practical politics of Judah, are simply due to his grasp of these two facts—a withering and repeated devastation, in the end a bare survival. He has, indeed, prophecies which travel farther; occasionally he is permitted to indulge in visions of a new dispensation. Like Moses, he climbs his Pisgah, but he is like Moses also in this, that his lifetime is exhausted with the attainment of the margin of a long period of judgment and struggle, and then he passes from our sight, and no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day. As abruptly as this vision closes with the announcement of *the remnant*, so abruptly does Isaiah disappear on the fulfilment of the announcement—some forty years subsequent to this vision—in the sudden rescue of the holy seed from the grasp of Sennacherib.

We have now finished the first period of Isaiah's career. Let us catalogue what are his leading doctrines up to this point. High above a very sinful people, and beyond all their conceptions of Him, Jehovah, the national God, rises holy, exalted in righteousness. From such a God to such a people it can only be judgment and affliction that pass; and these shall not be averted by the fact that He is the national God, and they His worshippers. Of this affliction the Assyrians gathering far off upon the horizon are evidently to be the instruments. The affliction shall be very sweeping; again and again shall it come; but the Lord will finally save a remnant of His people. Three elements compose this preaching—a very keen and practical conscience of sin; an overpowering vision of God, in whose immediate intimacy the prophet believes himself to be; and a very sharp perception of the politics of the day.

One question rises. In this part of Isaiah's ministry there is no trace of that Figure whom we chiefly identify with his preaching, the Messiah. Let us have patience; it is not time for Him; but the following is His connection with the prophet's present doctrines.

Isaiah's great result at present is the certainty of a remnant. That remnant will require two things—they will require a rallying-point, and they will require a leader. Henceforth Isaiah's prophesying will be bent to one or other of

these. The two grand purposes of his word and work will be, for the sake of the remnant, the inviolateness of Zion, and the coming of the Messiah. The former he has, indeed, already intimated (chap. iv.); the latter is now to share with it his hope and eloquence.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORLD IN ISAIAH'S DAY AND ISRAEL'S GOD.

735-730 B. C.

UP to this point we have been acquainted with Isaiah as a prophet of general principles, preaching to his countrymen the elements of righteousness and judgment, and tracing the main lines of fate along which their evil conduct was rapidly forcing them. We are now to observe him applying these principles to the executive politics of the time, and following Judah's conduct to the issues he had predicted for it in the world outside herself. Hitherto he has been concerned with the inner morals of Jewish society; he is now to engage himself with the effect of these on the fortunes of the Jewish State. In his seventh chapter Isaiah begins that career of practical statesmanship, which not only made him "the greatest political power in Israel since David," but placed him, far above his importance to his own people, upon a position of influence over all ages. To this eminence Isaiah was raised, as we shall see, by two things. First, there was the occasion of his times, for he lived at a juncture at which the vision of the *World*, as distinguished from the *Nation*, opened to his people's eyes. Second, he had the faith which enabled him to realise the government of the World by the One God, whom he has already beheld exalted and sovereign within the Nation. In the Nation we have seen Isaiah led to emphasise very absolutely the righteousness of God; applying this to the whole World, he is now to speak as the prophet of what we call Providence. He has seen Jehovah ruling in righteousness in Judah; he is now to take possession of the nations of the World in Jehovah's name. But we mistake Isaiah if we think it is any abstract doctrine of providence which he is about to inculcate. For him God's providence has in the meantime but one end: the preservation of a remnant of the holy people. Afterwards we shall find him expecting besides, the conversion of the whole World to faith in Israel's God.

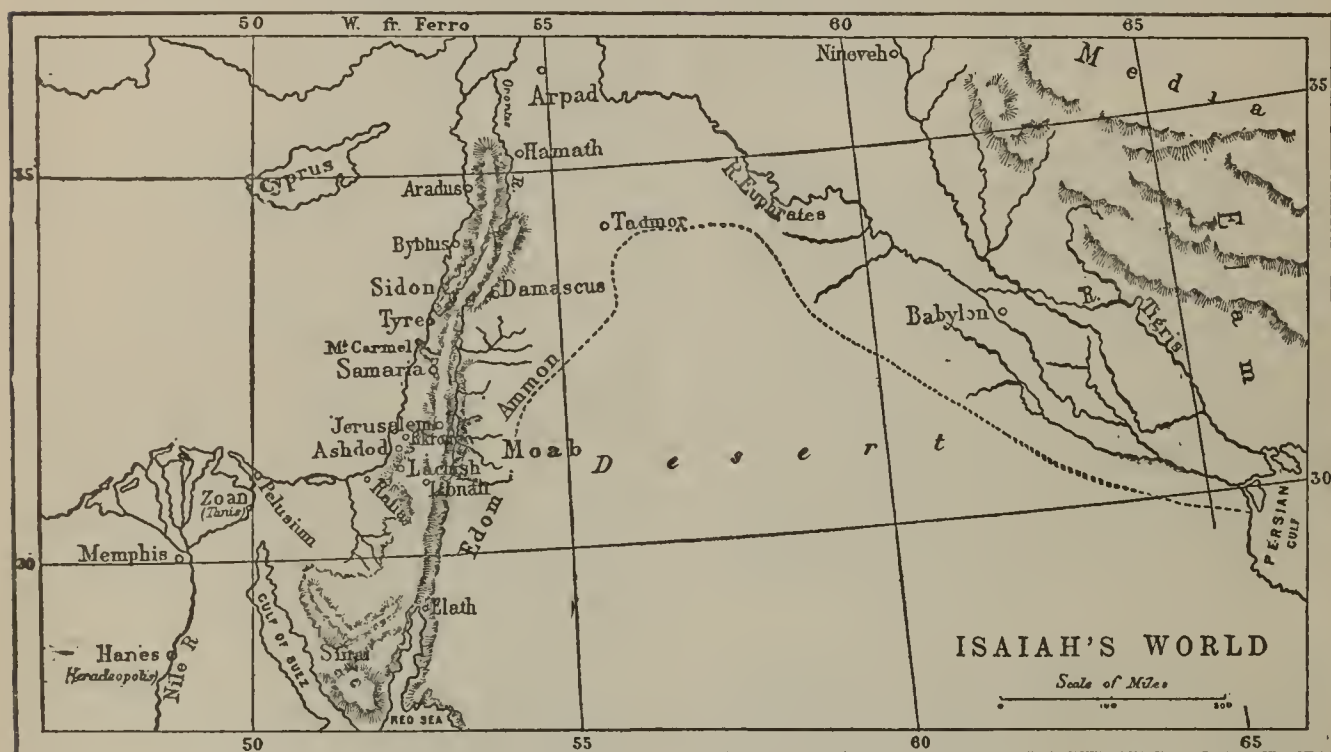
The World in Isaiah's day was practically Western Asia. History had not long dawned upon Europe; over Western Asia it was still noon. Draw a line from the Caspian to the mouth of the Persian Gulf; between that line and another crossing the Levant to the west of Cyprus, and continuing along the Libyan border of Egypt, lay the highest forms of religion and civilisation which our race had by that period achieved. This was the World on which Isaiah looked out from Jerusalem, the furthest borders of which he has described in his prophecies, and in the political history of which he illustrated his great principles. How was it composed?

There were, first of all, at either end of it,

northeast and southwest, the two great empires of Assyria and Egypt, in many respects wonderful counterparts of each other. No one will understand the history of Palestine who has not grasped its geographical position relative to these similar empires. Syria, shut up between the Mediterranean sea and the Arabian desert, has its outlets north and south into two great river-plains, each of them ending in a delta. Territories of that kind exert a double force on the world with which they are connected, now drawing across their boundaries the hungry races of neighbouring highlands and deserts, and again sending them forth, compact and resistless armies. This double action summarises the histories of both Egypt and Assyria from the earliest times to the period which we are now treating, and was the cause of the

Assyrian conquest. In Egypt, on the other hand, power was more equally balanced between the hardier people up the Nile and the wealthier people down the Nile—between the Ethiopians and the Egyptians proper. It was the repeated and undecisive contests between these two during the whole of Isaiah's day, which kept Egypt from being an effective force in the politics of Western Asia. In Isaiah's day no Egyptian army advanced more than a few leagues beyond its own frontier.

Next in this world of Western Asia come the Phœnicians. We may say that they connected Egypt and Assyria, for although Phœnicia proper meant only the hundred and fifty miles of coast between Carmel and the bay of Antioch, the Phœnicians had large colonies on the delta of the Nile and trading posts upon the Euphrates.



constant circulation, by which, as the Bible bears witness, the life of Syria was stirred from the Tower of Babel downwards. Mesopotamia and the Nile valley drew races as beggars to their rich pasture grounds, only to send them forth in subsequent centuries as conquerors. The century of Isaiah fell in a period of forward movement. Assyria and Egypt were afraid to leave each other in peace; and the wealth of Phœnicia, grown large enough to excite their cupidity, lay between them. In each of these empires, however, there was something to hamper this aggressive impulse. Neither Assyria nor Egypt was a homogeneous State. The valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile were each of them the home of two nations. Beside Assyria lay Babylonia, once Assyria's mistress, and now of all the Assyrian provinces by far the hardest to hold in subjection, although it lay the nearest to home. In Isaiah's time, when an Assyrian monarch is unable to come into Palestine, Babylon is generally the reason; and it is by intriguing with Babylon that a king of Judah attempts to keep Assyria away from his own neighbourhood. But Babylon only delayed the

They were gathered into independent but more or less confederate cities, the chief of them Tyre and Sidon; which, while they attempted the offensive only in trade, were by their wealth and maritime advantages capable of offering at once a stronger attraction and a more stubborn resistance to the Assyrian arms than any other power of the time. Between Phœnicia proper and the mouths of the Nile, the coast was held by groups of Philistine cities, who nearness to Egypt rather than their own strength was the source of a frequent audacity against Assyria, and the reason why they appear in the history of this period oftener than any other State as the object of Assyrian campaigns.

Behind Phœnicia and the Philistines lay a number of inland territories; the sister-States of Judah and Northern Israel, with their cousins Edom, Moab, and Aram or Syria. Of which Judah and Israel together were about the size of Wales; Edom a mountain range the size and shape of Cornwall; Moab, on its north, a broken tableland, about a Devonshire; and Aram, or Syria, a territory round Damascus, of uncertain size, but considerable enough to have resisted

Assyria for a hundred and twenty years. Beyond Aram, again, to the north, lay the smaller State of Hamath, in the mouth of the pass between the Lebanons, with nothing from it to the Euphrates. And then, hovering upon the east of these settled States, were a variety of more or less Nomadic Tribes, whose refuges were the vast deserts of which so large a part of Western Asia consists.

Here was a world, with some of its constituents wedged pretty firmly by mutual pressure, but in the main broken and restless—a political surface that was always changing. The whole was subject to the movements of the two empires at its extremes. One of them could not move without sending a thrill through to the borders of the other. The approximate distances were these:—from Egypt's border to Jerusalem, about one hundred miles; from Jerusalem to Samaria, forty-five; from Samaria to Damascus, one hundred and fifteen; from Damascus to Hamath, one hundred and thirty; and from Hamath to the Euphrates, one hundred; in all from the border of Egypt to the border of Assyria four hundred and ninety English statute miles. The main line of war and traffic, coming up from Egypt, kept the coast to the plain of Esdraelon, which it crossed towards Damascus, travelling by the north of the sea of Galilee, *the way of the sea*. Northern Israel was bound to fall an early prey to armies, whose easiest path thus traversed her richest provinces. Judah, on the other hand, occupied a position so elevated and apart, that it was likely to be the last that either Assyria or Egypt would achieve in their subjugation of the States between them.

Thus, then, Western Asia spread itself out in Isaiah's day. Let us take one more rapid glance across it. Assyria to the north, powerful and on the offensive, but hampered by Babylon; Egypt on the south, weakened and in reserve; all the cities and States between turning their faces desperately northwards, but each with an ear bent back for the promises of the laggard southern power, and occasionally supported by its subsidies; Hamath, their advanced guard at the mouth of the pass between the Lebanons, looking out towards the Euphrates; Tyre and Sidon attractive to the Assyrian king, whose policy is ultimately commercial, by their wealth, both they and the Philistine cities obstructing his path by the coast to his great rival of Egypt; Israel bulwarked against Assyria by Hamath and Damascus, but in danger, as soon as they fall, of seeing her richest provinces overrun; Judah unlikely in the general restlessness to retain her hold upon Edom, but within her own borders tolerably secure, neither lying in the Assyrian's path to Egypt, nor wealthy enough to attract him out of it; safe, therefore, in the neutrality which Isaiah ceaselessly urges her to preserve, and in danger of suction into the whirlpool of the approach of the two empires only through the foolish desire of her rulers to secure an utterly unnecessary alliance with the one or the other of them.

For a hundred and twenty years before the advent of Isaiah, the annals of the Assyrian kings record periodical campaigns against the cities of "the land of the west," but these isolated incursions were followed by no permanent results. In 745, however, five years before King Uzziah died, a soldier ascended the throne of Assyria, under the title of Tiglath-pileser II.,*

who was determined to achieve the conquest of the whole world and its organisation as his empire. Where his armies came, it was not simply to chastise or demand tribute, but to annex countries, carry away their populations, and exploit their resources. It was no longer kings who were threatened; peoples found themselves in danger of extinction. This terrible purpose of the Assyrian was pursued with vast means and the utmost ferocity. He has been called the Roman of the East, and up to a certain degree we may imagine his policy by remembering all that is familiar to us of its execution by Rome: its relentlessness, impetus, and mysterious action from one centre; the discipline, the speed, the strange appearance, of his armies. But there was an Oriental savagery about Assyria, from which Rome was free. The Assyrian kings moved in the power of their brutish and stormy gods—gods that were in the shape of bulls and had the wings as of the tempest. The annals of these kings, in which they describe their campaigns, are full of talk about trampling down their enemies; about showering tempests of clubs upon them, and raining a deluge of arrows; about overwhelming them, and sweeping them off the face of the land, and strewing them like chaff on the sea; about chariots with scythes, and wheels clogged with blood; about great baskets stuffed with the salted heads of their foes. It is a mixture of the Roman and Red Indian.

Picture the effect of the onward movement of such a force upon the imaginations and policies of those little States that clustered round Judah and Israel. Settling their own immemorial feuds, they sought alliance with one another against this common foe. Tribes, that for centuries had stained their borders with one another's blood, came together in unions, the only reason for which was that their common fear had grown stronger than their mutual hate. Now and then a king would be found unwilling to enter such an alliance or eager to withdraw from it, in the hope of securing by his exceptional conduct the favour of the Assyrian, whom he sought further to ingratiate by voluntary tribute. The shifting attitudes of the petty kings towards Assyria bewilder the reader of the Assyrian annals. The foes of one year are the tributaries of the next; the State, that has called for help this campaign, appears as the rebel of that. In 742, Uzziah of Judah is cursed by Tiglath-pileser as an arch-enemy; Samaria and Damascus are recorded as faithful tributaries. Seven years later Ahaz of Judah offers tribute to the Assyrian king, and Damascus and Samaria are invaded by the Assyrian armies. What a world it was, and what politics! A world of petty clans, with no idea of a common humanity, and with no motive for union except fear; politics without a noble thought or long purpose in them, the politics of peoples at bay—the last flicker of dying nationalities,—“stumps of smoking firebrands,” as Isaiah described two of them.

When we turn to the little we know of the religions of these tribes, we find nothing to arrest their restlessness or broaden their thoughts. These nations had their religions, and called on their gods, but their gods were made in their own image, their religion was the reflex of their life. Each of them employed, rather than wor-

* The Pul of 2 Kings xv. 19 and the Tiglath-pileser of 2 Kings xvi. are the same.

shipped, its deity. No nation believed in its god except as one among many, with his sovereignty limited to its own territory, and his ability to help it conditioned by the power of the other gods, against whose peoples he was fighting. There was no belief in "Providence," no idea of unity or of progress in history, no place in these religions for the great world-force that was advancing upon their peoples.

From this condemnation we cannot except the people of Jehovah. It is undeniable that the mass of them occupied at this time pretty much the same low religious level as their neighbours. We have already seen (chap. i.) their mean estimate of what God required from themselves; with that corresponded their view of His position towards the world. To the majority of the Israelites their God was but one out of many, with His own battles to fight and have fought for Him, a Patron sometimes to be ashamed of, and by no means a Saviour in whom to place an absolute trust. When Ahaz is beaten by Syria, he says: "Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me" (2 Chron. xxviii. 23). Religion to Ahaz was only another kind of diplomacy. He was not a fanatic, but a diplomat, who made his son to pass through the fire to Moloch, and burnt incense in the high places and on the hills, and under every green tree. He was more a political than a religious eclectic, who brought back the pattern of the Damascus altar to Jerusalem. The Temple, in which Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, became under Ahaz, and by the help of the priesthood, the shelter of various idols; in every corner of Jerusalem altars were erected to other gods. This religious hospitality was the outcome neither of imagination nor of liberal thought; it was prompted only by political fear. Ahaz has been mistaken in the same way as Charles I. was—for a bigot, and one who subjected the welfare of his kingdom to a superstitious regard for religion. But beneath the cloak of religious scrupulousness and false reverence,* there was in Ahaz the same selfish fear for the safety of his crown and his dynasty, as those who best knew the English monarch tell us was the real cause of his ceaseless intrigue and stupid obstinacy.

Now that we have surveyed this world, its politics and its religion, we can estimate the strength and originality of the Hebrew prophets. Where others saw the conflicts of nations, aided by deities as doubtfully matched as themselves, they perceived all things working together by the will of one supreme God and serving His ends of righteousness. It would be wrong to say, that before the eighth century the Hebrew conception of God had been simply that of a national deity, for this would be to ignore the remarkable emphasis placed by the Hebrews from very early times upon Jehovah's righteousness. But till the eighth century the horizon of the Hebrew mind had been the border of their territory; the historical theatre on which it saw God working was the national life. Now, however, the Hebrews were drawn into the world; they felt movements of which their own history was but an eddy; they saw the advance of forces against which their own armies, though inspired by Jehovah, had no chance of material success. The perspective was entirely changed; their na-

* Isa. vii. 12.

tive land took to most of them the aspect of a petty and worthless province, their God the rank of a mere provincial deity; they refused the waters of Shiloah, that go softly, and rejoiced in the glory of the king of Assyria, the king of the great River and the hosts that moved with the strength of its floods. It was at this moment that the prophets of Israel performed their supreme religious service. While Ahaz and the mass of the people illustrated the impotence of the popular religion, by admitting to an equal place in the national temple the gods of their victorious foes, the prophets boldly took possession of the whole world in the name of Jehovah of hosts, and exalted Him to the throne of the supreme Providence. Now they could do this only by emphasising and developing the element of righteousness in the old conception of Him. This attribute of Jehovah took absolute possession of the prophets; and in the strength of its inspiration they were enabled, at a time when it would have been the sheerest folly to promise Israel victory against a foe like Assyria, to asseverate that even that supreme world-power was in the hand of Jehovah, and that He must be trusted to lead up all the movements of which the Assyrians were the main force to the ends He had so plainly revealed to His chosen Israel. Even before Isaiah's time such principles had been proclaimed by Amos and Hosea, but it was Isaiah who both gave to them their loftiest expression, and applied them with the utmost detail and persistence to the practical politics of Judah. We have seen him, in the preliminary stages of his ministry under Uzziah and Jotham, reaching most exalted convictions of the righteousness of Jehovah, as contrasted with the people's view of their God's "nationalism." But we are now to follow him boldly applying this faith—won within the life of Judah, won, as he tells us, by the personal inspiration of Judah's God—to the problems and movements of the whole world as they bear upon Israel's fate. The God, who is supreme in Judah through righteousness, cannot but be supreme everywhere else, for there is nothing in the world higher than righteousness. Isaiah's faith in a Divine Providence is a close corollary to his faith in Jehovah's righteousness; and of one part of that Providence he had already received conviction—"A remnant shall remain." Ahaz may crowd Jerusalem with foreign altars and idols, so as to be able to say: "We have with us, on our side, Moloch and Chemosh and Rimmon and the gods of Damascus and Assyria." Isaiah, in the face of this folly, lifts up his simple gospel: "Immanu-El. We have with us, in our own Jehovah of hosts, El, the one supreme God, Ruler of heaven and earth."

CHAPTER VI.

KING AND MESSIAH; PEOPLE AND CHURCH.

ISAIAH vii., viii., ix. 1-8.

735-732 B. C.

THIS section of the book of Isaiah (vii.-ix. 7) consists of a number of separate prophecies uttered during a period of at least three years: 735-732 B. C. By 735 Ahaz had ascended the

throne; Tiglath-pileser had been occupied in the far east for two years. Taking advantage of the weakness of the former and the distance of the later, Rezin, king of Damascus, and Pekah, king of Samaria, planned an invasion of Judah. It was a venture they would not have dared had Uzziah been alive. While Rezin marched down the east of the Jordan and overturned the Jewish supremacy in Edom, Pekah threw himself into Judah, defeated the armies of Ahaz in one great battle, and besieged Jerusalem, with the object of deposing Ahaz and setting a Syrian, Ben-Tabeel, in his stead. Simultaneously the Philistines attacked Judah from the southwest. The motive of the confederates was in all probability anger with Ahaz for refusing to enter with them into a Pan-Syrian alliance against Assyria. In his distress Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser, and the Assyrian swiftly responded. In 734—it must have been less than a year since Ahaz was attacked—the hosts of the north had overrun Samaria and swept as far south as the cities of the Philistines. Then, withdrawing his troops again, Tiglath-pileser left Hoshea as his vassal on Pekah's throne, and sending the population of Israel east of the Jordan into distant captivity, completed a two years' siege of Damascus (734-732) by its capture. At Damascus Ahaz met the conqueror, and having paid him tribute, took out a further policy of insurance in the altar-pattern, which he brought back with him to Jerusalem. Such were the three years, whose rapid changes unfolded themselves in parallel with these prophecies of Isaiah. The details are not given by the prophet, but we must keep in touch with them while we listen to him. Especially must we remember their central point, *the decision of Ahaz to call in the help of Assyria*, a decision which affected the whole course of politics for the next thirty years. Some of the oracles of this section were plainly delivered by Isaiah before that event, and simply seek to inspire Ahaz with a courage which should feel Assyrian help to be needless; others, again, imply that Ahaz has already called in the Assyrian: they taunt him with hankering after foreign strength, and depict the woes which the Assyrian will bring upon the land; while others (for example, the passage ix. 1-7) mean that the Assyrian has already come, and that the Galilean provinces of Israel have been depopulated, and promise a Deliverer. If we do not keep in mind the decision of Ahaz, we shall not understand these seemingly contradictory utterances, which it thoroughly explains. Let us now begin at the beginning of chapter vii. It opens with a bare statement, by way of title, of the invasion of Judah and the futile result; and then proceeds to tell us how Isaiah acted from the first rumour of the confederacy onward.

I. THE KING (chap. vii.).

"And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it." This is a summary of the whole adventure and issue of the war, given by way of introduction. The narrative proper begins in verse 2, with the effect of the first news of the league upon Ahaz and his people. Their hearts

were moved, like the trees of the forest before the wind. The league was aimed so evidently against the two things most essential to the national existence and the honour of Jehovah; the dynasty of David, namely, and the inviolability of Jerusalem. Judah had frequently before suffered the loss of her territory; never till now were the throne and city of David in actual peril. But that, which bent both king and people by its novel terror, was the test Isaiah expected for the prophecies he had already uttered. Taking with him, as a summary of them, his boy with the name Shear-Jashub—"A-remnant-shall-return"—Isaiah faced Ahaz and his court in the midst of their preparation for the siege. They were examining—but more in panic than in prudence—the water supply of the city, when Isaiah delivered to them a message from the Lord, which may be paraphrased as follows: "Take heed and be quiet," keep your eyes open and your heart still; "fear not, neither be faint-hearted, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Remaliah's son." They have no power to set you on fire. They are "but stumps of expiring firebrands," almost burnt out. While you wisely look after your water supply, do so in hope. This purpose of deposing you is vain. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." Of whom are you afraid? Look those foes of yours in the face. "The head of Syria is Damascus, and Damascus' head is Rezin:" is he worth fearing? "The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and Samaria's head is Remaliah's son:" is he worth fearing? Within a few years they will certainly be destroyed. But whatever estimate you make of your foes, whatever their future may be, for yourself have faith in God; for you that is the essential thing. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."*

This paraphrase seeks to bring out the meaning of a passage confessedly obscure. It seems as if we had only bits of Isaiah's speech to Ahaz and must supply the gaps. No one need hesitate, however, to recognise the conspicuous personal qualities—the combination of political sagacity with religious fear, of common-sense and courage rooted in faith. In a word, this is what Isaiah will say to the king, clever in his alliances, religious and secular, and busy about his material defences: "Take unto you the shield of faith. You have lost your head among all these things. Hold it up like a man behind that shield; take a rational view of affairs. Rate your enemies at their proper value. But for this you must believe in God. Faith in Him is the essential condition of a calm mind and a rational appreciation of affairs."

It is, no doubt, difficult for us to realise that the truth which Isaiah thus enforced* on King Ahaz—the government of the world and human history by one supreme God—was ever a truth of which the race stood in ignorance. A generation like ours cannot be expected to put its mind in the attitude of those of Isaiah's contemporaries who believed in the real existence of many gods with limited sovereignties. To us, who are full of the instincts of Divine Providence and of the presence in history of law and progress, it is extremely hard even to admit the fact—far less fully to realise what it means—that our

* There is a play upon words here, which may be reproduced in English by the help of a North-England term: If ye have not *faith*, ye cannot have *stait*.

race had ever to receive these truths as fresh additions to their stock of intellectual ideas. Yet, without prejudice to the claims of earlier prophets, this may be confidently affirmed: that Isaiah where we now meet him stood on one side believing in one supreme God, Lord of heaven and earth, and his generation stood on the other side, believing that there were many gods. Isaiah, however, does not pose as the discoverer of the truth he preaches; he does not present it as a new revelation, nor put it in a formula. He takes it for granted, and proceeds to bring its moral influence to bear. He will infect men with his own utter conviction of it, in order that he may strengthen their character and guide them by paths of safety. His speech to Ahaz is an exhibition of the moral and rational effects of believing in Providence. Ahaz is a sample of the *character* polytheism produced; the state of mind and heart to which Isaiah exhorts him is that induced by belief in one righteous and almighty God. We can make the contrast clear to ourselves by a very definite figure.

The difference, which is made to the character and habits of men if the country they live in has a powerful government or not, is well-known. If there be no such central authority, it is a case of every man's hand against his neighbour. Men walk armed to the teeth. A constant attitude of fear and suspicion warps the whole nature. The passions are excited and magnified; the intelligence and judgment are dwarfed. Just the same after its kind is life to the man or tribe, who believe, that the world in which they dwell and the life they share with others have no central authority. They walk armed with prejudices, superstitions, and selfishnesses. They create, like Ahaz, their own providences, and still, like him, feel insecure. Everything is exaggerated by them; in each evil there lurks to their imagination unlimited hostility. They are without breadth of view or length of patience. But let men believe that life has a central authority, that God is supreme, and they will fling their prejudices and superstitions to the winds, now no more needed than the antiquated fortresses and weapons by which our forefathers, in days when the government was weak, were forced to defend their private interests. When we know that God reigns, how quiet and free it makes us! When things and men are part of His scheme and working out His ends, when we understand that they are not monsters but ministers, how reasonably we can look at them! Were we afraid of Syria and Ephraim? Why, the head of Syria is this fellow Rezin, the head of Ephraim this son of Remaliah! They cannot last long; God's engine stands behind to smite them. By the reasonable government of God, let us be reasonable! Let us take heed and be quiet. Have faith in God, and to faith will come her proper consequent of common sense.

For the higher a man looks, the farther he sees: to us that is the practical lesson of these first nine verses of the seventh chapter. The very gesture of faith bestows upon the mind a breadth of view. The man, who lifts his face to God in heaven, is he whose eyes sweep simultaneously the farthest prospect of earth, and bring to him a sense of the proportion of things. Ahaz, facing his nearest enemies, does not see over their heads, and in his consternation at their appearance prepares to embark upon any policy that suggests itself, even though it be so rash

as the summoning of the Assyrian. Isaiah, on the other hand, with his vision fixed on God as the Governor of the world, is enabled to overlook the dust that darkens Judah's frontier, to see behind it the inevitable advance of the Assyrians, and to be assured that, whether Ahaz calls them to his quarrel or no, they will very soon of their own motion overwhelm both of his enemies. From these "two smoking firebrands" there is then no real danger. But from the Assyrian, if once Judah entangle herself in his toils, there is the most extreme danger. Isaiah's advice is therefore not mere religious quietism; it is prudent policy. It is the best political advice that could have been offered at that crisis, as we have already been able to gather from a survey of the geographical and political dispositions of Western Asia,* apart altogether from religious considerations. But to Isaiah the calmness requisite for this sagacity sprang from his faith. Mr. Bagelot might have appealed to Isaiah's whole policy in illustration of what he has so well described as the military and political benefits of religion. Monotheism is of advantage to men not only by reason of "the high concentration of steady feeling" which it produces, but also for the mental calmness and sagacity which surely spring from a pure and vivid conviction that the Lord reigneth.†

One other thing it is well we should emphasise, before we pass from Isaiah's speech to Ahaz. Nothing can be plainer than that Isaiah, though advocating so absolutely a quiescent belief in God, *is no fatalist*. Now other prophets there have been, insisting just as absolutely as Isaiah upon resignation to God the supreme, and the evident practical effect of their doctrine of the Divine sovereignty has been to make their followers, not shrewd political observers, but blind and apathetic fatalists. The difference between them and Isaiah has lain in the kind of character, which they and he have respectively attributed to the Deity, before exalting Him to the throne of absolute power and resigning themselves to His will. Isaiah, though as disciplined a believer in God's sovereignty and man's duty of obedience as any prophet that ever preached these doctrines, was preserved from the fatalism to which they so often lead by the conviction he had previously received of God's righteousness. Fatalism means resignation to fate, and fate means an omnipotence either without character, or (which is the same thing) of whose character we are ignorant. Fate is God *minus* character, and fatalism is the characterless condition to which belief in such a God reduces man. History presents it to our view amid the most diverse surroundings. The Greek mind, so free

* Page 641.

† "Physics and Politics" (International Scientific Series), pp. 75 ff. One of the finest modern illustrations of the connection between faith and common sense is found in the "Letters of General Gordon to His Sister." Gordon's coolness in face of the slave trade, the just survey he makes of it, and the sensible advice which he gives about meeting it stand well in contrast to the haste and rash proposals of philanthropists at home, and are evidently due to his conviction that the slave trade, like everything else in the world, is in the hands of God, and so may be calmly studied and wisely check-mated. Gordon's letters make very clear how much of his shrewdness in dealing with men was due to the same source. It is instructive to observe throughout how his complete resignation to the will of God and his perfect obedience delivered him from prejudices and partialities, from distractions and desires that make sober judgment impossible in other men.

and sunny, was bewildered and benumbed by belief in an inscrutable Nemesis. In the East how frequently is a temper of apathy or despair bred in men, to whom God is nothing but a despot! Even within Christianity we have had fanatics, so inordinately possessed with belief in God's sovereignty of election, to the exclusion of all other Divine truths, as to profess themselves, with impious audacity, willing to be damned for His glory. Such instances are enough to prove to us the extreme danger of making the sovereignty of God the *first* article of our creed. It is not safe for men to exalt a deity to the throne of the supreme providence, till they are certified of his character. The vision of mere power intoxicates and brutalises, no less when it is hallowed by the name of religion, than when, as in modern materialism, it is blindly interpreted as physical force. Only the people who have first learned to know their Deity intimately in the private matters of life, where heart touches heart, and the delicate arguments of conscience are not overborne by the presence of vast natural forces or the intricate movements of the world's history, can be trusted afterwards to enter these larger theatres of religion, without risk of losing their faith, their sensibility, or their conscience.

The whole course of revelation has been bent upon this: to render men familiarly and experimentally acquainted with the character of God, before laying upon them the duty of homage to His creative power or submission to His will. In the Old Testament God is the Friend, the Guide, the Redeemer of men, or ever He is their Monarch and Lawgiver. The Divine name which the Hebrew sees "excellent through all the earth" is the name that he has learned to know at home as "Jehovah, our Lord" (Ps. viii.). Jehovah trains His people to trust His personal truth and lovingkindness within their own courts, before He tests their allegiance and discipline upon the high places of the world. And when, amid the strange terrors of these and the novel magnitudes with which Israel, facing the world, had to reckon, the people lost their presence of mind, His elegy over them was, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Even when their temple is full and their sacrifices of homage to His power most frequent, it is still their want of moral acquaintance with Himself of which He complains: "Israel doth not know; My people doth not consider." What else was the tragedy in which Jewish history closed, than just the failure to perceive this lesson: that to have and to communicate the knowledge of the Almighty's character is of infinitely more value than the attempt to vindicate in any outward fashion Jehovah's supremacy over the world? This latter, this forlorn, hope was what Israel exhausted the evening of their day in attempting. The former—to communicate to the lives and philosophies of mankind a knowledge of the Divine heart and will, gained throughout a history of unique grace and miracle—was the destiny which they resigned to the followers of the crucified Messiah.

For under the New Testament this also is the method of revelation. What our King desires before He ascends the throne of the world is that the world should know Him; and so He comes down among us, to be heard, and seen, and handled of us, that our hearts may learn His heart and know His love, unbewildered by His

majesty. And for our part, when we ascribe to our King the glory and the dominion, it is as unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His blood. For the chief thing for individuals, as for nations, is not to believe that God reigneth so much as to know what kind of God He is who reigneth.

But Ahaz would not be persuaded. He had a policy of his own, and was determined to pursue it. He insisted on appealing to Assyria. Before he did so, Isaiah made one more attempt on his obduracy. With a vehemence, which reveals how critical he felt the king's decision to be, the prophet returned as if this time the very voice of Jehovah. "And Jehovah spake to Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God; ask it either in Sheol below or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."

Isaiah's offer of a sign was one which the prophets of Israel used to make when some crisis demanded the immediate acceptance of their word by men, and men were more than usually hard to convince—a miracle such as the thunder that Samuel called out of a clear sky to impress Israel with God's opinion of their folly in asking for a king;* or as the rending of the altar which the man of God brought to pass to convict the sullen Jeroboam;† or as the regress of the shadow on the sun-dial, which Isaiah himself gave in assurance of recovery to the sick Hezekiah.‡ Such signs are offered only to weak or prejudiced persons. The most real faith, as Isaiah himself tells us, is unforced, the purest natures those which need no signs and wonders. But there are certain crises at which faith must be immediately forced, and Ahaz stood now at such a crisis; and there are certain characters who, unable to read a writ from the court of conscience and reason, must be served with one from a court—even though it be inferior—whose language they understand; and Ahaz was such a character. Isaiah knew his man, and prepared a pretty dilemma for him. By offering him whatever sign he chose to ask, Isaiah knew that the king would be committed before his own honour and the public conscience to refrain from calling in the Assyrians, and so Judah would be saved; or if the king refused the sign, the refusal would unmask him. Ahaz refused, and at once Isaiah denounced him and all his house. They were mere shufflers, playing fast and loose with God as well as men. "Hear ye now, O house of David. Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye must weary my God also?" You have evaded God; therefore God Himself will take you in hand: "the Lord Himself shall give you a sign."

In order to follow intelligently the rest of Isaiah's address, we must clearly understand how the sign which he now promises differs in nature from the sign he had implored Ahaz to select, of whatever sort he may have expected that selection to be. The king's determination to call in Assyria has come between. Therefore, while the sign Isaiah first offered upon the spot was intended for an immediate pledge that God would establish Ahaz, if only he did not appeal to the foreigner, the sign Isaiah now offers shall come as a future proof of how criminal and disastrous the appeal to the foreigner has been.

* 1 Sam. xii. 17.

† 1 Kings xiii. 3.

‡ Chap. xxxviii.

The first sign would have been an earnest of salvation; the second is to be an exposure of the fatal evil of Ahaz's choice. The first would have given some assurance of the swift overthrow of Ephraim and Syria; the second shall be some painful illustration of the fact that not only Syria and Ephraim, but Judah herself, shall be overwhelmed by the advance of the northern power. This second sign is one, therefore, which only time can bring round. Isaiah identifies it with a life not yet born.

A Child, he says, shall shortly be born to whom his mother shall give the name Immanuel—"God-with-us." By the time this Child comes to years of discretion, "he shall eat butter and honey." Isaiah then explains the riddle. He does not, however, explain who the mother is, having described her vaguely as "a" or "the young woman of marriageable age;" for that is not necessary to the sign, which is to consist in the Child's own experience. To this latter he limits his explanation. Butter and honey are the food of privation, the food of a people, whose land, depopulated by the enemy, has been turned into pasture. Before this Child shall arrive at years of discretion not only shall Syria and Ephraim be laid waste, but the Lord Himself will have laid waste Judah. "Jehovah shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people and upon thy father's house days, that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria." Nothing more is said of Immanuel, but the rest of the chapter is taken up with the details of Judah's devastation.

Now this sign and its explanation would have presented little difficulty but for the name of the Child—Immanuel. Erase that, and the passage reads forcibly enough. Before a certain Child, whose birth is vaguely but solemnly intimated in the near future, shall have come to years of discretion, the results of the choice of Ahaz shall be manifest. Judah shall be devastated, and her people have sunk to the most rudimentary means of living. All this is plain. It is a form which Isaiah used more than once to measure the near future. And in other literatures, too, we have felt the pathos of realising the future results of crime and the length to which disaster lingers, by their effect upon the lives of another generation:—

"The child that is unborn shall rue
The hunting of that day!"

But why call the Child Immanuel? The name is evidently part of the sign, and has to be explained in connection with it. Why call a Child "God-with-us" who is not going to act greatly or to be highly honoured, who is only going to suffer, for whom to come to years of intelligence shall only be to come to a sense of his country's disaster and his people's poverty. This Child who is used so pathetically to measure the flow of time and the return of its revenges, about whom we are told neither how he shall behave himself in the period of privation, nor whether he shall survive it—why is he called Immanuel? or why, being called Immanuel, has he so sordid a fate to contrast with so splendid a name?

It seems to the present expositor quite impossible to dissociate so solemn an announcement by Jehovah to the house of David of the birth of a Child, so highly named, from that expectation of the coming of a glorious Prince which was current in this royal family since the

days of its founder. Mysterious and abrupt as the intimation of Immanuel's birth may seem to us at this juncture, we cannot forget that it fell from Isaiah's lips on hearts which cherished as their dearest hope the appearance of a glorious descendant of David, and were just now the more sensitive to this hope that both David's city and David's dynasty were in peril. Could Ahaz possibly understand by Immanuel any other child than that Prince whose coming was the inalienable hope of his house? But if we are right in supposing that Ahaz made this identification, or had even the dimmest presage of it, then we understand the full force of the sign. Ahaz by his unbelief had not only disestablished himself (ver. 9): he had mortgaged the hope of Israel. In the flood of disaster, which his fatal resolution would bring upon the land, it mattered little what was to happen to himself. Isaiah does not trouble now to mention any penalty for Ahaz. But his resolve's exceeding pregnancy of peril is borne home to the king by the assurance that it will devastate all the golden future, and must disinherit the promised King. The Child, who is Israel's hope, is born; he receives the Divine name, and that is all of salvation or glory suggested. He grows up not to a throne or the majesty which the seventy-second Psalm pictures—the offerings of Sheba's and Seba's kings, the corn of his land shaking like the fruit of Lebanon, while they of the city flourish like the grass of the earth—but to the food of privation, to the sight of his country razed by his enemies into one vast common fit only for pasture, to loneliness and suffering. Amid the general desolation his figure vanishes from our sight, and only his name remains to haunt, with its infinite melancholy of what might have been, the thorn-choked vineyards and grass-grown courts of Judah.

But even if it were to prove too fine a point, to identify Immanuel with the promised Messiah of David's house, and we had to fall back on some vaguer theory of him, finding him to be a personification,—either a representative of the coming generation of God's people, or a type of the promised to-morrow,—the moral effect of the sign would remain the same; and it is with this alone that we have here to do. Be this an individual, or a generation, or an age,—by the Name bestowed upon it, it was to have been a glorious, God-inhabited age, generation, or individual, and Ahaz has prematurely spoiled everything about it but the Name. The future shall be like a boy cursed by his fathers, brought into the world with glorious rights that are stamped in his title, but only to find his kingdom and estates no longer in existence, and all the circumstances dissipated in which he might have realised the glorious meaning of his name. Type of innocent suffering, he is born to an empty title, his name the vestige of a great opportunity, the ironical monument of an irreparable crime.

If Ahaz had any conscience left, we can imagine the effect of this upon him. To be punished for sin in one's own body and fortune, this is sore enough; but to see heaven itself blackened and all the gracious future frustrate, this is unspeakably terrible.

Ahaz is thus the Judas of the Old Testament, if that conception of Judas' character be the right one which makes his wilful desire to bring about the kingdom of God in his own violent

fashion the motive of his betrayal of Jesus. Of his own obduracy Ahaz has betrayed the Messiah and Deliverer of his people. The assurance of this betrayal is the sign of his obduracy, a signal and terrible proof of his irretrievable sin in calling upon the Assyrians. The king has been found wanting.

II. THE PEOPLE (chap. viii.).

The king has been found wanting; but Isaiah will appeal to the people. Chap. viii. is a collection of addresses to them, as chap. vii. was an expostulation with their sovereign. The two chapters are contemporary. In chap. viii. ver. 1, the narrative goes back upon itself, and returns to the situation as it was before Ahaz made his final resolution of reliance on Assyria. Vv. 1-4 of chap. viii. imply that the Assyrian has not yet been summoned by Ahaz to his assistance, and therefore run parallel to chap. vii. vv. 3-9; but chap. viii. ver. 5 and following verses sketch the evils that are to come upon Judah and Israel, consequent upon the arrival of the Assyrians in Palestine, in answer to the appeal of Ahaz. These evils for land and nation are threatened as absolutely to the people as they had been to the king. And then the people are thrown over (viii. 14), as the king had been; and Isaiah limits himself to his disciples (ver. 16)—the *remnant* that was foretold in chap. vi.

This appeal from monarch to people is one of the most characteristic features of Isaiah's ministry. Whatever be the matter committed to him, Isaiah is not allowed to rest till he has brought it home to the popular conscience; and however much he may be able to charge national disaster upon the folly of politicians or the obduracy of a king, it is the people whom he holds ultimately responsible. The statesman, according to Isaiah, cannot rise far above the level of his generation; the people set the fashion to their most autocratic rulers. This instinct for the popular conscience, this belief in the moral solidarity of a nation and their governors, was the motive of the most picturesque passages in Isaiah's career, and inspired some of the keenest epigrams in which he conveyed the Divine truth. We have here a case in illustration. Isaiah had met Ahaz and his court "at the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field," preparing for the expected siege of the city, and had delivered to them the Lord's message not to fear, for that Syria-Ephraim would certainly be destroyed. But that was not enough. It was now laid upon the prophet to make public and popular advertisement of the same truth.

Isaiah was told to take a large, smooth board, and write thereon in the character used by the common people—"with the pen of a man"—as if it were the title to a prophecy, the compound word "Maher-shalal-hash-baz." This was not only an intelligibly written, but a significantly sonorous, word—one of those popular cries in which the liveliest sensations are struck forth by the crowded, clashing letters, full to the dullest ears of rumours of war: "speed-spoil-hurry-prey." The interpretation of it was postponed, the prophet meantime taking two faithful witnesses to its publication. In a little a son was born to Isaiah, and to this child he transferred the noisy name. Then its explanation was

given. The double word was the alarm of a couple of invasions. "Before the boy shall have knowledge to cry, My father, my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria." So far nothing was told the people that had not been told their king; only the time of the overthrow of their two enemies was fixed with greater precision. At the most in a year, Damascus and Samaria would have fallen. The ground was already vibrating to the footfall of the northern hosts.

The rapid political changes, which ensued in Palestine, are reflected on the broken surface of this eighth chapter. We shall not understand these abrupt and dislocated oracles, uttered at short intervals during the two years of the Assyrian campaign, unless we realise that northern shadow passing and repassing over Judah and Israel, and the quick alternations of pride and penitence in the peoples beneath it. We need not try to thread the verses on any line of thought. Logical connection among them there is none. Let us at once get down into the currents of popular feeling, in which Isaiah, having left Ahaz, is now labouring, and casting forth these cries.

It is a period of powerful currents, a people wholly in drift, and the strongest man of them arrested only by a firm pressure of the Lord's hand. "For Jehovah spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me, that I should not walk in the way of this people." The character of the popular movement, "the way of this people," which nearly lifted Isaiah off his feet, is evident. It is that into which every nation drifts, who have just been loosened from a primitive faith in God, and by fear or ambition have been brought under the fascination of the great world. On the one hand, such a generation is apt to seek the security of its outward life in things materially large and splendid, to despise as paltry its old religious forms, national aspirations and achievements, and be very desirous to follow foreign fashion and rival foreign wealth. On the other hand, the religious spirit of such an age, withdrawn from its legitimate objects, seeks satisfaction in petty and puerile practices, demeaning itself spiritually, in a way that absurdly contrasts with the grandeur of its material ambitions. Such a stage in the life of a people has its analogy in the growth of the individual, when the boy, new to the world, by affecting the grandest companions and models, assumes an ambitious manner, with contempt for his former circumstances, yet inwardly remains credulous, timid, and liable to panic. Isaiah reveals that it was such a stage which both the kingdoms of Israel had now reached. "This people hath refused the waters of Shiloah, that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son."

It was natural, that when the people of Judah contrasted their own estate with that of Assyria, or even of Damascus, they should despise themselves. For what was Judah? A petty principality, no larger than three of our own counties. And what was Jerusalem? A mere mountain village, some sixty or seventy acres of barren rock, cut into tongues by three insignificant valleys, down which there sometimes struggled tiny threads of water, though the beds were oftener dry, giving the town a withered and squalid look—no great river to nourish, ennoble,

or protect. What were such a country and capital to compare with the empire of Assyria?—the empire of the two rivers, whose powerful streams washed the ramparts, wharves, and palace stairs of mighty cities! What was Jerusalem even to the capital of Rezin? Were not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, let alone these waterless wādys, whose bleached beds made the Jewish capital so squalid? It was the Assyrian's vast water system—canals, embankments, sluices, and the wealth of water moving through them—that most impressed the poor Jew, whose streams failed him in summer, and who had to treasure up his scanty stores of rainwater in the cisterns, with which the rocky surface of his territory is still so thickly indented. There had, indeed, been at Jerusalem some attempt to conduct water. It was called "The Shiloah—conduit or aqueduct," or literally "emissary" in the old sense of the word—a rough, narrow tunnel of some thousand feet in length, hewn through the living rock from the only considerable spring on the east side of Jerusalem, to a reservoir within the walls. To this day "The Shiloah" presents itself as not by any means a first-class piece of engineering. Ahaz had either just made the tunnel or repaired it; but if the water went no faster than it travels now, the results were indeed ridiculous. Well might "this people despise the waters of the Shiloah, that go trickling," when they thought upon the rivers of Damascus or the broad streams of Mesopotamia. Certainly it was enough to dry up the patriotism of the Judean, if he was capable of appreciating only material value, to look upon this bare, riverless capital, with its bungled aqueduct and trickling water supply. On merely material grounds, Judah was about the last country at that time in which her inhabitants might be expected to show pride or confidence.

But woe to the people whose attachment to their land is based upon its material advantages, who have lost their sense for those spiritual presences, from an appreciation of which springs all true love of country, with warrior's courage in her defence and statesman's faith in her destiny! The greatest calamity, which can befall any people, is to forfeit their enthusiasm for the soil, on which their history has been achieved and their hearths and altars lie, by suffering their faith in the presence of God, of which these are but the tokens, to pass away. With this loss Isaiah now reproaches Judah. The people are utterly materialised; their delights have been in gold and silver, chariots and horses, fenced cities and broad streams, and their faith has now followed their delights. But these things to which they flee will only prove their destruction. The great foreign river, whose waters they covet, will overflow them: "even the king of Assyria and all his glory, and he shall come up over all his channels and go over all his banks; and he shall sweep onward into Judah; he shall overflow and pass through; he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel," thou who art "God-with-us." At the sound of the Name, which floats in upon the floods of invasion like the Ark on the waters of old, Isaiah pulls together his distraught faith in his country, and forgetting her faults, flings defiance at her foes. "Associate yourselves, ye peoples, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of

far-off countries, gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, it shall be brought to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for Immanu-El"—"With us is God." The challenge was made good. The prophet's faith prevailed over the people's materialism, and Jerusalem remained inviolable till Isaiah's death.

Meantime the Assyrian came on. But the infatuated people of Judah continued to tremble rather before the doomed conspirators, Rezin and Pekah. It must have been a time of huge excitement. The prophet tells us how he was steadied by the pressure of the Lord's hand, and how, being steadied, the meaning of the word "Immanuel" was opened out to him. "God-with-us" is the one great fact of life. Amid all the possible alliances and all the possible fears of a complex political situation, He remains the one certain alliance, the one real fear. "Say ye not, A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people say, A conspiracy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof. Jehovah of hosts, Him shall ye sanctify; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." God is the one great fact of life, but what a double-edged fact—"a sanctuary to all who put their trust in Him, but a rock of offence to both houses of Israel!" The figure is very picturesque. An altar, a common stone on steps, one of those which covered the land in large numbers—it is easy to see what a double purpose that might serve. What a joy the sight would be to the weary wanderer or refugee who sought it, what a comfort as he leant his weariness upon it, and knew he was safe! But those who were flying over the land, not seeking Jehovah, not knowing indeed what they sought, blind and panic-stricken—for them what could that altar do but trip them up like any other common rock in their way? "In fact, Divine justice is something which is either observed, desired, or attained, and is then men's weal, or, on the other hand, is overlooked, rejected, or sought after in a wild, unintelligent spirit, and only in the hour of need, and is then their lasting ruin."*

The Assyrian came on, and the temper of the Jews grew worse. Samaria was indeed doomed from the first, but for some time Isaiah had been excepting Judah from a judgment for which the guilt of Northern Israel was certainly riper. He foresaw, of course, that the impetus of invasion might sweep the Assyrians into Judah, but he had triumphed in this: that Judah was Immanuel's land, and that all who arrayed themselves against her must certainly come to naught. But now his ideas have changed, as Judah has persisted in evil. He knows now that God is for a stumbling-block to *both* houses of Israel; nay, that upon Jerusalem herself He will fall as a gin and a snare. Only for a little group of individuals, separate from both States, and gathered round the prophet and the word of God given to him, is salvation certain. People, as well as king, have been found wanting. There remains only this *remnant*.

Isaiah then at last sees his *remnant*. But the point we have reached is significant for more than the fulfilment of his expectations. This is the first appearance in history of a religious community, apart from the forms of domestic or national life. "Till then no one had dreamed of a fellowship of faith dissociated from all national

* Ewald.

forms, bound together by faith in the Divine word alone. It was the birth of a new era in religion, for it was the birth of the conception of the Church, the first step in the emancipation of spiritual religion from the forms of political life."*

The plan of the seventh and eighth chapters is now fully disclosed. As the king for his unworthiness has to give place to the Messiah, so the nation for theirs have to give place to the Church. In the seventh chapter the king was found wanting, and the Messiah promised. In the eighth chapter the people are found wanting; and the prophet, turning from them, proceeds to form the Church among those who accept the Word, which king and people have refused. "Bind thou up the testimony, and seal the teaching† among my disciples. And I will wait on Jehovah, who hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him. Behold, I and the children Jehovah hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts, Him that dwelleth in Mount Zion."

This, then, is the situation: revelation concluded, the Church formed upon it, and the nation abandoned. But is that situation final? The words just quoted betray the prophet's hope that it is not. He says: "I will wait." He says again: The Lord is only "hiding His face from the house of Jacob." I will expect again the shining of His countenance. I will hope for Divine grace and the nation being once more conterminous. The rest of the section (to ix. 7) is the development of this hope, which stirs in the prophet's heart after he has closed the record of revelation.

The darkness deepened across Israel. The Assyrian had come. The northern floods kept surging among the little States of Palestine, and none knew what might be left standing. We can well understand Isaiah pausing, as he did, in face of such rapid and uncontrollable movements. When Tiglath-pileser swept over the plain of Esdraelon, casting down the king of Samaria and the Philistine cities, and then swept back again, carrying off upon his ebb the populations east of the Jordan, it looked very like as if both the houses of Israel should fall. In their panic, the people betook themselves to morbid forms of religion; and at first Isaiah was obliged to quench the hope and pity he had betrayed for them in indignation at the utter contrariety of their religious practices to the word of God. There can be no Divine grace for the people as long as they "seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto the wizards that chirp and that mutter." For such a disposition the prophet has nothing but scorn, "Should not a people seek unto their God? On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead?" They must come back to the prophet's own word before hope may dawn. "To the revelation and the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them."

The night, however, grew too awful for scorn. There had been no part of the land so given to the idolatrous practices, which the prophet scathed, as "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles." But all the horrors of captivity

had now fallen upon it, and it had received at the Lord's hand double for all its sins. The night had been torn enough by lightning; was there no dawn? The darkness of these provinces fills the prophet's silenced thoughts. He sees a people "hardly bestead and hungry, fretting themselves, cursing their king," who had betrayed them, "and their God," who had abandoned them, "turning their faces upwards" to heaven and "downwards" to the sacred soil from which they were being dragged, "but, behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and into thick darkness they are driven away." It is a murky picture, yet through the smoke of it we are able to discern a weird procession of Israelites departing into captivity. We date it, therefore, about 732 B. C., the night of Israel's first great captivity. The shock and the pity of this rouse the prophet's great heart. He cannot continue to say that there is no morning for those benighted provinces. He will venture a great hope for their people.

Over how many months the crowded verses, viii. 21-ix. 7, must be spread, it is useless now to inquire—whether the revulsion they mark arose all at once in the prophet's mind, or hope grew gradually brighter as the smoke of war died away on Israel's northern frontier during 731 B. C. It is enough that we can mark the change. The prophet's tones pass from sarcasm to pity (viii. 20, 21); from pity to hope (viii. 22-ix. 1); from hope to triumph in the vision of salvation actually achieved (ix. 2). "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, on them hath the light shined." For a mutilated, we see a multiplied nation; for the fret of hunger and the curses of defeat, we hear the joy of harvest and of spoil after victory. "For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, Thou hast broken as in the day of Midian." War has rolled away for ever over that northern horizon, and all the relics of war in the land are swept together into the fire. "For all the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, and for fuel of fire." In the midday splendour of this peace, which, after the fashion of Hebrew prophecy, is described as already realised, Isaiah hails the Author of it all in that gracious and marvellous Child whose birth he had already intimated, Heir to the throne of David, but entitled by a fourfold name, too generous, perhaps, for a mere mortal, "Wonderful-Counsellor, Hero-God, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-peace," who shall redeem the realms of his great forerunner and maintain "Israel with justice and righteousness from henceforth, even for ever."

When, finally, the prophet inquires what has led his thoughts through this rapid change from satisfaction (chap. viii. 16) with the salvation of a small "remnant" of believers in the word of God—a little kernel of patience in the midst of a godless and abandoned people—to the daring vision of a whole nation redeemed and established in peace under a Godlike King, he says: "The zeal of the Lord of hosts hath performed this."

"The zeal," translates our English version, but no one English word will give it. It is that mixture of hot honour and affection to which "jealousy" in its good sense comes near. It is that overflow of the love that cannot keep still,

* Robertson Smith, "Prophets of Israel," p. 275.

† English Version, "law," but not the law of Moses. Isaiah refers to the word that has come by himself.

which, when men think God has surely done all He will or can do for an ungrateful race, visits them in their distress, and carries them forward into unconceived dispensations of grace and glory. It is the Spirit of God, which yearns after the lost, speaks to the self-despairing of hope, and surprises rebel and prophet alike with new revelations of love. We have our systems representing God's work up to the limits of our experience, and we settle upon them; but the Almighty is ever greater than His promise or than His revelation of Himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MESSIAH.

WE have now reached that point of Isaiah's prophesying at which the Messiah becomes the most conspicuous figure on his horizon. Let us take advantage of it, to gather into one statement all that the prophet told his generation concerning that exalted and mysterious Person.*

When Isaiah began to prophesy, there was current among the people of Judah the expectation of a glorious King. How far the expectation was defined it is impossible to ascertain; but this at least is historically certain. A promise had been made to David (2 Sam. vii. 4-17) by which the permanence of his dynasty was assured. His offspring, it was said, should succeed him, yet eternity was promised not to any individual descendant, but to the dynasty. Prophets earlier than Isaiah emphasised this establishment of the house of David, even in the days of Israel's greatest distress; but they said nothing of a single monarch with whom the fortunes of the house were to be identified. It is clear, however, even without the evidence of the Messianic Psalms, that the hope of such a hero was quick in Israel. Besides the documentary proof of David's own last words (2 Sam. xxiii.), there is the manifest impossibility of dreaming of an ideal kingdom apart from the ideal king. Orientals, and especially Orientals of that period, were incapable of realising the triumph of an idea or an institution without connecting it with a personality. So that we may be perfectly sure, that when Isaiah began to prophesy the people not only counted upon the continuance of David's dynasty, as they counted upon the presence of Jehovah Himself, but were familiar with the ideal of a monarch, and lived in hope of its realisation.

In the first stage of his prophecy, it is remarkable, Isaiah makes no use of this tradition, although he gives more than one representation of Israel's future in which it might naturally have appeared. No word is spoken of a Messiah, even in the awful conversation in which Isaiah received from the Eternal the fundamentals of his teaching. The only hope there permitted to him is the survival of a bare, leaderless few of the people, or, to use his own word, *a stump*, with no sign of a prominent sprout upon it. In connection, however, with the survival of a remnant, as we have said on chap. vi. (p. 639), it is

plain that there were two indispensable conditions, which the prophet could not help having to state sooner or later. Indeed, one of them he had mentioned already. It was indispensable that the people should have a leader, and that they should have a rallying-point. They must have their King, and they must have their City. Every reader of Isaiah knows that it is on these two themes the prophet rises to the height of his eloquence—Jerusalem shall remain inviolable; a glorious king shall be given unto her. But it has not been so generally remarked, that Isaiah is far more concerned and consistent about the secure city than about the ideal monarch. From first to last the establishment and peace of Jerusalem are never out of his thoughts, but he speaks only now and then of the King to come. Through long periods of his ministry, though frequently describing the blessed future, he is silent about the Messiah, and even sometimes so groups the inhabitants of that future, as to leave no room for Him among them. Indeed, the silences of Isaiah upon this Person are as remarkable as the brilliant passages in which he paints His endowments and His work.

If we consider the moment, chosen by Isaiah for announcing the Messiah and adding his seal to the national belief in the advent of a glorious Son of David, we find some significance in the fact that it was a moment, when the throne of David was unworthily filled and David's dynasty was for the first time seriously threatened. It is impossible to dissociate the birth of a boy called *Immanuel*, and afterwards so closely identified with the fortunes of the whole land (vii. 8), from the public expectation of a King of glory; and critics are almost unanimous in recognising Immanuel again in the Prince-of-the-Four-Names in chap. ix. Immanuel, therefore, is the Messiah, the promised King of Israel. But Isaiah makes his own first intimation of Him, not when the throne was worthily filled by an Uzziah or a Jotham, but when a fool and traitor to God abused its power, and the foreign conspiracy to set up a Syrian prince in Jerusalem imperilled the whole dynasty. Perhaps we ought not to overlook the fact, that Isaiah does not here designate Immanuel as a descendant of David. The vagueness with which the mother is described has given rise to a vast amount of speculation as to what particular person the prophet meant by her. But may not Isaiah's vagueness be the only intention he had in mentioning a mother at all? The whole house of David shared at that moment the sin of the king (vii. 13); and it is not presuming too much upon the freedom of our prophet to suppose that he shook himself loose from the tradition which entailed the Messiah upon the royal family of Judah, and at least left it an open question, whether Immanuel might not, in consequence of their sin, spring from some other stock.

It is, however, far less with the origin, than with the experience, of Immanuel that Isaiah is concerned; and those who embark upon curious inquiries, as to who exactly the mother might be, are busying themselves with what the prophet had no interest in, while neglecting that in which really lay the significance of the sign that he offered.

Ahaz by his wilfulness has made a Substitute necessary. But Isaiah is far more taken up with this: that he has actually mortgaged the prospects of that Substitute. The Messiah comes,

* The Messiah, or *Anointed*, is used in the Old Testament of many agents of God: high-priest (Lev. iv. 3); ministers of the Word (Ps. cv. 15); Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 1); but mostly of God's king, actual (1 Sam. xxiv. 7), or expected (Dan. ix. 25). So it became in Jewish theology the technical term for the coming King and the Captain of salvation.

but the wilfulness of Ahaz has rendered His reign impossible. He, whose advent has hitherto not been foretold except as the beginning of an era of prosperity, and whose person has not been painted but with honour and power, is represented as a helpless and innocent Sufferer—His prospects dissipated by the sins of others, and Himself born only to share His people's indigence (p. 646). Such a representation of the Hero's fate is of the very highest interest. We are accustomed to associate the conception of a suffering Messiah only with a much later development of prophecy, when Israel went into exile; but the conception meets us already here. It is another proof that "Esaias is very bold." He calls his Messiah Immanuel, and yet dares to present Him as nothing but a Sufferer—a Sufferer for the sins of others. Born only to suffer with His people, who should have inherited their throne—that is Isaiah's first doctrine of the Messiah.

Through the rest of the prophecies published during the Syro-Ephraïtic troubles the Sufferer is slowly transformed into a Deliverer. The stages of this transformation are obscure. In chap. viii. Immanuel is no more defined than in chap. vii. He is still only a Name of hope upon an unbroken prospect of devastation. "The stretching out of his wings"—i. e., the floods of the Assyrian—"shall fill the breadth of Thy land, O Immanuel." But this time that the prophet utters the Name, he feels inspired by new courage. He grasps at Immanuel as the pledge of ultimate salvation. Let the enemies of Judah work their worst; it shall be in vain, "for Immanuel, God is with us." And then, to our astonishment, while Isaiah is telling us how he arrived at the convictions embodied in this Name, the personality of Immanuel fades away altogether, and Jehovah of hosts Himself is set forth as the sole sanctuary of those who fear Him. There is indeed a double displacement here. Immanuel dissolves in two directions. As a Refuge, He is displaced by Jehovah; as a Sufferer and a Symbol of the sufferings of the land, by a little community of disciples, the first embodiment of the Church, who now, with Isaiah, can do nothing except wait for the Lord (p. 648).

Then, when the prophet's yearning thoughts, that will not rest upon so dark a closure, struggle once more, and struggling pass from despair to pity, and from pity to hope, and from hope to triumph in a salvation actually achieved, they hail all at once as the Hero of it the Son whose birth was promised. With an emphasis, which vividly reveals the sense of exhaustion in the living generation and the conviction that only something fresh, and sent straight from God Himself, can now avail Israel, the prophet cries: "Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given." The Messiah appears in a glory that floods His origin out of sight. We cannot see whether He springs from the house of David; but "the government is to be upon His shoulder," and He shall reign "on David's throne with righteousness for ever." His title shall be four-fold: "Wonderful-Counsellor, God-Hero, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-Peace."

These Four Names do certainly not invite us to grudge them meaning, and they have been claimed as incontrovertible proofs, that the prophet had an absolutely Divine Person in view. One of the most distinguished and de-

liberate of Old Testament scholars declares that "the Deliverer whom Isaiah promises is nothing less than a God in the metaphysical sense of the word. The names as a whole correspond to the predicate *theos*.*" There are serious reasons, however, which make us doubt this conclusion, and, though we firmly hold that Jesus Christ was God, prevent us from recognising these names as prophecies of His Divinity. Two of the names are capable of being used of an earthly monarch: "Wonderful-Counsellor" and "Prince-of-Peace," which are, within the range of human virtue, in evident contrast to Ahaz, at once foolish in the conception of his policy and warlike in its results. It will be more difficult to get Western minds to see how "Father-Everlasting" may be applied to a mere man, but the ascription of eternity is not unusual in Oriental titles, and in the Old Testament is sometimes rendered to things that perish. When Hebrews speak of any one as everlasting, that does not necessarily imply Divinity. The second name, which we render "God-Hero," is, it is true, used of Jehovah Himself in the very next chapter to this, but in the plural it is also used of men by Ezekiel (xxxii. 21). The part of it translated *God* is a frequent name of the Divine Being in the Old Testament, but literally means only *mighty*, and is by Ezekiel (xxx. 11) applied to Nebuchadnezzar. We should hesitate, therefore, to understand by these names "a God in the metaphysical sense of the word."

We fall back with greater confidence on other arguments of a more general kind, which apply to all Isaiah's prophecies of the Messiah. If Isaiah had one revelation rather than another to make, it was the revelation of the unity of God. Against king and people, who crowded their temple with the shrines of many deities, Isaiah presented Jehovah as the one only God. It would simply have nullified the force of his message, and confused the generation to which he brought it, if either he or they had conceived of the Messiah, with the conceiving of Christian theology, as a separate Divine personality.

Again, as Mr. Robertson Smith has very clearly explained,† the functions assigned by Isaiah to the King of the future are simply the ordinary duties of the monarchy, for which He is equipped by the indwelling of that Spirit of God, that makes all wise men wise and valorous men valorous. "We believe in a Divine and eternal Saviour, because the work of salvation as we understand it in the light of the New Testament is essentially different from the work of the wisest and best earthly king." But such an earthly king's work is all Isaiah looks for. So that, so far from its being derogatory to Christ to grudge the sense of Divinity to these names, it is a fact that the more spiritual our notions are of the saving work of Jesus, the less inclined shall we be to claim the prophecies of Isaiah in proof of His Deity.

There is a third argument in the same direction, the force of which we appreciate only when we come to discover how very little from this point onwards Isaiah had to say about the promised king. In chaps. i.-xxxix. only three other passages are interpreted as describing the Messiah. The first of these, xi. 1-5, dating perhaps from about 720, when Hezekiah was king, tells us, for the first and only time by Isaiah's lips,

* Schultz, "A. T. Theologie," pp. 726, 727

† "Prophets of Israel," p. 306.

that the Messiah is to be a scion of David's house, and confirms what we have said: that His duties, however perfectly they were to be discharged, were the usual duties of Judah's monarchy.* The second passage, xxxii. iff., which dates probably from after 705, when Hezekiah was still king, is, if indeed it refers at all to the Messiah, a still fainter, though sweeter, echo of previous descriptions. While the third passage, xxxiii. 17: "Thou shalt see thy king in his beauty," does not refer to the Messiah at all, but to Hezekiah, then prostrate and in sackcloth, with Assyria thundering at the gate of Jerusalem (701). The mass of Isaiah's predictions of the Messiah thus fall within the reign of Ahaz, and just at the point at which Ahaz proved an unworthy representative of Jehovah, and Judah and Israel were threatened with complete devastation. There is a repetition when Hezekiah has come to the throne. But in the remaining seventeen years, except perhaps for one allusion, Isaiah is silent on the ideal king, although he continued throughout that time to unfold pictures of the blessed future which contained every other Messianic feature, and the realisation of which he placed where he had placed his Prince-of-the-Four-Names—in connection, that is, with the approaching defeat of the Assyrians. Ignoring the Messiah, during these years Isaiah lays all the stress of his prophecy on the inviolability of Jerusalem; and while he promises the recovery of the actually reigning monarch from the distress of the Assyrian invasion,—as if that were what the people chiefly desired to see, and not a brighter, stronger substitute,—he hails Jehovah Himself, in solitary and undeputed sovereignty, as Judge, Lawgiver, Monarch, and Saviour (xxxiii. 22). Between Hezekiah, thus restored to his beauty, and Jehovah's own presence, there is surely no room left for another royal personage. But these very facts—that Isaiah felt most compelled to predict an ideal king when the actual king was unworthy, and that, on the contrary, when the reigning king proved worthy, approximating to the ideal, Isaiah felt no need for another, and indeed in his prophecies left no room for another—form surely a powerful proof that the king he expected was not a supernatural being, but a human personality, extraordinarily endowed by God, one of the descendants of David by ordinary succession, but fulfilling the ideal which his forerunners had missed. Even if we allow that the four names contain among them the predicate of Divinity, we must not overlook the fact that the Prince is only called by them. It is not that "He is," but that "He shall be called, Wonderful-Counsellor, God-Hero, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-Peace." Nowhere is there a dogmatic statement that He is Divine. Besides, it is inconceivable that if Isaiah, the prophet of the unity of God, had at any time a second Divine Person in his hope, he should have afterwards remained so silent about Him. To interpret the ascription of the Four Names as a conscious definition of Divinity, at all like the Christian conception of Jesus Christ, is to render the silence of Isaiah's later life and the silence of subsequent prophets utterly inexplicable.

On these grounds, then, we decline to believe

* See further on this passage p. 661. As is there pointed out, while these passages on the Messiah are indeed infrequent and unconnected, there is a very evident progress through them of Isaiah's conception of his Hero's character.

that Isaiah saw in the king of the future "a God in the metaphysical sense of the word." Just because we know the proofs of the Divinity of Jesus to be so spiritual, do we feel the uselessness of looking for them to prophecies that manifestly describe purely earthly and civil functions.

But such a conclusion by no means shuts us out from tracing a relation between these prophecies and the appearance of Jesus. The fact, that Isaiah allowed them to go down to posterity, proves that he himself did not count them to have been exhausted in Hezekiah. And this fact of their preservation is ever so much the more significant, that their literal truth was discredited by events. Isaiah had evidently foretold the birth and bitter youth of Immanuel for the *near* future. Immanuel's childhood was to begin with the devastation of Ephraim and Syria, and to be passed in circumstances consequent on the devastation of Judah, which was to follow close upon that of her two enemies. But although Ephraim and Syria were immediately spoiled, as Isaiah foresaw, Judah lay in peace all the reign of Ahaz and many years after his death. So that had Immanuel been born in the next twenty-five years after the announcement of His birth, He would not have found in His own land the circumstances which Isaiah foretold as the discipline of His boyhood. Isaiah's forecast of Judah's fate was, therefore, falsified by events. That the prophet or his disciples should have allowed it to remain is proof that they believed it to have contents which the history they had lived through neither exhausted nor discredited. In the prophecies of the Messiah there was something ideal, which was as permanent and valid for the future as the prophecy of the Remnant or that of the visible majesty of Jehovah. If the attachment, at which the prophet aimed when he launched these prophecies on the stream of time was denied them by their own age, that did not mean their submersion, but only their freedom to float further down the future and seek attachment there.

This boldness, to entrust to future ages a prophecy discredited by contemporary history, argues a profound belief in its moral meaning and eternal significance; and it is this boldness, in face of disappointment continued from generation to generation in Israel, that constitutes the uniqueness of the Messianic hope among that people. To sublimate this permanent meaning of the prophecies from the contemporary material, with which it is mixed, is not difficult. Isaiah foretells his Prince on the supposition that certain things are fulfilled. When the people are reduced to the last extreme, when there is no more a king to rally to or to rule them, when the land is in captivity, when revelation is closed, when, in despair of the darkness of the Lord's face, men have taken to them that have familiar spirits and wizards that peep and mutter, then, in that last sinful, hopeless estate of man, a Deliverer shall appear. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it." This is the first article of Isaiah's Messianic creed, and stands back behind the Messiah and all Messianic blessings, their exhaustless origin. Whatsoever man's sin and darkness be, the Almighty lives, and His zeal is infinite. Therefore it is a fact eternally true, that whatsoever Deliverer His people need and can receive shall be sent to them, and shall be styled by whatsoever names their hearts can

best appreciate. Titles shall be given Him to attract their hope and their homage, and not a definition of His nature, of which their theological vocabulary would be incapable. This is the vital kernel of Messianic prophecy in Isaiah. The "zeal of the Lord," kindling the dark thoughts of the prophet as he broods over his people's need of salvation, suddenly makes a Saviour visible—visible just as He is needed there and then. Isaiah hears Him hailed by titles that satisfy the particular wants of the age, and express men's thoughts as far up the idea of salvation and majesty as they of that age can rise. But the prophet has also perceived that sin and disaster will so accumulate before the Messiah comes, that, though innocent, He shall have to bear tribulation and pass to His prime through suffering. No one with open mind can deny, that in this moderate estimate of the prophet's meaning there is a very great deal of the essence of the Gospel as it has been fulfilled in the personal consciousness and saving work of Jesus Christ,—as much of that essence, indeed, as it was possible to communicate to so early a generation, and one whose religious needs were so largely what we call temporal. But if we grant this, and if at the same time we appreciate the uniqueness of such a hope as this of Israel, then surely it must be allowed to have the appearance of a special preparation for Christ's life and work; and so, to use very moderate words which have been applied to Messianic prophecy in general, it may be taken "as a proof of its true connection with the Gospel dispensation as part of one grand scheme in the counsels of Providence."*

Men do not ask when they drink of a streamlet high up on the hills, "Is this going to be a great river?" They are satisfied if it is water enough to quench their thirst. And so it was enough for Old Testament believers if they found in Isaiah's prophecy of a Deliverer—as they did find—what satisfied their own religious needs, without convincing them to what volumes it should swell. But this does not mean that in using these Old Testament prophecies we Christians should limit our enjoyment of them to the measure of the generation to whom they were addressed. To have known Christ must make the predictions of the Messiah different to a man. You cannot bring so infinite an ocean of blessing into historic connection with these generous, expansive intimations of the Old Testament without its passing into them. If we may use a rough figure, the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are tidal rivers. They not only run, as we have seen, to their sea, which is Christ: they feel His reflex influence. It is not enough for a Christian to have followed the historical direction of the prophecies, or to have proved their connection with the New Testament as parts of one Divine harmony. Forced back by the fulness of meaning to which he has found their courses open, he returns to find the savour of the New Testament upon them, and that where he descended shallow and tortuous channels, with all the difficulties of historical exploration, he is borne back on full tides of worship. To use the appropriate words of Isaiah, "the Lord is with him there, a place of broad rivers and streams."

With all this, however, we must not forget

* Stanton: "The Jewish and Christian Messiah."

that, beside these prophecies of a great earthly ruler, there runs another stream of desire and promise, in which we see a much stronger premonition of the fact that a Divine Being shall some day dwell among men. We mean the Scriptures in which it is foretold that Jehovah Himself shall visibly visit Jerusalem. This line of prophecy, taken along with the powerful anthropomorphic representations of God,—astonishing in a people like the Jews, who so abhorred the making of an image of the Deity upon the likeness of anything in heaven and earth,—we hold to be the proper Old Testament instinct that the Divine should take human form and tabernacle amongst men. But this side of our subject—the relation of the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament to the Incarnation—we postpone till we come to the second part of the book of Isaiah, in which the anthropomorphic figures are more frequent and daring than they are here.

BOOK II.

PROPHECIES FROM THE ACCESSION OF HEZEKIAH TO THE DEATH OF SARGON, 727-705 B. C.

THE prophecies with which we have been engaged (chaps. ii.-x. 4) fall either before or during the great Assyrian invasion of Syria, undertaken in 734-732 by Tiglath-pileser II., at the invitation of King Ahaz. Nobody has any doubt about that. But when we ask what prophecies of Isaiah come next in chronological order, we raise a storm of answers. We are no longer on the sure ground we have been enjoying.

Under the canonical arrangement the next prophecy is "The Woe upon the Assyrian" (x. 5-34). In the course of this the Assyrian is made to boast of having overthrown Samaria (vv. 9-11): "Is not Samaria as Damascus? . . . Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" If "Samaria" mean the capital city of Northern Israel—and the name is never used in these parts of Scripture for anything else—and if the prophet be quoting a boast which the Assyrian was actually in a position to make, and not merely imagining a boast, which he would be likely to make some years afterwards (an entirely improbable view, though held by one great scholar*), then an event is here described as past and over which did not happen during Tiglath-pileser's campaign, nor indeed till twelve years after it. Tiglath-pileser did not require to besiege Samaria in the campaign of 734-32. The king, Pekah, was slain by a conspiracy of his own subjects; and Hoshea, the ringleader, who succeeded, willingly purchased the stability of a usurped throne by homage and tribute to the king of kings. So Tiglath-pileser went home again, satisfied to have punished Israel by carrying away with him the population of Galilee. During his reign there was no further appearance of the Assyrians in Palestine, but at his death in 727 Hoshea, after the fashion of Assyrian vassals when the throne of Nineveh changed occupants, attempted to throw off the yoke of the new king, Salmanas-

* Delitzsch, who fancies that the fall of Samaria is a completed affair only in the vision of the prophet, not in reality.

sar IV. Along with the Phœnician and Philistine cities, Hoshea negotiated an alliance with So, or Seve, the Ethiopian, a usurper who had just succeeded in establishing his supremacy over the land of the Pharaohs. In a year Salmanassar marched south upon the rebels. He took Hoshea prisoner on the borders of his territory (725), but, not content, as his predecessor had been, with the submission of the king, "he came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years."* He did not live to see the end of the siege, and Samaria was taken in 722 by Sargon, his successor. Sargon overthrew the kingdom and uprooted the people. The northern tribes were carried away into a captivity, from which as tribes they never returned.

It was evidently this complete overthrow of Samaria by Sargon in 722-721, which Isaiah had behind him when he wrote x. 9-11. We must, therefore, date the prophecy after 721, when nothing was left as a bulwark between Judah and the Assyrian. We do so with reluctance. There is much in x. 5-34 which suits the circumstances of Tiglath-pileser's invasion. There are phrases and catch-words coinciding with those in vii.-ix. 7; and the whole oration is simply a more elaborate expression of that defiance of Assyria, which inspires such of the previous prophecies as viii. 9, 10. Besides, with the exception of Samaria, all the names in the Assyrian's boastful catalogue—Carchemish, Calno, Arpad, Hamath, and Damascus—might as justly have been vaunted by the lips of Tiglath-pileser as by those of Sargon. But in spite of these things, which seem to vindicate the close relation of x. 5-34 to the prophecies which precede it in the canon, the mention of Samaria as being already destroyed justifies us in divorcing it from them. While they remain dated from before 732, we place it subsequent to 722.

Was Isaiah, then, silent these ten years? Is there no prophecy lying farther on in his book that treats of Samaria as still standing? Besides an address to the fallen Damascus in xvii. 1-11, which we shall take later with the rest of Isaiah's oracles on foreign states, there is one large prophecy, chap. xxviii., which opens with a description of the magnates of Samaria lolling in drunken security on their vine-crowned hill, but God's storms are ready to break. Samaria has not yet fallen, but is threatened and shall fall soon. The first part of chap. xxviii. can only refer to the year in which Salmanassar advanced upon Samaria—726 or 725. There is nothing in the rest of it to corroborate this date; but the fact, that there are several turns of thought and speech very similar to turns of thought and speech in x. 5-34, makes us the bolder to take away xxviii. from its present connection with xxix.-xxxii., and place it just before x. 5-34.

Here then is our next group of prophecies, all dating from the first seven years of the reign of Hezekiah: xxviii., a warning addressed to the politicians of Jerusalem from the impending fate of those of Samaria (date 725); x. 5-34, a woe upon the Assyrian (date about 720), describing his boasts and his progress in conquest till his sudden crash by the walls of Jerusalem; xi., of date uncertain, for it reflects no historical circumstance, but standing in such artistic contrast to x. that the two must be treated together; and xii., a hymn of salvation, which forms a fitting

* 2 Kings xvii. 5.

conclusion to xi. With these we shall take the few fragments of the book of Isaiah which belong to the fifteen years 720-705, and are as straws to show how Judah all that time was drifting down to alliance with Egypt—xx., xxi. 1-10, and xxxviii.-xxxix. This will bring us to 705, and the beginning of a new series of prophecies, the richest of Isaiah's life, and the subject of our third book.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOD'S COMMONPLACE.

ISAIAH xxviii.

ABOUT 725, B. C.

THE twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Isaiah is one of the greatest of his prophecies. It is distinguished by that regal versatility of style, which places its author at the head of Hebrew writers. Keen analyses of character, realistic contrasts between sin and judgment, clever retorts and epigrams, rapids of scorn, and "a spate" of judgment, but for final issue a placid stream of argument banked by sweet parable—such are the literary charms of the chapter, which derives its moral grandeur from the force with which its currents set towards faith and reason, as together the salvation of states, politicians, and private men. The style mirrors life about ourselves, and still tastes fresh to thirsty men. The truths are relevant to every day in which luxury and intemperance abound, in which there are eyes too fevered by sin to see beauty in simple purity, and minds so surfeited with knowledge or intoxicated with their own cleverness, that they call the maxims of moral reason commonplace and scorn religious instruction as food for babes.

Some time when the big, black cloud was gathering again on the north, Isaiah raised his voice to the magnates of Jerusalem: "Lift your heads from your wine-bowls; look north. The sunshine is still on Samaria, and your fellow-drinkers there are revelling in security. But the storm creeps up behind. They shall certainly perish soon; even you cannot help seeing that. Let it scare you, for their sin is yours, and that storm will not exhaust itself on Samaria. Do not think that your clever policies, alliance with Egypt or the treaty with Assyria herself, shall save you. Men are never saved from death and hell by making covenants with them. Scorners of religion and righteousness, except ye cease being sceptical and drunken, and come back from your diplomacy to faith and reason, ye shall not be saved! This destruction that looms is going to cover the whole earth. So stop your running to and fro across it in search of alliances. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Stay at home and trust in the God of Zion, for Zion is the one thing that shall survive." In the parable, which closes the prophecy, Isaiah offers some relief to this dark prospect: "Do not think of God as a mere disaster-monger, maker of terrors for men. He has a plan, even in catastrophe, and this deluge, which looks like destruction for all of us, has its method, term, and fruits, just as much as the husbandman's harrowing of the earth or threshing of the corn."

The chapter with this argument falls into four divisions.

I. THE WARNING FROM SAMARIA (vv. 1-6).

They had always been hard drinkers in North Israel. Fifty years before, Amos flashed judgment on those who trusted in the mount of Samaria, "lolling upon their couches and gulping their wine out of basons," women as well as men. Upon these same drunkards of Ephraim, now soaked and "stunned with wine," Isaiah fastens his Woe. Sunny the sky and balmy the air in which they lie, stretched upon flowers by the heads of their fat valleys—a land that tempts its inhabitants with the security of perpetual summer. But God's swift storm drives up the valley—hail, rain, and violent streams from every gorge. Flowers, wreaths, and pampered bodies are trampled in the mire. The glory of sunny Ephraim is as the first ripe fig a man findeth, and "while it is yet in his hand, he eateth it up." But while drunken magnates and the flowers of a rich land are swept away, there is a residue who can and do abide even that storm, to whom the Lord Himself shall be for a crown, "a spirit of justice to him that sitteth for justice, and for strength to them that turn back the battle at the gate."

Isaiah's intention is manifest, and his effort a great one. It is to rob passion of its magic and change men's temptations to their disgusts, by exhibiting how squalid passion shows beneath disaster, and how gloriously purity shines surviving it. It is to strip luxury and indulgence of their attractiveness by drenching them with the storm of judgment, and then not to leave them stunned, but to rouse in them a moral admiration and envy by the presentation of certain grand survivals of the storm—unstained justice and victorious valour. Isaiah first sweeps the atmosphere, hot from infective passion, with the cold tempest from the north. Then in the clear shining after rain he points to two figures, which have preserved through temptation and disaster, and now lift against a smiling sky, the ideal that those corrupt judges and drunken warriors have dragged into the mire—"him that sitteth for justice and him that turneth back the battle at the gate." The escape from sensuality, this passage suggests, is twofold. There is the exposure to nature where God's judgments sweep their irresistible way; and then from the despair, which the unrelieved spectacle of judgment produces, there is the recovery to moral effort through the admiration of those purities and heroisms, that by God's Spirit have survived.

When God has put a conscience into the art or literature of any generation, they have followed this method of Isaiah, but not always to the healthy end which he reaches. To show the slaves of Circe the physical disaster impending—which you must begin by doing if you are to impress their brutalised minds—is not enough. The lesson of Tennyson's "Vision of Sin" and of Arnold's "New Sirens," that night and frost, decay and death, come down at last on pampered sense, is necessary, but not enough. Who stops there remains a defective and morbid moralist. When you have made the sensual shiver before the disease that inevitably awaits them, you must go on to show that there are men who have the secret of surviving the most terrible judgments of God, and lift their figures calm and victorious against the storm-washed sky. Preach the depravity of men, but never apart from the possibilities that remain in them. It is Isaiah's health

as a moralist that he combines the two. No prophet ever threatened judgment more inexorable and complete than he. Yet he never failed to tell the sinner how possible it was for him to be different. If it were necessary to crush men in the mud, Isaiah would not leave them there with the hearts of swine. But he put conscience in them, and the envy of what was pure, and the admiration of what was victorious. Even as they wallowed, he pointed them to the figures of men like themselves, who had survived and overcome by the Spirit of God. Here we perceive the ethical possibilities that lay in his fundamental doctrine of a remnant. Isaiah never crushed men beneath the fear of judgment, without revealing to them the possibility and beauty of victorious virtue. Had we lived in those great days, what a help he had been to us—what a help he may be still!—not only firm to declare that the wages of sin is death, but careful to effect that our humiliation shall not be despair, and that even when we feel our shame and irretrievableness the most, we shall have the opportunity to behold our humanity crowned and seated on the throne from which we had fallen, our humanity driving back the battle from the gate against which we had been hopelessly driven! That seventh verse sounds like a trumpet in the ears of enervated and despairing men.

II. GOD'S COMMONPLACE (vv. 7-13).

But Isaiah has cast his pearls before swine. The men of Jerusalem, whom he addresses, are too deep in sensuality to be roused by his noble words. "Even priest and prophet stagger through strong drink;" and the class that should have been the conscience of the city, responding immediately to the word of God, "reel in vision and stumble in judgment." They turn upon Isaiah's earnest message with tipsy men's insolence. Verses 9 and 10 should be within inverted commas, for they are the mocking reply of drunkards over their cups. "Whom is he going to teach knowledge, and upon whom is he trying to force 'the Message,'" as he calls it? "Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts?" Are we school-children, that he treats us with his endless platitudes and repetitions—"precept upon precept and precept upon precept, line upon line and line upon line, here a little and there a little?" So did these bibulous prophets, priests, and politicians mock Isaiah's messages of judgment, wagging their heads in mimicry of his simple, earnest tones. "We must conceive the abrupt, intentionally short, reiterated and almost childish words of verse 10 as spoken in mimicry, with a mocking motion of the head, and in a childish, stammering, taunting tone."*

But Isaiah turns upon them with their own words: "You call me, Stammerer! I tell you that God, Who speaks through me, and Whom in me you mock, will one day speak again to you in a tongue that shall indeed sound stammering to you. When those far-off barbarians have reached your walls, and over them taunt you in uncouth tones, then shall you hear how God can stammer. For these shall be the very voice of Him, and as He threatens you with captivity it shall be your bitterness to remem-

* Ewald. The original runs thus: "Kitsav la-tsav, tsav la-tsav, qav la-qav, qav la-qav; z'eir sham z'eir sham."

ber how by me He once offered you 'a rest and refreshing,' which you refused. I tell you more. God will not only speak in words, but in deeds, and then truly your nickname for His message shall be fulfilled to you. Then shall the word of the Lord be unto you 'precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.' For God shall speak with the terrible simplicity and slowness of deeds, with the gradual growth of fate, with the monotonous stages of decay, till step by step you 'go, and stumble backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.' You have scorned my instruction as monosyllables fit for children! By irritating monosyllables of gradual penalty shall God instruct you the second time."

This is not only a very clever and cynical retort, but the statement of a moral principle. We gather from Isaiah that God speaks twice to men, first in words and then by deeds, but both times very simply and plainly. And if men deride and abuse the simplicity of the former, if they ignore moral and religious truths because they are elementary, and rebel against the quiet reiteration of simple voices, with which God sees it most healthy to conduct their education, then they shall be stunned by the commonplace pertinacity, with which the effects of their insolence work themselves out in life. God's ways with men are mostly commonplace: that is the hardest lesson we have to learn. The tongue of conscience speaks like the tongue of time, prevailing by ticks and moments; not in undue excitement of soul and body, not in the stirring up of our passions nor by enlisting our ambitions, not in thunder nor in startling visions, but by everyday precepts of faithfulness, honour, and purity, to which conscience has to rise unwinged by fancy or ambition, and dreadfully weighted with the dreariness of life. If we, carried away upon the rushing interests of the world, and with our appetite spoiled by the wealth and piquancy of intellectual knowledge, despise the simple monitions of conscience and Scripture, as uninteresting and childish, this is the risk we run,—that God will speak to us in another, and this time unshirkable, kind of commonplace. What that is we shall understand, when a career of dissipation or unscrupulous ambition has bereft life of all interest and joy, when one enthusiasm after another grows dull, and one pleasure after another tasteless, when all the little things of life preach to us of judgment, and "the grasshopper becometh a burden," and we, slowly descending through the drab and monotony of decay, suffer the last great commonplace, death. There can be no greater irony than for the soul, which has sinned by too greedily seeking for sensation, to find sensation absent even from the judgments she has brought upon herself. Poor Heine's "Confessions" acknowledge, at once with the appreciation of an artist and the pain of a victim, the satire, with which the Almighty inflicts, in the way that Isaiah describes, His penalties upon sins of sense.

III. COVENANTS WITH DEATH AND HELL (vv. 14-22).

To Isaiah's threats of destruction, the politicians of Jerusalem replied, We have bought destruction off! They meant some treaty with a

foreign power. Diplomacy is always obscure, and at that distance its details are buried for us in impenetrable darkness. But we may safely conclude that it was either the treaty of Ahaz with Assyria, or some counter-treaty executed with Egypt since this power began again to rise into pretentiousness, or more probably still it was a secret agreement with the southern power, while the open treaty with the northern was yet in force. Isaiah, from the way in which he speaks, seems to have been in ignorance of all, except that the politician's boast was an unhallowed, underhand intrigue, accomplished by much swindling and false conceit of cleverness. This wretched subterfuge Isaiah exposes in some of the most powerful sentences he ever uttered. A faithless diplomacy was never more thoroughly laid bare, in its miserable mixture of political pedantry and falsehood.

"Therefore hear the word of Jehovah, ye men of scorn, rulers of this people, which is in Jerusalem!

"Because ye have said, We have entered into a covenant with Death, and with Hell have we made a bargain: the 'Overflowing Scourge,'" a current phrase of Isaiah's which they fling back in his teeth, "when it passeth along, shall not come unto us. for we have set lies as our refuge, and in falsehood have we hidden ourselves" [the prophet's penetrating scorn drags up into their boast the secret conscience of their hearts, that after all lies did form the basis of this political arrangement], "therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I lay in Zion for foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." No need of swift couriers to Egypt, and fret and fever of poor political brains in Jerusalem! The word *make haste* is onomatopoeic, like our *fuss*, and, if *fuss* may be applied to the conduct of high affairs of state, its exact equivalent in meaning.

"And I will set justice for a line, and righteousness for a plummet, and hail shall sweep away the subterfuge of lies, and the secrecy shall waters overflow. And cancelled shall be your covenant with Death, and your bargain with Hell shall not stand."

"The 'Overflowing Scourge,'" indeed! "When it passeth over, then ye shall be unto it for trampling. As often as it passeth over, it shall take you away, for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night. Then shall it be sheer terror to realise 'the Message'!" Too late then for anything else. Had you realised "the Message" now, what rest and refreshing! But then only terror.

"For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself upon it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." This proverb seems to be struck out of the prophet by the belief of the politicians, that they are creating a stable and restful policy for Judah. It flashes an aspect of hopeless uneasiness over the whole political situation. However they make their bed, with Egypt's or Assyria's help, they shall not find it comfortable. No cleverness of theirs can create a satisfactory condition of affairs, no political arrangement, nothing short of faith, of absolute reliance on that bare foundation-stone laid in Zion,—God's assurance that Jerusalem is inviolable.

"For Jehovah shall arise as on Mount Perat-sim; He shall be stirred as in the valley of Gib-

eon, to do His deed—strange is this deed of His, and to bring to pass His act—strange is His act.

"Now, therefore, play no more the scorner, lest your bands be made tight, for a consumption, and that determined have I heard from the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, upon the whole*earth." This finishes the matter. Possibility of alliance there is for sane men nowhere in this world of Western Asia, so evidently near convulsion. Only the foundation-stone in Zion shall be left. Cling to that.

When the pedantic members of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, in the year 1650, were clinging with all the grip of their hard logic, but with very little heart, to the "Divine right of kings," and attempting an impossible state, whose statute-book was to be the Westminster Confession, and its chief executive officer King Charles II., Cromwell, then encamped at Musselburgh, sent them that letter in which the famous sentence occurs: "I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken. Precept may be upon precept, line may be upon line," he goes on to say, "and yet the Word of the Lord may be to some a word of Judgment; that they may fall backward, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken! There may be a spiritual fulness, which the world may call drunkenness; as in the second Chapter of the Acts. There may be, as well, a carnal confidence upon misunderstood and misapplied precepts, which may be called spiritual drunkenness. There may be a *Covenant* made with Death and Hell! I will not say yours was so. But judge if such things have a politic aim: To avoid the overflowing scourge; or, To accomplish worldly interests? And if therein you have confederated with wicked and carnal men, and have respect for them, or otherwise have drawn them in to associate with us, Whether this be a covenant of God and spiritual? Bethink yourselves; we hope we do.

"I pray you read the Twenty-eighth of Isaiah, from the fifth to the fifteenth verse. And do not scorn to know that it is the Spirit that quickens and giveth life."*

Cromwell, as we have said, is the best commentator Isaiah has ever had, and that by an instinct born, not only of the same faith, but of experience in tackling similar sorts of character. In this letter he is dealing, like Isaiah, with stubborn pedants, who are endeavouring to fasten the national fortunes upon a Procrustean policy. The diplomacy of Jerusalem was very clever; the Covenanting ecclesiasticism of Edinburgh was logical and consistent. But a Jewish alliance with Assyria and the attempt of Scotsmen to force their covenant upon the whole United Kingdom were equally sheer impossibilities. In either case "the bed was shorter than that a man could stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he could wrap himself in it." Both, too, were "covenants with Death and Hell;" for if the attempt of the Scots to secure Charles II. by the covenant was free from the falsehood of Jewish diplomacy, it was fatally certain, if successful, to have led to the subversion of their highest religious interests; and history has proved that Cromwell was no more than just in applying to it the strong expressions, which Isaiah uses of Judah's ominous treaties with the unscrupulous heathen. Over against so pedantic

an idea as that of forcing the life of the three nations into the mould of the one Covenant, and so fatal a folly as the attempt to commit the interests of religion to the keeping of the dissolute and perjured king, Cromwell stands in his great toleration of everything but unrighteousness and his strong conviction of three truths:—that the religious life of Great Britain and Ireland was too rich and varied for the Covenant; that national and religious interests so complicated and precious could be decided only upon the plainest principles of faith and justice; and that, tested by these principles, Charles II. and his crew were as utterly without worth to the nation and as pregnant with destruction, as Isaiah felt Assyria and Egypt to be to Judah. The battle-cries of the two parties at Dunbar are significant of the spiritual difference between them. That of the Scots was "The Covenant!" Cromwell's was Isaiah's own, "The Lord of Hosts!" However logical, religious, and sincere theirs might be, it was at the best a scheme of men too narrow for events, and fatally compromised by its association with Charles II. But Cromwell's battle-cry required only a moderately sincere faith from those who adopted it to ensure their victory. For to them it meant just what it had meant to Isaiah, loyalty to a Divine providence, supreme in righteousness, the willingness to be guided by events, interpreting them by no tradition or scheme, but only by conscience. He who understands this will be able to see which side was right in that strange civil war, where both so sincerely claimed to be Scriptural.

It may be wondered why we spend so much argument on comparing the attempt to force Charles II. into the Solemn League and Covenant with the impious treaty of Judah with the heathen. But the argument has not been wasted, if it have shown how even sincere and religious men may make covenants with death, and even Church creeds and constitutions become beds too short that a man may lie upon them, coverings narrower than that he can wrap himself in them. Not once or twice has it happened that an old and hallowed constitution has become, in the providence of God, unfit for the larger life of a people or of a Church, and yet is clung to by parties in that Church or people from motives of theological pedantry or ecclesiastical cowardice. Sooner or later a crisis is sure to arrive, in which the defective creed has to match itself against some interest of justice; and then endless compromises have to be entertained, that discover themselves perilously like "bargains with hell." If we of this generation have to make a public application of the twenty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, it lies in this direction. There are few things, to which his famous proverb of the short bed can be applied more aptly, than to the attempt to fasten down the religious life and thought of the present age too rigorously upon a creed of the fashion of two or three hundred years ago.

But Isaiah's words have wider application. Short of faith as he exemplified it, there is no possibility for the spirit of man to be free from uneasiness. It is so all along the scale of human endeavour. No power of patience or of hope is his, who cannot imagine possibilities of truth outside his own opinions. Nor trust a justice larger than his private rights. It is here very often that the real test of our faith meets us. If we seek to fit life solely to the conception of our privileges, if in the preaching of our opinions no mystery of

* Cromwell's Letters and Speeches," Letter cxxxvi.

higher truth awe us at least into reverence and caution; then, whatever religious creeds we profess, we are not men of faith, but shall surely inherit the bitterness and turmoil that are the portion of unbelievers. If we make it the chief aim of our politics to drive cheap bargains for our trade or to be consistent to party or class interests; if we trim our conscience to popular opinion; if we sell our honesty in business or our love in marriage, that we may be comfortable in the world; then, however firmly we be established in reputation or in welfare, we have given our spiritual nature a support utterly inadequate to its needs, and we shall never find rest. Sooner or later, a man must feel the pinch of having cut his life short of the demands of conscience. Only a generous loyalty to her decrees will leave him freedom of heart and room for his arm to swing. Nor will any philosophy, however comprehensive, nor poetic fancy, however elastic, be able without the complement of faith to arrange, to account for, or to console us for, the actual facts of experience. It is only belief in the God of Isaiah, a true and loving God, omnipotent Ruler of our life, that can bring us peace. There was never a sorrow that did not find explanation in that, never a tired thought that would not cling to it. There are no interests so scattered nor energies so far-reaching that there is not return and rest for them under the shadow of His wings. "He that believeth shall not make haste." "Be still," says a psalm of the same date as Isaiah—"Be still, and know that I am God."

IV. THE ALMIGHTY THE ALL-METHODICAL (vv. 23-29).

The patience of faith, which Isaiah has so nobly preached, he now proceeds to vindicate by reason. But the vindication implies that his audience are already in another mood. From confidence in their clever diplomacy, heedless of the fact that God has His own purposes concerning them, they have swung round to despair before His judgments. Their despair, however, is due to the same fault as their careless confidence—the forgetfulness that God works by counsel and method. Even a calamity, so universal and extreme as that of whose certainty the prophet has now convinced them, has its measure and its term. To persuade the crushed and superstitious Jews of this, Isaiah employs a parable. "You know," he says, "the husbandman. Have you ever seen him keep on 'harrowing and breaking the clods of his land' for mere sport, and without farther intention? Does not the harrowing time lead to the sowing time? Or again, when he threshes his crops, does he thresh for ever? Is threshing the end he has in view? Look, how he varies the rigour of his instrument by the kind of plant he threshes. For delicate plants, like fitches and cummin, he does not use the 'threshing sledge' with the sharp teeth, or the lumbering 'roller, but the fitches are beaten out with a staff and the cummin with a rod.' And in the case of 'bread corn,' which needs 'his roller and horses,' he does not use these upon it till it is all 'crushed to dust.'" The application of this parable is very evident. If the husbandman be so methodical and careful, shall the God who taught him not also be so? If the violent treatment of land and fruits be so measured and adapted for their greater fruitfulness and purity, ought we not to trust God to

have the same intentions in His violent treatment of His people? Isaiah here returns to his fundamental gospel: that the Almighty is the All-methodical, too. Men forget this. In their times of activity they think God indifferent; they are too occupied with their own schemes for shaping life, to imagine that He has any. In days of suffering, again, when disaster bursts, they conceive of God only as force and vengeance. Yet, says Isaiah, "Jehovah of hosts is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in that sort of wisdom which causes things to succeed." This last word of the chapter is very expressive. It literally means furtherance, help, salvation, and then the true wisdom or insight which ensures these: the wisdom which carries things through. It splendidly sums up Isaiah's gospel to the Jews, cowering like dogs before the coming calamity: God is not mere force or vengeance. His judgments are not chaos. But "He is wonderful in counsel," and all His ways have "furtherance" or "salvation" for their end.

We have said this is one of the finest prophecies of Isaiah. His political foresight was admirable, when he alone of his countrymen predicted the visitation of Assyria upon Judah. But now, when all are convinced of it, how still more wonderful does he seem facing that novel disaster, with the whole world's force behind it, and declaring its limit. He has not the temptation, so strong in prophets of judgment, to be a mere disaster-monger, and leave judgment on the horizon unrelieved. Nor is he afraid, as other predictors of evil have been, of the monster he has summoned to the land. The secret of this is that from the first he predicted the Assyrian invasion, not out of any private malice nor merely by superior political foresight, but because he knew—and knew, as he tells us, by the inspiration of God's own Spirit—that God required such an instrument to punish the unrighteousness of Judah. If the enemy was summoned by God at the first, surely till the last the enemy shall be in God's hand.

To this enemy we are now to see Isaiah turn with the same message he has delivered to the men of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX.

ATHEISM OF FORCE AND ATHEISM OF FEAR.

ISAIAH x. 5-34.

ABOUT 721 B. C.

IN chap. xxviii. Isaiah, speaking in the year 725 when Salmanassar IV. was marching on Samaria, had explained to the politicians of Jerusalem how entirely the Assyrian host was in the hand of Jehovah for the punishment of Samaria and the punishment and purification of Judah. The invasion which in that year loomed so awful was not unbridled force of destruction, implying the utter annihilation of God's people, as Damascus, Arpad, and Hamath had been annihilated. It was Jehovah's instrument for purifying His people, with its appointed term and its glorious intentions of fruitfulness and peace.

In the tenth chapter Isaiah turns with this truth to defy the Assyrian himself. It is four years later. Samaria has fallen. The judgment which the prophet spoke upon the luxurious cap-

ital has been fulfilled. All Ephraim is an Assyrian province. Judah stands for the first time face to face with Assyria. From Samaria to the borders of Judah is not quite two days' march, to the walls of Jerusalem a little over two. Now shall the Jews be able to put to the test their prophet's promise! What can possibly prevent Sargon from making Zion as Samaria, and carrying her people away in the track of the northern tribes to captivity?

There was a very fallacious human reason, and there was a very sound Divine one.

The fallacious human reason was the alliance which Ahaz had made with Assyria. In what state that alliance now was, does not clearly appear, but the most optimist of the Assyrian party at Jerusalem could not, after all that had happened, be feeling quite comfortable about it. The Assyrian was as unscrupulous as themselves. There was too much impetus in the rush of his northern floods to respect a tiny province like Judah, treaty or no treaty. Besides, Sargon had as good reason to suspect Jerusalem of intriguing with Egypt, as he had against Samaria or the Philistine cities; and the Assyrian kings had already shown their meaning of the covenant with Ahaz by stripping Judah of enormous tribute.

So Isaiah discounts in this prophecy Judah's treaty with Assyria. He speaks as if nothing was likely to prevent the Assyrian's immediate march upon Jerusalem. He puts into Sargon's mouth the intention of this, and makes him boast of the ease with which it can be accomplished (vv. 7-11). In the end of the prophecy he even describes the probable itinerary of the invader from the borders of Judah to his arrival on the heights, over against the Holy City (vv. 27 last clause to 32).*

"Cometh up from the North the Destroyer.

"He is come upon Ai; marcheth through Migron; at Michmash musters his baggage.

"They have passed through the Pass; 'Let Geba be our bivouac.'

"Terror-struck is Ramah; Gibeah of Saul hath fled.

"Make shrill thy voice, O daughter of Gallim! Listen, Laishah! Answer her, Anathoth!

"In mad flight is Madmenah; the dwellers in Gebim gather their stuff to flee.

"This very day he halteth at Nob; he waveth his hand at the Mount of the Daughter of Zion, the Hill of Jerusalem."

This is not actual fact; but it is vision of what may take place to-day or to-morrow. For there is nothing—not even that miserable treaty—to prevent such a violation of Jewish territory, within which, it ought to be kept in mind, lie all the places named by the prophet.

But the invasion of Judah and the arrival of the Assyrian on the heights over against Jerusalem does not mean that the Holy City and the shrine of Jehovah of hosts are to be destroyed; does not mean that all the prophecies of Isaiah about the security of this rallying-place for the remnant of God's people are to be annulled, and Israel annihilated. For just at the moment of the Assyrian's triumph, when he brandishes his hand over Jerusalem, as if he would harry it like a bird's nest, Isaiah beholds him struck down, and crash like the fall of a whole Lebanon of cedars (vv. 33, 34).

"Behold the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, lopping the topmost boughs with a sudden crash,

* It will be noticed that in the above version a different reading is adopted from the meaningless clause at the end of verse 27 in the English version, out of which a proper heading for the subsequent itinerary has been obtained by Robertson Smith (*Journal of Philology*, 1884, p. 62).

"And the high ones of stature hewn down, and the lofty are brought low!"

"Yea, He moweth down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon by a Mighty One falleth."

All this is poetry. We are not to suppose that the prophet actually expected the Assyrian to take the route, which he has laid down for him with so much detail. As a matter of fact, Sargon did not advance across the Jewish frontier, but turned away by the coast-land of Philistia to meet his enemy of Egypt, whom he defeated at Rafia, and then went home to Nineveh, leaving Judah alone. And, although some twenty years later the Assyrian did appear before Jerusalem, as threatening as Isaiah describes, and was cut down in as sudden and miraculous a manner, yet it was not by the itinerary Isaiah here marked for him that he came, but in quite another direction: from the southwest. What Isaiah merely insists upon is that there is nothing in that wretched treaty of Ahaz—that fallacious *human* reason—to keep Sargon from overrunning Judah to the very walls of Jerusalem, but that, even though he does so, there is a most suré *Divine* reason for the Holy City remaining inviolate.

The Assyrian expected to take Jerusalem. But he is not his own master. Though he knows it not, and his only instinct is that of destruction (ver. 7), he is the rod in God's hand. And when God shall have used him for the needed punishment of Judah, then will God visit upon him his arrogance and brutality. This man, who says he will exploit the whole earth as he harries a bird's nest (ver. 14), who believes in nothing but himself, saying, "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent," is but the instrument of God, and all his boasting is that of "the axe against him that heweth therewith and of the saw against him that wieldeth it." "As if," says the prophet, with a scorn still fresh for those who make material force the ultimate power in the universe—"As if a rod should shake them that lift it up, or as if a staff should lift up him that is not wood." By the way, Isaiah has a word for his countrymen. What folly is theirs, who now put all their trust in this world-force, and at another time cower in abject fear before it! Must he again bid them look higher, and see that Assyria is only the agent in God's work of first punishing the whole land, but afterwards redeeming His people! In the midst of denunciation the prophet's stern voice breaks into the promise of this later hope (vv. 24-27a); and at last the crash of the fallen Assyrian is scarcely still, before Isaiah has begun to declare a most glorious future of grace for Israel. But this carries us over into the eleventh chapter, and we had better first of all gather up the lessons of the tenth.

This prophecy of Isaiah contains a great Gospel and two great Protests, which the prophet was enabled to make in the strength of it: one against the Atheism of Force, and one against the Atheism of Fear.

The Gospel of the chapter is just that which we have already emphasised as the gospel *par excellence* of Isaiah: the Lord exalted in righteousness, God supreme over the supremest men and forces of the world. But we now see it carried to a height of daring not reached before. This was the first time that any man faced the sovereign force of the world in the full sweep of victory, and told himself and his fellow-men: "This is not travelling in the greatness of its

own strength, but is simply a dead, unconscious instrument in the hand of God." Let us, at the cost of a little repetition, get at the heart of this. We shall find it wonderfully modern.

Relief in God had hitherto been local and circumscribed. Each nation, as Isaiah tells us, had walked in the name of its god, and limited his power and prevision to its own life and territory. We do not blame the peoples for this. Their conception of God was narrow, because their life was narrow, and they confined the power of their deity to their own borders because, in fact, their thoughts seldom strayed beyond. But now the barriers, that had so long enclosed mankind in narrow circles, were being broken down. Men's thoughts travelled through the breaches, and learned that outside their fatherland there lay the world. Their lives thereupon widened immensely, but their theologies stood still. They felt the great forces which shook the world, but their gods remained the same petty, provincial deities. Then came this great Assyrian power, hurtling through the nations, laughing at their gods as idols, boasting that it was by his own strength he overcame them, and to simple eyes making good his boast as he harried the whole earth like a bird's nest. No wonder that men's hearts were drawn from the unseen spiritualities to this very visible brutality! No wonder all real faith in the gods seemed to be dying out, and that men made it the business of their lives to seek peace with this world-force, that was carrying everything, including the gods themselves, before it! Mankind was in danger of practical atheism: of placing, as Isaiah tells us, the ultimate faith which belongs to a righteous God in this brute force: of substituting embassies for prayers, tribute for sacrifice, and the tricks and compromises of diplomacy for the endeavour to live a holy and righteous life. Behold, what questions were at issue: questions that have come up again and again in the history of human thought, and that are tugging at us to-day harder than ever!—whether the visible, sensible forces of the universe, that break so rudely in upon our primitive theologies, are what we men have to make our peace with, or whether there is behind them a Being, who wields them for purposes, far transcending them, of justice and of love; whether, in short, we are to be materialists or believers in God. It is the same old, ever-new debate. The factors of it have only changed a little as we have become more learned. Where Isaiah felt the Assyrians, we are confronted by the evolution of nature and history, and the material forces into which it sometimes looks ominously like as if these could be analysed. Everything that has come forcibly and gloriously to the front of things, every drift that appears to dominate history, all that asserts its claim on our wonder, and offers its own simple and strong solution of our life—is our Assyria. It is precisely now, as then, a rush of new powers across the horizon of our knowledge, which makes the God, who was sufficient for the narrower knowledge of yesterday, seem petty and old-fashioned to-day. This problem no generation can escape, whose vision of the world has become wider than that of its predecessors. But Isaiah's greatness lay in this: that it was given to him to attack the problem the first time it presented itself to humanity with any serious force, and that he applied to it the only sure solution—a more lofty

and spiritual view of God than the one which it had found wanting. We may thus paraphrase his argument: "Give me a God who is more than a national patron, give me a God who cares only for righteousness, and I say that every material force the world exhibits is nothing but subordinate to Him. Brute force cannot be anything but an instrument, "an axe," "a saw," something essentially mechanical and in need of an arm to lift it. Postulate a supreme and righteous Ruler of the world, and you not only have all its movements explained, but may rest assured that it shall only be permitted to execute justice and purify men. The world cannot prevent their salvation, if God have willed this."

Isaiah's problem was thus the fundamental one between faith and atheism; but we must notice that it did not arise theoretically, nor did he meet it by an abstract proposition. This fundamental religious question—whether men are to trust in the visible forces of the world or in the invisible God—came up as a bit of practical politics. It was not to Isaiah a philosophical or theological question. It was an affair in the foreign policy of Judah.

Except to a few thinkers, the question between materialism and faith never does present itself as one of abstract argument. To the mass of men it is always a question of practical life. Statesmen meet it in their policies, private persons in the conduct of their fortunes. Few of us trouble our heads about an intellectual atheism, but the temptations to practical atheism abound unto us all day by day. Materialism never presents itself as a mere *ism*; it always takes some concrete form. Our Assyria may be the world in Christ's sense, that flood of successful, heartless, unscrupulous, scornful forces which burst on our innocence, with their challenge to make terms and pay tribute, or go down straightway in the struggle for existence. Beside their frank and forceful demands, how commonplace and irrelevant do the simple precepts of religion often seem; and how the great brazen laugh of the world seems to bleach the beauty out of purity and honour! According to our temper, we either cower before its insolence, whining that character and energy of struggle and religious peace are impossible against it; and that is the Atheism of Fear, with which Isaiah charged the men of Jerusalem, when they were paralysed before Assyria. Or we seek to ensure ourselves against disaster by alliance with the world. We make ourselves one with it, its subjects and imitators. We absorb the world's temper, get to believe in nothing but success, regard men only as they can be useful to us, and think so exclusively of ourselves as to lose the faculty of imagining about us any other right or need of pity. And all that is the Atheism of Force, with which Isaiah charged the Assyrian. It is useless to think that we common men cannot possibly sin after the grand manner of this imperial monster. In our measure we fatally can. In this commercial age private persons very easily rise to a position of influence, which gives almost as vast a stage for egotism to display itself as the Assyrian boasted. But after all the human Ego needs very little room to develop the possibilities of atheism that are in it. An idol is an idol, whether you put it on a small or a large pedestal. A little man with a little work may as easily stand between himself and God, as an emperor with the world at his feet. Forgetfulness that he is a servant,

a trader on graciously entrusted capital—and then at the best an unprofitable one—is not less sinful in a small egotist than in a great one; it is only very much more ridiculous, than Isaiah, **with** his scorn, has made it to appear in the Assyrian.

Or our Assyria may be the forces of nature, which have swept upon the knowledge of this generation with the novelty and impetus, with which the northern hosts burst across the horizon of Israel. Men to-day, in the course of their education, become acquainted with laws and forces, which dwarf the simpler theologies of their boyhood, pretty much as the primitive beliefs of Israel dwindled before the arrogant face of Assyria. The alternative confronts them either to retain, with a narrowed and fearful heart, their old conceptions of God, or to find their enthusiasm in studying, and their duty in relating themselves to, the forces of nature alone. If this be the only alternative, there can be no doubt but that most men will take the latter course. We ought as little to wonder at men of to-day abandoning certain theologies and forms of religion for a downright naturalism—for the study of powers that appeal so much to the curiosity and reverence of man—as we wonder at the poor Jews of the eighth century before Christ forsaking their provincial conceptions of God as a tribal Deity for homage to this great Assyrian, who handled the nations and their gods as his playthings. But is such the only alternative? Is there no higher and sovereign conception of God, in which even these natural forces may find their explanation and term? Isaiah found such a conception for his problem, and his problem was very similar to ours. Beneath his idea of God, exalted and spiritual, even the imperial Assyrian, in all his arrogance, fell subordinate and serviceable. The prophet's faith never wavered, and in the end was vindicated by history. Shall we not at least attempt his method of solution? We could not do better than by taking his factors. Isaiah got a God more powerful than Assyria, by simply *exalting* the old God of his nation *in righteousness*. This Hebrew was saved from the terrible conclusion, that the selfish, cruel force which in his day carried all before it was the highest power in life, simply by believing righteousness to be more exalted still. But have twenty-five centuries made any change upon this power, by which Isaiah interpreted history and overcame the world? Is righteousness less sovereign now than then, or was conscience more imperative when it spoke in Hebrew than when it speaks in English? Among the decrees of nature, at last interpreted for us in all their scope and reiterated upon our imaginations by the ablest men of the age, truth, purity, and civic justice as confidently assert their ultimate victory, as when they were threatened merely by the arrogance of a human despot. The discipline of science and the glories of the worship of nature are indeed justly vaunted over the childish and narrow-minded ideas of God that prevail in much of our average Christianity. But more glorious than anything in earth or heaven is character, and the adoration of a holy and loving will makes more for "victory and law" than the discipline or the enthusiasm of science. Therefore, if our conceptions of God are overwhelmed by what we know of nature, let us seek to enlarge and spiritualise them. Let us insist, as Isaiah did, upon His righteousness, until our God once more appear indubitably supreme.

Otherwise we are left with the intolerable paradox, that truth and honesty, patience and love of man to man, are after all but the playthings and victims of force; that, to adapt the words of Isaiah, the rod really shakes him who lifts it up, and the staff is wielding that which is not wood.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN MAN AND THE ANIMALS.

ISAIAH XI. 12.

ABOUT 720 B. C.?

BENEATH the crash of the Assyrian with which the tenth chapter closes, we pass out into the eleventh upon a glorious prospect of Israel's future. The Assyrian when he falls shall fall for ever like the cedars of Lebanon, that send no fresh sprout forth from their broken stumps. But out of the trunk of the Judæan oak, also brought down by these terrible storms, Isaiah sees springing a fair and powerful Branch. Assyria, he would tell us, has no future. Judah has a future, and at first the prophet sees it in a scion of her royal house. The nation shall be almost exterminated, the dynasty of David hewn to a stump; "yet there shall spring a shoot from the stock of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."

The picture of this future, which fills the eleventh chapter, is one of the most extensive that Isaiah has drawn. Three great prospects are unfolded in it: a prospect of mind, a prospect of nature, and a prospect of history. To begin with, there is (vv. 2-5) the geography of a royal mind in its stretches of character, knowledge, and achievement. We have next (vv. 5-9) a vision of the restitution of nature, Paradise regained. And, thirdly (vv. 9-16), there is the geography of Israel's redemption, the coasts and highways along which the hosts of the dispersion sweep up from captivity to a station of supremacy over the world. To this third prospect chapter xii. forms a fitting conclusion, a hymn of praise in the mouth of returning exiles.* The human mind, nature, and history are the three dimensions of life, and across them all the prophet tells us that the Spirit of the Lord will fill the future with His marvels of righteousness, wisdom, and peace. He presents to us three great ideals: the perfect indwelling of our humanity by the Spirit of God; the peace and communion of all nature, covered with the knowledge of God; the traversing of all history by the Divine purposes of redemption.

I. THE MESSIAH AND THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD (xi. 1-5).

The first form, in which Isaiah sees Israel's longed-for future realised, is that which he so often exalts and makes glistering upon the threshold of the future—the form of a king. It is a peculiarity, which we cannot fail to remark about Isaiah's scattered representations of this brilliant figure, that they have no connecting link.

*The authenticity of this hymn has been called in question.

They do not allude to one another, nor employ a common terminology, even the word *king* dropping out of some of them. The earliest of the series bestows a name on the Messiah, which none of the others repeat, nor does Isaiah say in any of them, This is He of whom I have spoken before. Perhaps the disconnectedness of these oracles is as strong a proof as is necessary of the view we have formed that throughout his ministry our prophet had before him no distinct, identical individual, but rather an ideal of virtue and kingdom, whose features varied according to the conditions of the time. In this chapter Isaiah recalls nothing of Immanuel, or of the Prince-of-the-Four-Names. Nevertheless (besides for the first time deriving the Messiah from the house of David), he carries his description forward to a stage which lies beyond and to some extent implies his two previous portraits. Immanuel was only a Sufferer with His people in the day of their oppression. The Prince-of-the-Four-Names was the Redeemer of his people from their captivity, and stepped to his throne not only after victory, but with the promise of a long and just government shining from the titles by which He was proclaimed. But now Isaiah not only speaks at length of this peaceful reign—a chronological advance—but describes his hero so inwardly that we also feel a certain spiritual advance. The Messiah is no more a mere experience, as Immanuel was, nor only outward deed and promise, like the Prince-of-the-Four-Names, but at last, and very strongly, *a character*. The second verse is the definition of this character; the third describes the atmosphere in which it lives. "And there shall rest upon him the Spirit of Jehovah, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah; and he shall draw breath in the fear of Jehovah"—in other words, ripeness but also sharpness of mind; moral decision and heroic energy; piety in its two forms of knowing the will of God and feeling the constraint to perform it. We could not have a more concise summary of the strong elements of a ruling mind. But it is only as Judge and Ruler that Isaiah cares here to think of his hero. Nothing is said of the tender virtues, and we feel that the prophet still stands in the days of the need of inflexible government and purgation in Judah.

Dean Plumptre has plausibly suggested, that these verses may represent the programme which Isaiah set before his pupil Hezekiah on his accession to the charge of a nation, whom his weak predecessor had suffered to lapse into such abuse of justice and laxity of morals.* The acts of government described are all of a punitive and repressive character. The hero speaks only to make the land tremble: "And He shall smite the land† with the rod of His mouth" [what need, after the whispering, indecisive Ahaz!], "and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked."

This, though a fuller and more ethical picture of the Messiah than even the ninth chapter, is

* Dean Plumptre notes the identity of the ethical terminology of this passage with that of the book of Proverbs, and conjectures that the additions to the original nucleus, chaps. x.-xxiv., and therefore the whole form, of the book of Proverbs, may be due to the editorship of Isaiah, and perhaps was the manual of ethics on which he sought to mould the character of Hezekiah (*Expositor*, series ii., v., p. 213).

† Perhaps for *land-carets*—we ought, with Lagarde, to read *tyrant-carits*.

evidently wanting in many of the traits of a perfect man. Isaiah has to grow in his conception of his Hero, and will grow as the years go on, in tenderness. His thirty-second chapter is a much richer, a more gracious and humane picture of the Messiah. There the Victor of the ninth and righteous Judge of the eleventh chapters is represented as *a Man*, who shall not only punish but protect, and not only reign but inspire, who shall be life as well as victory and justice to His people—"an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

A conception so limited to the qualifications of an earthly monarch, as this of chap. xi., gives us no ground for departing from our previous conclusion, that Isaiah had not a "supernatural" personality in his view. The Christian Church, however, has not confined the application of the passage to earthly kings and magistrates, but has seen its perfect fulfilment in the indwelling of Christ's human nature by the Holy Ghost. But it is remarkable, that for this exegesis she has not made use of the most "supernatural" of the details of character here portrayed. If the Old Testament has a phrase for sinlessness, that phrase occurs here, in the beginning of the third verse. In the authorised English version it is translated, "and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord," and in the Revised Version, "His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord," and on the margin the literal meaning of *delight* is given as *scent*. But the phrase may as well mean, "He shall draw his breath in the fear of the Lord"; and it is a great pity, that our revisers have not even on the margin given to English readers any suggestion of so picturesque, and probably so correct, a rendering. It is a most expressive definition of sinlessness—sinlessness which was the attribute of Christ alone. We, however purely intentioned we be, are compassed about by an atmosphere of sin. We cannot help breathing what now inflames our passions, now chills our warmest feelings, and makes our throats incapable of honest testimony or glorious praise. As oxygen to a dying fire, so the worldliness we breathe is to the sin within us. We cannot help it; it is the atmosphere into which we are born. But from this Christ alone of men was free. He was His own atmosphere, "drawing breath in the fear of the Lord." Of Him alone is it recorded, that, though living in the world, He was never infected with the world's sin. The blast of no man's cruelty ever kindled unholy wrath within His breast; nor did men's unbelief carry to His soul its deadly chill. Not even when He was led of the devil into the atmosphere of temptation, did His heart throb with one rebellious ambition. Christ "drew breath in the fear of the Lord."

But draughts of this atmosphere are possible to us also, to whom the Holy Spirit is granted. We too, who sicken with the tainted breath of society, and see the characters of children about us fall away and the hidden evil within leap to swift flame before the blasts of the world—we too may, by Christ's grace, "draw breath," like Him, "in the fear of the Lord." Recall some day when, leaving your close room and the smoky city, you breasted the hills of God, and into opened lungs drew deep draughts of the fresh air of heaven. What strength it gave your

body, and with what a glow of happiness your mind was filled! What that is physically, Christ has made possible for us men morally. He has revealed stretches and eminences of life, where, following in His footsteps, we also shall draw for our breath the fear of God. This air is inspired up every steep hill of effort, and upon all summits of worship. In the most passion-haunted air, prayer will immediately bring this atmosphere about a man, and on the wings of praise the poorest soul may rise from the miasma of temptation, and sing forth her song into the azure with as clear a throat as the lark's.

And what else is heaven to be, if not this? God, we are told, shall be its Sun; but its atmosphere shall be His fear, "which is clean and endureth for ever." Heaven seems most real as a moral open-air, where every breath is an inspiration, and every pulse a healthy joy, where no thoughts from within us find breath but those of obedience and praise, and all our passions and aspirations are of the will of God. He that lives near to Christ, and by Christ often seeks God in prayer, may create for himself even on earth such a heaven, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

II. THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD (xi. 2, 3).

This passage, which suggests so much of Christ, is also for Christian Theology and Art a classical passage on the Third Person of the Trinity. If the texts in the book of Revelation (chaps. i. 4; iii. 1; iv. 5; v. 6) upon the Seven Spirits of God were not themselves founded on this text of Isaiah, it is certain that the Church immediately began to interpret them by its details. While there are only six spirits of God named here—three pairs—yet, in order to complete the perfect number, the exegesis of early Christianity sometimes added "the Spirit of the Lord" at the beginning of verse 2 as the central branch of a seven-branched candlestick; or sometimes "the quick understanding in the fear of the Lord" in the beginning of verse 3 was attached as the seventh branch. (Compare Zech. iv. 6.)

It is remarkable that there is almost no single text of Scripture which has more impressed itself upon Christian doctrine and symbol than this second verse of the eleventh chapter, interpreted as a definition of the Seven Spirits of God. In the theology, art, and worship of the Middle Ages it dominated the expression of the work of the Holy Ghost. First, and most native to its origin, arose the employment of this text at the coronation of kings and the fencing of tribunals of justice. What Isaiah wrote for Hezekiah of Judah became the official prayer, song, or ensample of the earliest Christian kings in Europe. It is evidently the model of that royal hymn—not by Charlemagne, as usually supposed, but by his grandson Charles the Bald—the "*Veni Creator Spiritus*." In a Greek miniature of the tenth century, the Holy Spirit, as a dove, is seen hovering over King David, who displays the prayer: "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king's son," while there stand on either side of him the figures of Wisdom and Prophecy.* Henry III.'s order of

knighthood, "*Du Saint Esprit*," was restricted to political men, and particularly to magistrates. But perhaps the most interesting identification of the Holy Spirit with the rigorous virtues of our passage occurs in a story of St. Dunstan, who, just before mass on the day of Pentecost, discovered that three coiners, who had been sentenced to death, were being respited till the Festival of the Holy Ghost should be over. "It shall not be thus," cried the indignant saint, and gave orders for their immediate execution. There was remonstancé, but he, no doubt with the eleventh of Isaiah in mind, insisted, and was obeyed. "I now hope," he said, resuming the mass, "that God will be pleased to accept the sacrifice I am about to offer." "Whereupon," says the veracious "*Acts of the Saints*," "a snow-white dove did, in the vision of many, descend from heaven, and until the sacrifice was completed remain above his head in silence, with wings extended and motionless." Which may be as much legend as we have the heart to make it, but nevertheless remains a sure proof of the association, by discerning mediævals who could read their Scriptures, of the Holy Spirit with the decisiveness and rigorous justice of Isaiah's "mirror for magistrates."*

But the influence of our passage may be followed to that wider definition of the Spirit's work, which made Him the Fountain of all intelligence. The Spirits of the Lord mentioned by Isaiah are prevailingly intellectual; and the mediæval Church, using the details of this passage to interpret Christ's own intimation of the Paraclete as the Spirit of truth,—remembering also the story of Pentecost, when the Spirit bestowed the gifts of tongues, and the case of Stephen, who, in the triumph of his eloquence and learning, was said to be full of the Holy Ghost,—did regard, as Gregory of Tours expressly declared, the Holy Spirit as the "God of the intellect more than of the heart." All Councils were opened by a mass to the Holy Ghost, and few, who have examined with care the windows of mediæval churches, will have failed to be struck with the frequency with which the Dove is seen descending upon the heads of miraculously learned persons, or presiding at discussions, or hovering over groups of figures representing the sciences.† To the mediæval Church, then, the Holy Spirit was the Author of the intellect, more especially of the governing and political intellect; and there can be little doubt, after a study of the variations of this doctrine, that the first five verses of the eleventh of Isaiah formed upon it the classical text of appeal. To Christians, who have been accustomed by the use of the word *Comforter* to associate the Spirit only with the gentle and consoling influences of heaven, it may seem strange to find His energy identified with the stern rigour of the magistrate. But in its practical, intelligent, and reasonable uses the mediæval doctrine is greatly to be preferred, on grounds both of Scripture and common sense, to those two comparatively modern corruptions of it, one of which emphasises the Spirit's influence in the exclusive operation of the grace of orders, and the other, driving to an opposite extreme, dissipates it into the vaguest religiosity. It is one of

* Didron, "*Christian Iconography*," Engl. trans., i. 426.

† See Didron for numerous interesting instances of this.

* Didron, "*Christian Iconography*," Engl. trans., i. 432.

the curiosities of Christian theology, that a Divine influence, asserted by Scripture and believed by the early Church to manifest itself in the successful conduct of civil offices and the fulness of intellectual learning, should in these latter days be so often set up in a sort of "supernatural" opposition to practical wisdom and the results of science. But we may go back to Isaiah for the same kind of correction on this doctrine, as he has given us on the doctrine of faith; and while we do not forget the richer meaning the New Testament bestows on the operation of the Divine Spirit, we may learn from the Hebrew prophet to seek the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in all the endeavours of science, and not to forget that it is His guidance alone which enables us to succeed in the conduct of our offices and fortunes.

III. THE REDEMPTION OF NATURE (xi. 6-9).

But Isaiah will not be satisfied with the establishment of a strong government in the land and the redemption of human society from chaos. He prophesies the redemption of all nature as well. It is one of those errors, which distort both the poetry and truth of the Bible, to suppose that by the bears, lions, and reptiles which the prophet now sees tamed in the time of the regeneration, he intends the violent human characters which he so often attacks. When Isaiah here talks of the beasts, he means the beasts. The passage is not allegorical, but direct, and forms a parallel to the well-known passage in the eighth of Romans. Isaiah and Paul, chief apostles of the two covenants, both interrupt their magnificent odes upon the outpouring of the Spirit, to remind us that the benefits of this will be shared by the brute and unintelligent creation. And, perhaps, there is no finer contrast in the Scriptures than here, where beside so majestic a description of the intellectual faculties of humanity Isaiah places so charming a picture of the docility and sportfulness of wild animals,—“And a little child shall lead them.”

We, who live in countries from which wild beasts have been exterminated, cannot understand the insecurity and terror that they cause in regions where they abound. A modern seer of the times of regeneration would leave the wild animals out of his vision. They do not impress any more the human conscience or imagination. But they once did so most terribly. The hostility between man and the beasts not only formed once upon a time the chief material obstacle in the progress of the race, but remains still to the religious thinker the most pathetic portion of that groaning and travailing of all creation, which is so heavy a burden on his heart. Isaiah, from his ancient point of view, is in thorough accord with the order of civilisation, when he represents the subjugation of wild animals as the first problem of man, after he has established a strong government in the land. So far from rhetorising or allegorising—above which literary forms it would appear to be impossible for the appreciation of some of his commentators to follow him—Isaiah is earnestly celebrating a very real moment in the laborious progress of mankind. Isaiah stands where Hercules stood, and Theseus, and Arthur when

But man was less and less till Arthur came.

And he drave
The heathen, and he slew the beast, and felled
The forest, and let in the sun, and made
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight,
And so returned.”

But Isaiah would solve the grim problem of the warfare between man and his lower fellow-creatures in a very different way from that, of which these heroes have set the example to humanity. Isaiah would not have the wild beasts exterminated, but tamed. There our Western and modern imagination may fail to follow him, especially when he includes reptiles in the regeneration, and prophesies of adders and lizards as the playthings of children. But surely there is no genial man, who has watched the varied forms of life that sport in the Southern sunshine, who will not sympathise with the prophet in his joyous vision. Upon a warm spring day in Palestine, to sit upon the grass, beside some old dyke or ruin with its face to the south, is indeed to obtain a rapturous view of the wealth of life, with which the bountiful God has blessed and made merry man's dwelling-place. How the lizards come and go among the grey stones, and flash like jewels in the dust! And the timid snake rippling quickly past through the grass, and the leisurely tortoise, with his shiny back, and the chameleon, shivering into new colour as he passes from twig to stone and stone to straw,—all the air the while alive with the music of the cricket and the bee! You feel that the ideal is not to destroy these pretty things as vermin. What a loss of colour the lizards alone would imply! But, as Isaiah declares,—whom we may imagine walking with his children up the steep vineyard paths, to watch the creatures come and go upon the dry dykes on either hand,—the ideal is to bring them into sympathy with ourselves, make pets of them and playthings for children, who indeed stretch out their hands in joy to the pretty toys. Why should we need to fight with, or destroy, any of the happy life the Lord has created? Why have we this loathing to it, and need to defend ourselves from it, when there is so much suffering we could cure, and so much childlikeness we could amuse and be amused by, and yet it will not let us near? To these questions there is not another answer but the answer of the Bible: that this curse of conflict and distrust between man and his fellow-creatures is due to man's sin, and shall only be done away by man's redemption.

Nor is this Bible answer,—of which the book of Genesis gives us the one end, and this text of Isaiah the other,—a mere pious opinion, which the true history of man's dealing with wild beasts by extermination proves to be impracticable. We may take on scientific authority a few facts as hints from nature, that after all man is to blame for the wildness of the beasts, and that through his sanctification they may be restored to sympathy with himself. Charles Darwin says: “It deserves notice, that at an extremely ancient period, when man first entered any country the animals living there would have felt no instinctive or inherited fear of him, and would consequently have been tamed far more easily than at present.” And he gives some very instructive facts in proof of this with regard to dogs, antelopes, manatees, and hawks. “Quadrupeds and birds which have seldom been disturbed by man dread him no more than do our English birds the cows or horses grazing in the

“There grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,

fields."* Darwin's details are peculiarly pathetic in their revelation of the brutes' utter trustfulness in man, before they get to know him. Persons, who have had to do with individual animals of a species that has never been thoroughly tamed, are aware that the difficulty of training them lies in convincing them of our sincerity and good-heartedness, and that when this is got over they will learn almost any trick or habit. The well-known lines of Burns to the field-mouse gather up the cause of all this in a fashion very similar to the Bible's.

"I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union,
And justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor earth-born companion
And fellow-mortal."

How much the appeal of suffering animals to man—the look of a wounded horse or dog with a meaning which speech would only spoil, the tales of beasts of prey that in pain have turned to man as their physician, the approach of the wildest birds in winter to our feet as their Providence—how much all these prove Paul's saying that the "earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." And we have other signals, than those afforded by the pain and pressure of the beasts themselves, of the time when they and man shall sympathise. The natural history of many of our breeds of domesticated animals teaches us the lesson that their growth in skill and character—no one who has enjoyed the friendship of several dogs will dispute the possibility of character in the lower animals—has been proportionate to man's own. Though savages are fond of keeping and taming animals, they fail to advance them to the stages of cunning and discipline, which animals reach under the influence of civilised man.† "No instance is on record," says Darwin, "of such dogs as bloodhounds, spaniels, or true greyhounds having been kept by savages; they are the products of long-continued civilisation."

These facts, if few, certainly bear in the direction of Isaiah's prophecy, that not by extermination of the beasts, but by the influence upon them of man's greater force of character, may that warfare be brought to an end, of which man's sin, according to the Bible, is the original cause.

The practical "uses" of such a passage of Scripture as this are plain. Some of them are the awful responsibility of man's position as the keystone of creation, the material effects of sin, and especially the religiousness of our relation to the lower animals. More than once do the Hebrew prophets liken the Almighty's dealings with man to merciful man's dealings with his beasts.‡ Both Isaiah and Paul virtually declare that man discharges to the lower creatures a mediatorial office. To say so will of course seem an exaggeration to some people, but not to those who, besides being grateful to remember what help in labour and cheer in dreariness we owe our humble fellow-creatures, have been fortunate enough to enjoy the affection and trust of a dumb friend. Men who abuse the lower animals sin very grievously against God; men who neglect them lose some of the religious possibilities of life. If it is our business in life to

have the charge of animals, we should magnify our calling. Every coachman and carter ought to feel something of the priest about him; he should think no amount of skill and patience too heavy if it enables him to gain insight into the nature of creatures of God, all of whose hope, by Scripture and his own experience, is towards himself.

Our relation to the lower animals is one of the three great relations of our nature. For God our worship; for man our service; for the beasts our providence, and according both to Isaiah and Paul, the mediation of our holiness.

IV. THE RETURN AND SOVEREIGNTY OF ISRAEL (xi. 10-16).

In passing from the second to the third part of this prophecy, we cannot but feel that we descend to a lower point of view and a less pure atmosphere of spiritual ambition. Isaiah, who has just declared peace between man and beast, finds that Judah must clear off certain scores against her neighbours before there can be peace between man and man. It is an interesting psychological study. The prophet, who has been able to shake off man's primeval distrust and loathing of wild animals, cannot divest himself of the political tempers of his age. He admits, indeed, the reconciliation of Ephraim and Judah; but the first act of the reconciled brethren, he prophesies with exultation, will be to "swoop down upon" their cousins Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and their neighbours the Philistines. We need not longer dwell on this remarkable limitation of the prophet's spirit, except to point out that while Isaiah clearly saw that Israel's own purity would not be perfected except by her political debasement, he could not as yet perceive any way for the conversion of the rest of the world except through Israel's political supremacy.

The prophet, however, is more occupied with an event preliminary to Israel's sovereignty, namely the return from exile. His large and emphatic assertions remind the not yet captive Judah through how much captivity she has to pass before she can see the margin of the blessed future which he has been describing to her. Isaiah's words imply a much more general captivity than had taken place by the time he spoke them, and we see that he is still keeping steadily in view that thorough reduction of his people, to the prospect of which he was forced in his inaugural vision. Judah has to be dispersed, even as Ephraim has been, before the glories of this chapter shall be realised.

We postpone further treatment of this prophecy, along with the hymn (chap. xii.), which is attached to it, to a separate chapter, dealing with all the representations, which the first half of the book of Isaiah contains, of the return from exile.

CHAPTER XI.

DRIFTING TO EGYPT.

ISAIAH xx.; xxi. 1-10; xxxviii.; xxxix.

720-705 B. C.

FROM 720, when chap. xi. may have been published, to 705—or, by rough reckoning, from the fortieth to the fifty-fifth year of Isaiah's life—we

* Darwin, "Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication," pp. 20, 21.

† Galton, quoted by Darwin.

‡ Isa. lxiii. 13, 14; Hos. xi. 4.

cannot be sure that we have more than one prophecy from him; but two narratives have found a place in his book which relate events that must have taken place between 712 and 705. These narratives are chap. xx.: How Isaiah Walked Stripped and Barefoot for a Sign against Egypt, and chaps. xxxviii. and xxxix.: The Sickness of Hezekiah, with the Hymn he wrote, and his Behaviour before the Envoys from Babylon. The single prophecy belonging to this period is chap. xxi. 1-10, "Oracle of the Wilderness of the Sea," which announces the fall of Babylon. There has been considerable debate about the authorship of this oracle, but Cheyne, mainly following Dr. Kleinert, gives substantial reasons for leaving it with Isaiah. We postpone the full exposition of chaps. xxxviii., xxxix., to a later stage, as here it would only interrupt the history. But we will make use of chaps. xx. and xxi. 1-10 in the course of the following historical sketch, which is intended to connect the first great period of Isaiah's prophesying, 740-720, with the second, 705-701.

All these fifteen years, 720-705, Jerusalem was drifting to the refuge into which she plunged at the end of them—drifting to Egypt. Ahaz had firmly bound his people to Assyria, and in his reign there was no talk of an Egyptian alliance. But in 725, when the "overflowing scourge" of Assyrian invasion threatened to sweep into Judah as well as Samaria, Isaiah's words give us some hint of a recoil in the politics of Jerusalem towards the southern power. The "covenants with death and hell," which the men of scorn flaunted in his face as he harped on the danger from Assyria, may only have been the old treaties with Assyria herself, but the "falsehood and lies" that went with them were most probably intrigues with Egypt. Any Egyptian policy, however, that may have formed in Jerusalem before 719, was entirely discredited by the crushing defeat, which in that year Sargon inflicted upon the empire of the Nile, almost on her own borders, at Rafia.

Years of quietness for Palestine followed this decisive battle. Sargon, whose annals engraved on the great halls of Khorsabad enable us to read the history of the period year by year, tells us that his next campaigns were to the north of his empire, and till 711 he alludes to Palestine only to say that tribute was coming in regularly, or to mention the deportation to Hamath or Samaria of some tribe he had conquered far away. Egypt, however, was everywhere busy among his feudatories. Intrigue was Egypt's forte. She is always represented in Isaiah's pages as the talkative power of many promises. Her fair speech was very sweet to men groaning beneath the military pressure of Assyria. Her splendid past, in conjunction with the largeness of her promise, excited the popular imagination. Centres of her influence gathered in every state. An Egyptian party formed in Jerusalem. Their intrigue pushed mines in all directions, and before the century was out the Assyrian peace in Western Asia was broken by two great Explosions. The first of these, in 711, was local and abortive; the second, in 705, was universal, and for a time entirely destroyed the Assyrian supremacy.

The centre of the Explosion of 711 was Ashdod, a city of the Philistines. The king had suddenly refused to continue the Assyrian tribute, and Sargon had put another king in his place.

But the people—in Ashdod, as everywhere else, it was the people who were fascinated by Egypt—pulled down the Assyrian puppet and elevated Iaman, a friend to Pharaoh. The other cities of the Philistines, with Moab, Edom, and Judah, were prepared by Egyptian promise to throw in their lot with the rebels. Sargon gave them no time. "In the wrath of my heart, I did not divide my army, and I did not diminish the ranks, but I marched against Asdod with my warriors, who did not separate themselves from the traces of my sandals. I besieged, I took, Asdod and Gunt-Asdodim. . . . I then made again these towns. I placed the people whom my arm had conquered. I put over them my lieutenant as governor. I considered them like Assyrians, and they practised obedience."* It is upon this campaign of Sargon that Mr. Cheyne argues for the invasion of Judah, to which he assigns so many of Isaiah's prophecies, as, e. g., chaps. i. and x. 5-34. Some day Assyriology may give us proof of this supposition. We are without it just now. Sargon speaks no word of invading Judah, and the only part of the book of Isaiah that unmistakably refers to this time is the picturesque narrative of chap. xx.

In this we are told that "in the year" the *Tartan*, the Assyrian commander-in-chief, "came to Ashdod when Sargon king of Assyria sent him" [that is to be supposed the year of the first revolt in Ashdod, to which Sargon himself did not come], "and he fought against Ashdod and took it:—in that time Jehovah had spoken by the hand of Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth," the prophet's robe, "from off thy loins, and thy sandal strip from off thy foot; and he did so, walking naked," that is unfrocked, "and barefoot." For Egyptian intrigue was already busy; the temporary success of the Tartan at Ashdod did not discourage it, and it needed a protest. "And Jehovah said, As My servant Isaiah hath walked unfrocked and barefoot three years for a sign and a portent against Egypt and against Ethiopia" [note the double name, for the country was now divided between two rulers, the secret of her impotence to interfere forcibly in Palestine] "so shall the king of Assyria lead away the captives of Egypt and exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, stripped and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be dismayed and ashamed, because of Ethiopia their expectation and because of Egypt their boast. And the inhabitant of this coastland" [that is, all Palestine, and a name for it remarkably similar to the phrase used by Sargon, "the people of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab, dwelling by the sea"†] "shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we had fled for help to deliver ourselves from the king of Assyria, and how shall we escape—we?"

This parade of Isaiah for three years, unfrocked and barefoot, is another instance of that habit on which we remarked in connection with chap. viii. 1: the habit of finally carrying everything committed to him before the bar of the whole nation. It was to the mass of the people God said, "Come and let us reason together." Let us not despise Isaiah in his shirt any more than we do Diogenes in his tub, or with a lantern in his hand, seeking for a man by its rays at noonday. He was bent on startling the popular conscience, because he held it true that a

* "Records of the Past," vii. 40.

† Cheyne.

people's own morals have greater influence on their destinies than the policies of their statesmen. But especially anxious was Isaiah, as we shall again see from chap. xxxi., to bring this Egyptian policy home to the popular conscience. Egypt was a big-mouthed, blustering power, believed in by the mob: to expose her required public, picturesque, and persistent advertisement. So Isaiah continued his walk for three years. The fall of Ashdod, left by Egypt to itself, did not disillusion the Jews, and the rapid disappearance of Sargon to another part of his empire where there was trouble, gave the Egyptians audacity to continue their intrigues against him.*

Sargon's new trouble had broken out in Babylon, and was much more serious than any revolt in Syria. Merodach Baladan, king of Chaldea, was no ordinary vassal, but as dangerous a rival as Egypt. When he rose, it meant a contest between Babylon and Nineveh for the sovereignty of the world. He had long been preparing for war. He had an alliance with Elam, and the tribes of Mesopotamia were prepared for his signal of revolt. Among the charges brought him by Sargon is that, "against the will of the gods of Babylon, he had sent during twelve years ambassadors." One of these embassies may have been that which came to Hezekiah after his great sickness (chap. xxxix.). "And Hezekiah was glad of them, and showed them the house of his spicery, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah showed them not." Isaiah was indignant. He had hitherto kept the king from formally closing with Egypt; now he found him eager for an alliance with another of the powers of man. But instead of predicting the captivity of Babylon, as he predicted the captivity of Egypt, by the hand of Assyria, Isaiah declared, according to chap. xxxix., that Babylon would some day take Israel captive; and Hezekiah had to content himself with the prospect that this calamity was not to happen in his time.

Isaiah's prediction of the exile of Israel to Babylon is a matter of difficulty. The difficulty, however, is not that of conceiving how he could have foreseen an event which took place more than a century later. Even in 711 Babylon was not an unlikely competitor for the supremacy of the nations. Sargon himself felt that it was a crisis to meet her. Very little might have transferred the seat of power from the Tigris to the Euphrates. What, therefore, more probable than that when Hezekiah disclosed to these envoys the whole state of his resources, and excused himself by saying "that they were come from a far country, even Babylon," Isaiah, seized by a strong sense of how near Babylon stood to the throne of the nations, should laugh to scorn the excuse of distance, and tell the king that his anxiety to secure an alliance had only led him to place the temptation to rob him more in the face of a power that was certainly on the way to be able to do it? No, the difficulty is not that the prophet foretold a captivity of the Jews in Babylon, but that we cannot reconcile what he says of that captivity with his intimation of the immediate destruction of Babylon, which has come down to us in chap. xxi. 1-10.

In this prophecy Isaiah regards Babylon as he

has been regarding Egypt—certain to go down before Assyria, and therefore wholly unprofitable to Judah. If the Jews still thought of returning to Egypt when Sargon hurried back from completing her discomfiture in order to beset Babylon, Isaiah would tell them it was no use. Assyria has brought her full power to bear on the Babylonians; Elam and Media are with her. He travails with pain for the result. Babylon is not expecting a siege; but "preparing the table, eating and drinking," when suddenly the cry rings through her, "Arise, ye princes; anoint the shield." The enemy is upon us." So terrible and so sudden a warrior is this Sargon! At his words nations move; when he saith, "Go up, O Elam! Besiege, O Media!" it is done. And he falls upon his foes before their weapons are ready. Then the prophet shrinks back from the result of his imagination of how it happened—for that is too painful—upon the simple certainty, which God revealed to him, that it must happen. As surely as Sargon's columns went against Babylon, so surely must the message return that Babylon has fallen. Isaiah puts it this way. The Lord bade him get on his watchtower—that is his phrase for observing the signs of the times—and speak whatever he saw. And he saw a military column on the march: "a troop of horsemen by pairs, a troop of asses, a troop of camels." It passed him out of sight, "and he hearkened very diligently" for news. But none came. It was a long campaign. "And he cried like a lion" for impatience, "O my Lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower by day, and am set in my ward every night." Till at last, "behold, there came a troop of men, horsemen in pairs, and" now "one answered and said, Fallen, fallen is Babylon, and all the images of her gods he hath broken to the ground." The meaning of this very elliptical passage is just this: as surely as the prophet saw Sargon's columns go out against Babylon, so sure was he of her fall. Turning to his Jerusalem, he says, "My own threshed one, son of my floor, that which I have heard from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you." How gladly would I have told you otherwise! But this is His message and His will. Everything must go down before this Assyrian.

Sargon entered Babylon before the year was out, and with her conquest established his fear once more down to the borders of Egypt. In his lifetime neither Judah nor her neighbours attempted again to revolt. But Egypt's intrigue did not cease. Her mines were once more laid, and the feudatories of Assyria only waited for their favourite opportunity, a change of tyrants on the throne of Nineveh. This came very soon. In the fifteenth year of his reign, having finally established his empire, Sargon inscribed on the palace at Khorsabad the following prayer to Assur: "May it be that I, Sargon, who inhabit this palace, may be preserved by destiny during long years for a long life, for the happiness of my body, for the satisfaction of my heart, and may I arrive to my end! May I accumulate in this palace immense treasures, the booties of all countries, the products of mountains and valleys!" The god did not hear. A few months later, in 705, Sargon was murdered; and before Sennacherib, his successor, sat down on the throne, the whole of Assyrian supremacy in the southwest of Asia went up in the air. It was

* W. R. Smith, "Prophets of Israel," p. 282.

the second of the great Explosions we spoke of, and the rest of Isaiah's prophecies are concerned with its results.

BOOK III.

ORATIONS ON THE EGYPTIAN INTRIGUES AND ORACLES ON FOREIGN NATIONS, 705-702 B. C.

WE now enter the prophecies of Isaiah's old age, those which he published after 705, when his ministry had lasted for at least thirty-five years. They cover the years between 705, the date of Sennacherib's accession to the Assyrian throne, and 701, when his army suddenly disappeared from before Jerusalem.

They fall into three groups:—

1. Chaps. xxix.-xxxii., dealing with Jewish politics while Sennacherib is still far from Palestine, 704-702, and having Egypt for their chief interest, Assyria lowering in the background.

2. Chaps. xiv. 28-xxi. and xxiii., a group of oracles on foreign nations, threatened, like Judah, by Assyria.

3. Chaps. i., xxii., and xxxiii., and the historical narrative in xxxvi. and xxxvii., dealing with Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem in 701: Egypt and every foreign nation now fallen out of sight, and the storm about the Holy City too thick for the prophet to see beyond his immediate neighbourhood.

The *first and second* of these groups—orations on the intrigues with Egypt and oracles on the foreign nations—delivered while Sennacherib was still far from Syria, form the subject of this Third Book of our exposition.

The prophecies on the siege of Jerusalem are sufficiently numerous and distinctive to be put by themselves, along with their appendix (xxxviii., xxxix.), in our Fourth Book.

CHAPTER XII.

ARIEL, ARIEL.

ISAIAH xxix.

ABOUT 703 B. C.

IN 705 Sargon, King of Assyria, was murdered, and Sennacherib, his second son, succeeded him. Before the new ruler mounted the throne, the vast empire, which his father had consolidated, broke into rebellion, and down to the borders of Egypt cities and tribes declared themselves again independent. Sennacherib attacked his problem with Assyrian promptitude. There were two forces, to subdue which at the beginning made the reduction of the rest certain: Assyria's vassal kingdom and future rival for the supremacy of the world, Babylon; and her present rival, Egypt. Sennacherib marched on Babylon first.

While he did so the smaller States prepared to resist him. Too small to rely on their own resources, they looked to Egypt, and among others who sought help in that quarter was Judah. There had always been, as we have seen, an Egyptian party among the politicians of Jerusalem; and Assyria's difficulties now naturally increased its influence. Most of the prophecies

in chaps. xxix.-xxxii. are forward to condemn the alliance with Egypt and the irreligious politics of which it was the fruit.

At the beginning, however, other facts claim Isaiah's attention. After the first excitement, consequent on the threats of Sennacherib, the politicians do not seem to have been specially active. Sennacherib found the reduction of Babylon a harder task than he expected, and in the end it turned out to be three years before he was free to march upon Syria. As one winter after another left the work of the Assyrian army in Mesopotamia still unfinished, the political tension in Judah must have relaxed. The Government—for King Hezekiah seems at last to have been brought round to believe in Egypt—pursued their negotiations no longer with that decision and real patriotism, which the sense of near danger rouses in even the most selfish and mistaken of politicians, but rather with the heedlessness of principle, the desire to show their own cleverness, and the passion for intrigue which run riot among statesmen, when danger is near enough to give an excuse for doing something, but too far away to oblige anything to be done in earnest. Into this false ease, and the meaningless, faithless politics, which swarmed in it, Isaiah hurled his strong prophecy of chap. xxix. Before he exposes in chaps. xxx., xxxi., the folly of trusting to Egypt in the hour of danger, he has here the prior task of proving that hour to be near and very terrible. It is but one instance of the ignorance and fickleness of the people, that their prophet has first to rouse them to a sense of their peril, and then to restrain their excitement under it from rushing headlong for help to Egypt.

Chap. xxix. is an obscure oracle, but its obscurity is designed. Isaiah was dealing with a people in whom political security and religious formalism had stifled both reason and conscience. He sought to rouse them by a startling message in a mysterious form. He addressed the city by an enigma:—

"Ho! Ari-El, Ari-El! City David beleaguered! Add a year to a year, let the feasts run their round, then will I bring straitness upon Ari-El, and there shall be moaning and bemoaning,* and yet she shall be unto Me as an Ari-El."

The general bearing of this enigma became plain enough after the sore siege and sudden deliverance of Jerusalem in 701. But we are unable to make out one or two of its points. "Ari-El" may mean either "The Lion of God" (2 Sam. xxiii. 20), or "The Hearth of God" (Ezek. xliii. 15, 16). If the same sense is to be given to the four utterances of the name, then "God's-Lion" suits better the description of ver. 4; but "God's-Hearth" seems suggested by the feminine pronoun in ver. 1, and is a conception to which Isaiah returns in this same group of prophecies (xxx. 9). It is possible that this ambiguity was part of the prophet's design; but if he uses the name in both senses, some of the force of his enigma is lost to us. In any case, however, we get a picturesque form for a plain meaning. In a year after the present year is out, says Isaiah, God Himself will straiten the city, whose inhabitants are now so careless, and she shall be full of mourning and lamentation. Nevertheless in the end she shall be a true Ari-El: be it a true "God's-Lion,"

*Cheyne.

victor and hero; or a true "God's-Hearth," His own inviolable shrine and sanctuary.

The next few verses (3-8) expand this warning. In plain words, Jerusalem is to undergo a siege. God Himself shall "encamp against thee—round about" reads our English version, but more probably, as with the change of a letter, the Septuagint reads it—"like David." If we take this second reading, the reference to David in the enigma itself (ver. 1) becomes clear. The prophet has a very startling message to deliver: that God will besiege His own city, the city of David! Before God can make her in truth His own, make her verify her name, He will have to beleaguer and reduce her. For so novel and startling an intimation the prophet pleads a precedent: "'City which David' himself 'beleaguered!' Once before in thy history, ere the first time thou wast made God's own hearth, thou hadst to be besieged. As then, so now. Before thou canst again be a true Ari-El I must 'beleaguer thee like David.'" This reading and interpretation gives to the enigma a reason and a force which it does not otherwise possess.

Jerusalem, then, shall be reduced to the very dust, and whine and whimper in it (like a sick *lion*, if this be the figure the prophet is pursuing), when suddenly it is "the surge of" her foes—literally "thy strangers"—whom the prophet sees as "small dust, and as passing chaff shall the surge of tyrants be; yea, it shall be in the twinkling of an eye, suddenly. From Jehovah of hosts shall she be visited with thunder and with earthquake and a great noise,—storm-wind, and tempest and the flame of fire devouring. And it shall be as a dream, a vision of the night, the surge of all the nations that war against Ariel, yea all that war against her and her stronghold, and they that press in upon her. And it shall be as if the hungry had been dreaming, and lo! he was eating; but he hath awaked, and his soul is empty; and as if the thirsty had been dreaming, and lo! he was drinking; but he hath awaked, and lo! he is faint, and his soul is ravenous: thus shall be the surge of all the nations that war against Mount Zion." Now that is a very definite prediction, and in its essentials was fulfilled. In the end Jerusalem was invested by Sennacherib, and reduced to sore straits, when very suddenly—it would appear from other records, in a single night—the beleaguering force disappeared. This actually happened; and although the main business of a prophet, as we now clearly understand, was not to predict definite events, yet, since the result here predicted was one on which Isaiah staked his prophetic reputation and pledged the honour of Jehovah and the continuance of the true religion among men, it will be profitable for us to look at it for a little.

Isaiah foretells a great event and some details. The event is a double one: the reduction of Jerusalem to the direst straits by siege and her deliverance by the sudden disappearance of the besieging army. The details are that the siege will take place after a year (though the prophet's statement of time is perhaps too vague to be treated as a prediction), and that the deliverance will come as a great natural convulsion—thunder, earthquake, and fire—which it certainly did not do. The double event, however, stripped of these details, did essentially happen.

Now it is plain that any one with a considerable knowledge of the world at that day must

easily have been able to assert the probability of a siege of Jerusalem by the mixed nations who composed Sennacherib's armies. Isaiah's orations are full of proofs of his close acquaintance with the peoples of the world, and Assyria, who was above them. Moreover, his political advice, given at certain crises of Judah's history, was conspicuous not only for its religiousness, but for what we should call its "worldly-wisdom:" it was vindicated by events. Isaiah, however, would not have understood the distinction we have just made. To him political prudence was part of religion. "The Lord of hosts is for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn back the battle to the gate." Knowledge of men, experience of nations, the mental strength which never forgets history, and is quick to mark new movements as they rise, Isaiah would have called the direct inspiration of God. And it was certainly these qualities in this Hebrew, which provided him with the materials for his prediction of the siege of Jerusalem.

But it has not been found that such talents by themselves enable statesmen calmly to face the future, or clearly to predict it. Such knowledge of the past, such vigilance for the present, by themselves only embarrass, and often deceive. They are the materials for prediction, but a ruling principle is required to arrange them. A general may have a strong and well-drilled force under him, and a miserably weak foe in front; but if the sun is not going to rise to-morrow, if the laws of nature are not going to hold, his familiarity with his soldiers and expertness in handling them will not give him confidence to offer battle. He takes certain principles for granted, and on these his soldiers become of use to him, and he makes his venture. Even so Isaiah handled his mass of information by the grasp which he had of certain principles, and his facts fell clear into order before his confident eyes. He believed in the real government of God. "I also saw the Lord sitting, high and lifted up." He felt that God had even this Assyria in His hands. He knew that all God's ends were righteousness, and he was still of the conviction that Judah for her wickedness required punishment at the Lord's hands. Grant these convictions to him in the superhuman strength in which he tells us he was conscious of receiving them from God, and it is easy to see how Isaiah could not help predicting a speedy siege of Jerusalem, how he already beheld the valleys around her bristling with barbarian spears.

The prediction of the sudden raising of this siege was the equally natural corollary to another religious conviction, which held the prophet with as much intensity as that which possessed him with the need of Judah's punishment. Isaiah never slackened his hold on the truth that in the end God would save Zion, and keep her for Himself. Through whatever destruction, a root and remnant of the Jewish people must survive. Zion is impregnable because God is in her, and because her inviolateness is necessary for the continuance of true religion in the world. Therefore as confident as his prediction of the siege of Jerusalem is Isaiah's prediction of her delivery. And while the prophet wraps the fact in vague circumstance, while he masks, as it were, his ignorance of how in detail it will actually take place by calling up a great natural convulsion, yet he makes it abundantly clear—as, with his religious

convictions and his knowledge of the Assyrian power, he cannot help doing—that the deliverance will be unexpected and unexplainable by the natural circumstances of the Jews themselves, that it will be evident as the immediate deed of God.

It is well for us to understand this. We shall get rid of the mechanical idea of prophecy, according to which prophets made exact predictions of fact by some particular and purely official endowment. We shall feel that prediction of this kind was due to the most unmistakable inspiration, the influence upon the prophet's knowledge of affairs of two powerful religious convictions, for which he himself was strongly sure that he had the warrant of the Spirit of God.

Into the easy, selfish politics of Jerusalem, then, Isaiah sent this thunderbolt, this definite prediction: that in a year or more Jerusalem would be besieged and reduced to the direst straits. He tells us that it simply dazed the people. They were like men suddenly startled from sleep, who are too stupid to read a message pushed into their hands (vv. 9-12).

Then Isaiah gives God's own explanation of this stupidity. The cause of it is simply religious formalism. "This people draw nigh unto Me with their mouth, and with their lips do they honour Me, but their heart is far from Me, and their fear of Me is a mere commandment of men, a thing learned by rote." This was what Israel called religion—bare ritual and doctrine, a round of sacrifices and prayers in adherence to the tradition of the fathers. But in life they never thought of God. It did not occur to these citizens of Jerusalem that He cared about their politics, their conduct of justice, or their discussions and bargains with one another. Of these they said, taking their own way, "Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?" Only in the Temple did they feel God's fear, and there merely in imitation of one another. None had an original vision of God in real life; they learned other men's thoughts about Him, and took other men's words upon their lips, while their heart was far away. In fact, speaking words and listening to words had wearied the spirit and stifled the conscience of them.

For such a disposition Isaiah says there is only one cure. It is a new edition of his old gospel, that God speaks to us in facts, not forms. Worship and a lifeless doctrine have demoralised this people. God shall make Himself so felt in real life that even their dull senses shall not be able to mistake Him. "Therefore, behold, I am proceeding to work marvellously upon this people, a marvellous work and a wonder! and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the cleverness of their clever ones shall be obscured." This is not the promise of what we call a miracle. It is a historical event on the same theatre as the politicians are showing their cleverness, but it shall put them all to shame, and by its force make the dullest feel that God's own hand is in it. What the people had ceased to attribute to Jehovah was ordinary intelligence; they had virtually said, "He hath no understanding." The "marvellous work," therefore, which He threatens shall be a work of wisdom, not some convulsion of nature to cow their spirits, but a wonderful political result, that shall shame their conceit of cleverness, and teach them reverence for the will and skill of

God. Are the politicians trying to change the surface of the world, thinking that they "are turning things upside down," and supposing that they can keep God out of account: "Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?" God Himself is the real Arranger and Politician. He will turn things upside down! Compared with their attempt, how vast His results shall be! As if the whole surface of the earth were altered, "Lebanon changed into garden-land, and garden-land counted as forest!" But this, of course, is metaphor. The intent of the miracle is to show that God hath understanding; therefore it must be a work, the prudence and intellectual force of which politicians can appreciate, and it shall take place in their politics. But not for mere astonishment's sake is the "wonder" to be done. For blessing and morality shall it be: to cure the deaf and blind; to give to the meek and the poor a new joy; to confound the tyrant and the scorner; to make Israel worthy of God and her own great fathers. "Therefore thus saith Jehovah to the house of Jacob, He that redeemed Abraham: Not now ashamed shall Jacob be, and not now shall his countenance blanch." So unworthy hitherto have this stupid people been of so great ancestors! "But now when his (Jacob's) children behold the work of My hand in the midst of him, they shall hallow My name, yea, they shall hallow the Holy One of Jacob, and the God of Israel shall they make their fear. They also that err in spirit shall know understanding, and they that are unsettled shall learn to accept doctrine."

Such is the meaning of this strong chapter. It is instructive in two ways.

First, it very clearly declares Isaiah's view of the method of God's revelation. Isaiah says nothing of the Temple, the Shechinah, the Altar, or the Scripture; but he points out how much the exclusive confinement of religion to forms and texts has deadened the hearts of his countrymen towards God. In your real life, he says to them, you are to seek, and you shall find, Him. There He is evident in miracles,—not physical interruptions and convulsions, but social mercies and moral providences. The quickening of conscience, the dispersion of ignorance, poor men awakening to the fact that God is with them, the overthrow of the social tyrant, history's plain refutation of the atheist, the growth of civic justice and charity—In these, said the Hebrew prophet to the Old Testament believer, Behold your God!

Wherefore, *secondly*, we also are to look for God in events and deeds. We are to know that nothing can compensate us for the loss of the open vision of God's working in history and in life about us,—not ecstasy of worship nor orthodoxy of doctrine. To confine our religion to these latter things is to become dull towards God even in them, and to forget Him everywhere else. And this is a fault of our day, just as it was of Isaiah's. So much of our fear of God is conventional, orthodox, and not original, a trick caught from men's words or fashions, not a part of ourselves, nor won, like all that is real in us, from contact with real life. In our politics, in our conduct with men, in the struggle of our own hearts for knowledge and for temperance, and in service—there we are to learn to fear God. But there, and wherever else we are busy, self comes too much in the way; we are fascinated with our own cleverness; we ignore God, saying,

"Who seeth us? Who knoweth us?" We get to expect Him only in the Temple and on the Sabbath, and then only to influence our emotions. But it is in deeds, and where we feel life most real, that we are to look for Him. He makes Himself evident to us by wonderful works.

For these He has given us three theatres—the Bible, our country's history, and for each man his own life.

We have to take the Bible, and especially the life of Christ, and to tell ourselves that these wonderful events did really take place. In Christ God did dwell; by Christ He spoke to man; man was converted, redeemed, sanctified, beyond all doubt. These were real events. To be convinced of their reality were worth a hundred prayers.

Then let us follow the example of the Hebrew prophets, and search the history of our own people for the realities of God. Carlyle says in a note to Cromwell's fourth speech to Parliament, that "the Bible of every nation is its own history." This note is drawn from Carlyle by Cromwell's frequent insistence, that we must ever be turning from forms and rituals to study God's will and ways in history. And that speech of Cromwell is perhaps the best sermon ever delivered on the subject of this chapter. For he said: "What are all our histories but God manifesting Himself, that He hath shaken, and tumbled down and trampled upon everything that He hath not planted!" And again, speaking of our own history, he said to the House of Commons: "We are a people with the stamp of God upon us, . . . whose appearances and providences among us were not to be outmatched by any story." Truly this is national religion:—the reverential acknowledgment of God's hand in history; the admiration and effort of moral progress; the stirring of conscience when we see wrong; the expectation, when evil abounds, that God will bring justice and purity to us if we labour with Him for them.

But for each man there is the final duty of turning to himself.

"My soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening sense's hebetude,
She turns on my own life! So viewed,
No mere mote's breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of providence;
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read!"*

CHAPTER XIII.

POLITICS AND FAITH.

ISAIAH XXX.

ABOUT 720 B. C.

THIS prophecy of Isaiah rises out of circumstances a little more developed than those in which chap. xxix. was composed. Sennacherib is still engaged with Babylon, and it seems that it will yet be long before he marches his armies upon Syria. But Isaiah's warning has at last roused the politicians of Judah from their carelessness. We need not suppose that they believed all that Isaiah predicted about the dire siege which Jerusalem should shortly undergo and her sudden de-

liverance at the hand of the Lord. Without the two strong religious convictions, in the strength of which, as we have seen, he made the prediction, it was impossible to believe that this siege and deliverance must certainly happen. But the politicians were at least startled into doing something. They did not betake themselves to God, to whom it had been the purpose of Isaiah's last oration to shut them up. They only flung themselves with more haste into their intrigues with Egypt. But in truth haste and business were all that was in their politics: these were devoid both of intelligence and faith. Where the sole motive of conduct is fear, whether uneasiness or panic, force may be displayed, but neither sagacity nor any moral quality. This was the case with Judah's Egyptian policy, and Isaiah now spends two chapters in denouncing it. His condemnation is twofold. The negotiations with Egypt, he says, are bad politics and bad religion; but the bad religion is the root and source of the other. Yet while he vents all his scorn on the politics, he uses pity and sweet persuasiveness when he comes to speak of the eternal significance of the religion. The two chapters are also instructive, beyond most others of the Old Testament, in the light they cast on revelation—its scope and methods.

Isaiah begins with the bad politics. In order to understand how bad they were, we must turn for a little to this Egypt, with whom Judah was now seeking an alliance.

In our late campaign on the Upper Nile we heard a great deal of the Mudir of Dongola. His province covers part of the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia; and in Meirawi, the village whose name appeared in so many telegrams, we can still discover Meroe, the capital of Ethiopia. Now in Isaiah's day the king of Ethiopia was, what the Mudir of Dongola was at the time of our war, an ambitious person of no small energy; and the ruler of Egypt proper was, what the Khedive was, a person of little influence or resource. Consequently there happened what might have happened a few years ago but for the presence of the British army in Egypt. The Ethiopian came down the Nile, defeated Pharaoh and burned him alive. But he died, and his son died after him; and before their successor could also come down the Nile, the legitimate heir to Pharaoh had regained part of his power. Some years ensued of uncertainty as to who was the real ruler of Egypt.

It was in this time of unsettlement that Judah sought Egypt's help. The ignorance of the policy was manifest to all who were not blinded by fear of Assyria or party feeling. To Isaiah the Egyptian alliance is a folly and fatality that deserve all his scorn (vv. 1-8).

"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, executing a policy, but it is not from Me; and weaving a web, but not of My spirit, that they may heap sin upon sin; who set themselves on the way to go down to Egypt, and at My mouth they have not inquired, to flee to the refuge of Pharaoh, and to hide themselves in the shadow of Egypt. But the refuge of Pharaoh shall be unto you for shame, and the hiding in the shadow of Egypt for confusion!" How can a broken Egypt help you? "When his princes are at Zoan, and his ambassadors are come to Hanes, they shall all be ashamed of a people that cannot profit them, that are not for help nor for profit, but for shame, and also for reproach."

* Browning's "Christmas Eve."

Then Isaiah pictures the useless caravan which Judah has sent with tribute to Egypt, strings of asses and camels struggling through the desert, "land of trouble and anguish" amid lions and serpents, and all for "a people that shall not profit them" (ver. 6).

What tempted Judah to this profitless expenditure of time and money? Egypt had a great reputation, and was a mighty promiser. Her brilliant antiquity had given her a habit of generous promise, and dazzled other nations into trusting her. Indeed, so full were Egyptian politics of bluster and big language, that the Hebrews had a nickname for Egypt. They called her Rahab—Stormy-speech, Blusterer, Braggart. It was the term also for the crocodile, as being *a monster*, so that there was a picturesqueness as well as moral aptness in the name. Ay, says Isaiah, catching at the old name and putting to it another which describes Egyptian helplessness and inactivity, I call her Rahab Sit-still, Braggart-that-sitteth-still, Stormy-speech Stay-at-home. Blustering and inactivity, blustering and sitting still," that is her character; "for Egypt helpeth in vain and to no purpose."

Knowing how sometimes the fate of a government is affected by a happy speech or epigram, we can understand the effect of this cry upon the politicians of Jerusalem. But that he might impress it on the popular imagination and memory as well, Isaiah wrote his epigram on a tablet, and put it in a book. We must remind ourselves here of chap. xx., and remember how it tells us that Isaiah had already some years before this endeavoured to impress the popular imagination with the folly of an Egyptian alliance, "walking unfrocked and barefoot three years for a sign and a portent upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia" (see p. 666).

So that already Isaiah had appealed from politicians to people on this Egyptian question, just as he appealed thirty years ago from court to market-place on the question of Ephraim and Damascus.* It is another instance of that prophetic habit of his, on which we remarked in expounding chap. viii.; and we must again emphasise the habit, for chap. xxx. here swings round upon it. Whatever be the matter committed to him, Isaiah is not allowed to rest till he brings it home to the popular conscience; and however much he may be able to charge national disaster upon the folly of politicians or the obduracy of a king, it is the people whom he holds ultimately responsible. To Isaiah a nation's politics are not arbitrary; they are not dependent on the will of kings or the management of parties. They are the natural outcome of the nation's character. What the people are, that will their politics be. If you wish to reform the politics, you must first regenerate the people; and it is no use to inveigh against a senseless policy, like this Egyptian one, unless you go farther and expose the national temper which has made it possible. A people's own morals have greater influence on their destinies than their despots or legislators. Statesmen are what the State makes them. No Government will attempt a policy for which the nation behind it has not a conscience; and for the greater number of errors committed by their rulers, the blame must be laid on the people's own want of character or intelligence.

This is what Isaiah now drives home (xxx.

* Chap. viii. 1 (p. 647).

9 ff.). He tracks the bad politics to their source in bad religion, the Egyptian policy to its roots in the prevailing tempers of the people. The Egyptian policy was doubly stamped. It was disobedience to the word of God; it was satisfaction with falsehood. The statesmen of Judah shut their ears to God's spoken word; they allowed themselves to be duped by the Egyptian Pretence. But these, says Isaiah, are precisely the characteristics of the whole Jewish people. "For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the revelation of the Lord." It was these national failings—the want of virtues which are the very substance of a nation: truth and reverence or obedience—that had culminated in the senseless and suicidal alliance with Egypt. Isaiah fastens on their falsehood first: "Which say to the seers, Ye shall not see, and to the prophets, Ye shall not prophesy unto us right things; speak to us smooth things: prophesy deceits." No wonder such a character had been fascinated by "Rahab"! It was a natural Nemesis, that a people who desired from their teachers fair speech rather than true vision should be betrayed by the confidence their statesmen placed in the Blusterer, "that blustered and sat still." Truth is what this people first require, and therefore the revelation of the Lord will in the first instance be the revealing of the truth. Men who will strip pretence off the reality of things; men who will call things by their right names, as Isaiah had set himself to do; honest satirists and epigrammatists—these are the bearers of God's revelation. For it is one of the means of Divine salvation to call things by their right names, and here in God's revelation also epigrams have their place. So much for truth.

But reverence is truth's other self, for reverence is simply loyalty to the supremest truth. And it is against the truth that the Jews have chiefly sinned. They have shut their eyes to Egypt's real character, but that was a small sin beside this: that they turned their backs on the greatest reality of all—God Himself. "Get you out of the way," they said to the prophets, "turn out of the path; keep quiet in our presence about the Holy One of Israel!" Isaiah's effort rises to its culmination when he seeks to restore the sense of this Reality to his people. His spirit is kindled at the words "the Holy One of Israel," and to the end of chap. xxxi. leaps up in a series of brilliant and sometimes scorching descriptions of the name, the majesty, and the love of God. Isaiah is not content to have used his power of revelation to unveil the political truth about Egypt. He will make God Himself visible to this people. Passionately does he proceed to enforce upon the Jews what God thinks about their own condition (vv. 12-14), then to persuade them to rely upon Him alone, and wait for the working of His reasonable laws (vv. 15-18). Rising higher, he purges with pity their eyes to see God's very presence, their ears to hear His voice, their wounds to feel His touch (vv. 19-26). Then he remembers the cloud of invasion on the horizon, and bids them spell, in its uncouth masses, the articulate name of the Lord (vv. 27-33). And he closes with another series of figures by which God's wisdom, and His jealousy and His tenderness are made very bright to them (chap. xxxi.).

These brilliant prophecies may not have been given all at the same time: each is complete in itself. They do not all mention the negotiations

with Egypt, but they are all dark with the shadow of Assyria. Chap. xxx. 19-26 almost seem to have been written in a time of actual siege; but vv. 27-33 represent Assyria still upon the horizon. In this, however, these passages are fitly strung together: that they equally strain to impress a blind and hardened people with the will, the majesty, and the love of God their Saviour.

I. THE BULGING WALL (VV. 12-14).

Starting from their unwillingness to listen to the voice of the Lord in their Egyptian policy, Isaiah tells the people that if they refused to hear His word for guidance, they must now listen to it for judgment. "Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel: Because ye look down on this word, and trust in perverseness and crookedness, and lean thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, bulging out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant." "This iniquity," of course, is the embassy to Egypt. But that, as we have seen, is only the people's own evil character coming to a head; and by the breaking of the wall, we are therefore to suppose that the prophet means the collapse not only of this Egyptian policy, but of the whole estate and substance of the Jewish people. It will not be your enemy that will cause a breach in the nation, but your teeming iniquity shall cause the breach—to wit, this Egyptian folly. Judah will burst her bulwarks from the inside. You may build the strongest form of government round a people, you may buttress it with foreign alliances, but these shall simply prove occasions for the internal wickedness to break forth. Your supposed buttresses will prove real breaches; and of all your social structures there will not be left as much as will make the fragments of a single home, not "a sherd" big enough "to carry fire from the hearth, or to hold water from the cistern."

II. NOT ALLIANCES, BUT RELIANCE (VV. 15-18).

At this point, either Isaiah was stung by the demands of the politicians for an alternative to their restless Egyptian policy which he condemned, or more likely he rose, unaided by external influence, on the prophet's native instinct to find some purely religious ground on which to base his political advice. The result is one of the grandest of all his oracles. "For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not. But ye said, No, for upon horses will we flee; wherefore ye shall flee: and upon the swift will we ride; wherefore swift shall be they that pursue you! One thousand at the rebuke of one—at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a bare pole on the top of a mountain, and as a standard on an hill. And therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He hold aloof that He may have mercy upon you, for a God of judgment is the Lord; blessed are all they that wait for Him." The words of this passage are their own interpretation and enforcement, all but one; and as this one is obscure in

its English guise, and the passage really swings from it, we may devote a paragraph to its meaning.

"A God of judgment is the Lord" is an unfortunately ambiguous translation. We must not take *judgment* here in our familiar sense of the word. It is not a sudden deed of doom, but a long process of law. It means manner, method, design, order, system, the ideas, in short, which we sum up under the word "law." Just as we say of a man, "He is a man of judgment," and mean thereby not that by office he is a doer, but that by character he is a man of discernment and prudence, so simply does Isaiah say here that "Jehovah is a God of Judgment," and mean thereby not that He is One whose habit is sudden and awful deeds of penalty or salvation, but, on the contrary, that, having laid down His lines according to righteousness and established His laws in wisdom, He remains in His dealings with men consistent with these.

Now it is a great truth that the All-mighty and All-merciful is the All-methodical too; and no religion is complete in its creed or healthy in its influence, which does not insist equally on all these. It was just the want of this third article of faith which perverted the souls of the Jews in Isaiah's day, which (as we have seen under chapter i.) allowed them to make their worship so mechanical and material—for how could they have been satisfied with mere forms if they had but once conceived of God as having even ordinary intelligence?—and which turned their political life into such a mass of intrigue, conceit, and falsehood, for how could they have dared to suppose that they would get their own way, or have been so sure of their own cleverness, if only they had had a glimpse of the perception, that God, the Ruler of the world, had also His policy regarding them? They believed He was the Mighty, they believed He was the Merciful, but because they forgot that He was the Wise and the Worker by law, their faith in His might too often turned into superstitious terror, their faith in His mercy oscillated between the sleepy satisfaction that He was an indulgent God and the fretful impatience that He was an indifferent one. Therefore Isaiah persisted from first to last in this: that God worked by law; that He had His plan for Judah, as well as these politicians; and, as we shall shortly find him reminding them when intoxicated with their own cleverness "that He also is wise" (xxx. 2). Here by the same thought he bids them be at peace, and upon the rushing tides of politics, drawing them to that or the other mad venture, to swing by this anchor: that God has His own law and time for everything. No man could bring the charge of fatalism against such a policy of quietness. For it thrilled with intelligent appreciation of the Divine method. When Isaiah said, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength," he did not ask his restless countrymen to yield sullenly to an infinite force or to bow in stupidity beneath the inscrutable will of an arbitrary despot, but to bring their conduct into harmony with a reasonable and gracious plan, which might be read in the historical events of the time, and was vindicated by the loftiest religious convictions. Isaiah preached no submission to fate, but reverence for an all-wise Ruler, whose method was plain to every clear-sighted observer of the fortunes of the nations of the world, and whose

purpose could only be love and peace to His own people (*cf.* p. 644).

III. GOD'S TABLE IN THE MIDST OF THE ENEMIES (vv. 19-26).

This patient purpose of God Isaiah now proceeds to describe in its details. Every line of his description has its loveliness, and is to be separately appreciated. There is perhaps no fairer prospect from our prophet's many windows. It is not argument nor a programme, but a series of rapid glimpses, struck out by language, which often wants logical connection, but never fails to make us see.

To begin with, one thing is sure: the continuance of the national existence. Isaiah is true to his original vision—the survival of a remnant. “For a people in Zion—there shall be abiding in Jerusalem.” So the brief essential is flashed forth. “Thou shalt surely weep no more; surely He will be gracious unto thee at the voice of thy crying; with His hearing of thee He will answer thee.” Thus much of general promise had been already given. Now upon the vagueness of the Lord's delay Isaiah paints realistic details, only, however, that he may make more vivid the real presence of the Lord. The siege shall surely come, with its sorely concrete privations, but the Lord will be there, equally distinct. “And though the Lord give you the bread of penury and the water of tribulation” (perhaps the technical name for siege rations), “yet shall not thy Teacher hide Himself any more, but thine eyes shall ever be seeing thy Teacher; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way: walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand or when ye turn to the left.” Real, concrete sorrows, these are they that make the heavenly Teacher real! It is linguistically possible, and more in harmony with the rest of the passage, to turn “teachers,” as the English version has it, into the singular, and to render it by “Revealer.” The word is an active participle, “Moreh,” from the same verb as the noun “Torah,” which is constantly translated “Law” in our version, but is, in the Prophets at least, more nearly equivalent to “instruction,” or to our modern term “revelation” (*cf.* ver. 9). Looking thus to the One Revealer, and hearkening to the One Voice, “the lying and rebellious children” shall at last be restored to that capacity for truth and obedience the loss of which has been their ruin. Devoted to the Holy One of Israel, they shall scatter their idols as loathsome (ver. 22). But thereupon a wonder is to happen. As the besieged people, conscious of the One Great Presence in the midst of their encompassed city, cast their idols through the gates and over the walls, a marvellous vision of space and light and fulness of fresh food bursts upon their starved and straitened souls (ver. 23). Promise more sympathetic was never uttered to a besieged and famished city. Mark that all down the passage there is no mention of the noise or instruments of battle. The prophet has not spoken of the besiegers, who they may be, how they may come, nor of the fashion of their war, but only of the effects of the siege on those within: confinement, scant and bitter rations. And now he is almost wholly silent about the breaking up of the investing army and the trail of their slaughter. No battle breaks this siege, but a vision of openness

and plenty dawns noiselessly over its famine and closeness. It is not vengeance or blood that an exhausted and penitent people thirst after. But as they have been caged in a fortress, narrow, dark, and stony, so they thirst for the sight of the sower, and the drop of the rain on the broken, brown earth, and the juicy corn, and the meadow for their cribbed cattle, and the noise of brooks and waterfalls, and above and about it all fulness of light. “And He shall give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal, and bread, even the increase of the ground, and it shall be juicy and fat; thy cattle shall feed that day in a broad meadow. And the oxen and the young asses that till the ground shall eat savoury provender, winnowed with the shovel and with the fan. And there shall be upon every lofty mountain and upon every lifted hill rivers, streams of water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the hurt of His people and healeth the stroke of their wound.” It is one of Isaiah's fairest visions, and he is very much to be blamed who forces its beauty of nature into an allegory of spiritual things. Here literally God spreads His people a table in the midst of their enemies.

IV. THE NAME OF THE LORD (vv. 27-33).

But Isaiah lays down “the oaten pipe” and lifts again a brazen trumpet to his lips. Between him and that sunny landscape of the future, of whose pastoral details he has so sweetly sung, roll up now the uncouth masses of the Assyrian invasion, not yet fully gathered, far less broken. We are back in the present again, and the whole horizon is clouded.

The passage does not look like one from which comfort or edification can be derived, but it is of extreme interest. The first two verses, for instance, only require a little analysis to open a most instructive glimpse into the prophet's inner thoughts about the Assyrian progress, and show us how they work towards the expression of its full meaning. “Behold, the Name of Jehovah cometh from afar—burning His anger and awful the uplifting smoke; His lips are full of wrath, and His tongue as fire that devoureth; and His breath is as an overflowing torrent—even unto the neck it reacheth—to shake the nations in a sieve of destruction, and a bridle that leadeth astray on the jaws of the peoples.”

“The Name of Jehovah” is the phrase the prophets use when they wish to tell us of the personal presence of God. When we hear a name cried out, we understand immediately that a person is there. So when the prophet calls, “Behold, the Name of Jehovah,” in face of the prodigious advance of Assyria, we understand that he has caught some intuition of God's presence in that uplifting of the nations of the north at the word of the great King and their relentless sweep southward upon Palestine. In that movement God is personally present. The Divine presence Isaiah then describes in curiously mingled metaphor, which proves how gradually it was that he struggled to a knowledge of its purpose there. First of all he describes the advance of Assyria as a thunderstorm, heavy clouds

and darting, devouring fire. His imagination pictures a great face of wrath. The thick curtains of cloud as they roll over one another suggest the heavy lips, and the lightnings the fiery tongue. Then the figure passes from heaven to earth. The thunderstorm has burst, and becomes the "mountain torrent" which speedily "reaches the necks" of those who are caught in its bed. But then the prophet's conscience suggests something more than sudden and sheer force in this invasion, and the "tossing" of the torrent naturally leads him to express this new element in the figure of "a sieve." His thought about the Assyrian flood thus passes from one of simple force and rush to one of judgment and being well kept in 'and. He sees its ultimate check at Jerusalem, and so his last figure of it is the figure of "a bridle," or "lasso," such as is thrown upon the jaws of a wild animal when you wish to catch and tame him.

This gradual progress from the sense of sheer wild force, through that of personal wrath, to discipline and sparing is very interesting. Vague and chaotic that disaster rolled up the horizon upon Judah. "It cometh from afar." The politicians fled from it to their refuge behind the Egyptian Pretence. But Isaiah bids them face it. The longer they look, the more will conscience tell them that the unavoidable wrath of God is in it; no blustering Rahab will be able to hide them from the anger of the face that lowers there. But let them look longer still, and the unrelieved features of destruction will change to a hand that sifts and checks, the torrent will become a sieve, and the disaster show itself well held in by the power of their own God.

So wildly and impersonally still do the storms of sorrow and disaster roll up the horizon on men's eyes, and we fly in vague terror from them to our Egyptian refuges. So still does conscience tell us it is futile to flee from the anger of God, and we crouch hopeless beneath the rush of imaginations of unchecked wrath, blackening the heavens and turning every path of life to a tossing torrent. May it then be granted us to have some prophet at our side to bid us face our disaster once more, and see the discipline and judgment of the Lord, the tossing only of His careful sieve, in the wild and cruel waves! We may not be poets like Isaiah nor able to put the processes of our faith into such splendid metaphors as he, but faith is given us to follow the same course as his thoughts did, and to struggle till she arrives at the consciousness of God in the most uncouth judgments that darken her horizon—the consciousness of God present not only to smite, but to sift, and in the end to spare.

Of the angel who led Israel to the land of promise, God said, "My Name is in him." Our faith is not perfect till we can, like Isaiah, feel the same of the blackest angel, the heaviest disaster, God can send us, and be able to spell it out articulately: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth."

For delivery, says Isaiah, shall come to the people of God in the crisis, as sudden and as startling into song as the delivery from Egypt was. "Ye shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel."

After this interval of solemn gladness, the storm and fire break out afresh, and rage again

through the passage. But their direction is reversed, and whereas they had been shown rolling up the horizon as towards Judah, they are now shown rolling down the horizon in pursuit of the baffled Assyrian. The music of the verses is crashing. "And the Lord shall cause the peal * of His voice to be heard, and the lighting down of His arm to be seen in the fury of anger, yea flame of devouring fire—bursting and torrent and hailstones. For from the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be scattered when He shall smite with the rod. And every passage of the rod of fate which the Lord bringeth down upon him shall be with tabrets and harps, and in battles of waving shall he be fought against." The meaning is obscure but palpable. Probably the verse describes the ritual of the sacrifice to Moloch, to which there is no doubt the next verse alludes. To sympathise with the prophet's figure, we need of course an amount of information about the details of that ritual which we are very far from possessing. But Isaiah's meaning is evidently this: The destruction of the Assyrian host will be like a holocaust than a battle, like one of those fatal sacrifices to Moloch which are directed by the solemn waving of a staff, and accompanied by the music, not of war, but of festival. "Battles of waving" is a very obscure phrase, but the word translated "waving" is the technical term for the waving of the victim before the sacrifice to signify its dedication to the deity; "and these 'battles of waving' may perhaps have taken place in the fashion in which single victims were thrown from one spear to another till death ensued."† At all events, it is evident that Isaiah means to suggest that the Assyrian dispersion is a religious act, a solemn holocaust rather than one of this earth's ordinary battles, and directed by Jehovah Himself from heaven. This becomes clear enough in the next verse: "For a Topheth hath been set in order beforehand; yea, for Moloch is it arranged; He hath made it deep and broad; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a torrent of brimstone, shall kindle it." So the Assyrian power was in the end to go up in flame.

We postpone remarks on Isaiah's sense of the fierceness of the Divine righteousness till we reach his even finer expression of it in chap. xxxiii.

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD.

ISAIAH xxxi.

ABOUT 702 B. C.

CHAPTER XXXI., which forms an appendage to chaps. xxix. and xxx., can scarcely be reckoned among the more important prophecies of Isaiah. It is a repetition of the principles which the prophet has already proclaimed in connection with the faithless intrigues of Judah for an alliance with Egypt, and it was published at a time when the statesmen of Judah were further involved in these intrigues, when events were moving faster, and the prophet had to speak with more hurried words. Truths now familiar to us are expressed in less powerful language.

* So Dr. B. Davis, quoted by Cheyne.

† So Bredenkamp in his recent commentary on Isaiah.

But the chapter has its own value; it is remarkable for three very unusual descriptions of God, which govern the following exposition of it. They rise in climax, enforcing three truths:—that in the government of life we must take into account God's wisdom; we must be prepared to find many of His providences grim and savage-looking; but we must also believe that He is most tender and jealous for His people.

I. YET HE ALSO IS WISE (vv. 1-3).

We must suppose the negotiations with Egypt to have taken for the moment a favourable turn, and the statesmen who advocated them to be congratulating themselves upon some consequent addition to the fighting strength of Judah. They could point to many chariots and a strong body of cavalry in proof of their own wisdom and refutation of the prophet's maxim, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; in returning and rest shall ye be saved."

Isaiah simply answers their self-congratulation with the utterance of a new Woe, and it is in this that the first of the three extraordinary descriptions of God is placed. "Woe unto them that go down to Egypt for help; upon horses do they stay, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, and Jehovah they do not seek. Yet He also is wise." You have been clever and successful, but have you forgotten that "God also is wise," that He too has His policy, and acts reasonably and consistently? You think you have been making history; but God also works in history, and surely, to put it on the lowest ground, with as much cleverness and persistence as you do. "Yet He also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back His words, but will arise against the house of the evil-doers, and against the help of them that work iniquity."

This satire was the shaft best fitted to pierce the folly of the rulers of Judah. Wisdom, a reasonable plan for their aims and prudence in carrying it out, was the last thing they thought of associating with God, whom they relegated to what they called their religion—their temples, worship, and poetry. When their emotions were stirred by solemn services, or under great disaster, or in the hour of death, they remembered God, and it seemed natural to them that in these great exceptions of life He should interfere; but in their politics and their trade, in the common course and conduct of life, they ignored Him and put their trust in their own wisdom. They limited God to the ceremonies and exceptional occasions of life, when they looked for His glory or miraculous assistance, but they never thought that in their ordinary ways He had any interest or design.

The forgetfulness, against which Isaiah directs this shaft of satire, is the besetting sin of very religious people, of very successful people, and of very clever people.

It is the temptation of an ordinary Christian church-going people, like ourselves, with a religion so full of marvellous mercies, and so blessed with regular opportunities of worship, to think of God only in connection with these, and practically to ignore that along the far greater stretches of life He has any interest or purpose regarding us. Formally-religious people treat

God as if He were simply a constitutional sovereign, to step in at emergencies, and for the rest to play a nominal and ceremonial part in the conduct of their lives. Ignoring the Divine wisdom and ceaseless providence of God, and couching their hearts upon easy views of His benevolence, they have no other thought of Him than as a philanthropic magician, whose power is reserved to extricate men when they have got past helping themselves. From the earliest times that way of regarding God has been prevalent, and religious teachers have never failed to stigmatise it with the hardest name for folly. "Fools," says the Psalmist, "are afflicted when they draw near unto the gates of death; then," only then, "do they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." "Thou fool!" says Christ of the man who kept God out of the account of his life. God is not mocked, although we ignore half His being and confine our religion to such facile views of His nature. With this sarcasm, Isaiah reminds us that it is not a Fool who is on the throne of the universe; yet is the Being whom the imaginations of some men place there any better? O wise men, "God also is wise." Not by fits and starts of a benevolence similar to that of our own foolish and inconsistent hearts does He work. Consistency, reason, and law are the methods of His action; and they apply closely, irretrievably, to all of our life. Hath He promised evil? Then evil will proceed. Let us believe that God keeps His word; that He is thoroughly attentive to all we do; that His will concerns the whole of our life.

But the temptation to refuse to God even ordinary wisdom is also the temptation of very successful and very clever people, such as these Jewish politicians fancied themselves to be, or such as the Rich Fool in the parable. They have overcome all they have matched themselves against, and feel as if they were to be masters of their own future. Now the Bible and the testimony of men invariably declare that God has one way of meeting such fools—the way Isaiah suggests here. God meets them with their own weapons; He outmatches them in their own fashion. In the eighteenth Psalm it is written, "With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure, and with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward." The Rich Fool congratulates himself that his soul is his own; says God, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." The Jewish politicians pride themselves on their wisdom; "Yet God also is wise," says Isaiah significantly. After Moscow Napoleon is reported to have exclaimed, "The Almighty is too strong for me." But perhaps the most striking analogy to this satire of Isaiah is to be found in the "Confessions" of that Jew from whose living sepulchre we are so often startled with weird echoes of the laughter of the ancient prophets of his race. When Heine, Germany's greatest satirist, lay upon a bed to which his evil living had brought him before his time, and the pride of art, which had been, as he says, his god, was at last crushed, he tells us what it was that crushed him. They were singing his songs in every street of his native land, and his fame had gone out through the world, while he lay an exile and paralysed upon his "mattress-grave." "Alas!" he cries, "the irony of Heaven weighs heavily upon me. The great Author of the universe, the celestial Aristophanes, wished to show me, the petty, earthly, German Aristophanes, how my most

trenchant satires are only clumsy patchwork compared with His, and how immeasurably He excels me in humour and colossal wit." That is just a soul writing in its own heart's blood this terrible warning of Isaiah: "Yet God also is wise."

"Yea, the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses flesh, and not spirit; and when Jehovah shall stretch out His hand, both he that helpeth shall stumble, and he that is holpen shall fall, and they all shall perish together."

II. THE LION AND HIS PREY (ver. 4).

But notwithstanding what he has said about God destroying men who trust in their own cleverness, Isaiah goes on to assert that God is always ready to save what is worth saving. The people, the city, His own city—God will save that. To express God's persistent grace towards Jerusalem, Isaiah uses two figures borrowed from the beasts. Both of them are truly Homeric, and fire the imagination at once; but the first is not one we should have expected to find as a figure of the saving grace of God. Yet Isaiah knows it is not enough for men to remember how wise God always is. They need also to be reminded how grim and cruel He must sometimes appear, even in His saving providences.

"For thus saith Jehovah unto me: Like as when the lion growleth, and the young lion over his prey, if a mob of shepherds be called forth against him, from their voice he will not shrink in dismay, nor for their noise abase himself; so shall Jehovah of hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion and the hill thereof." A lion with a lamb in his claws, growling over it, while a crowd of shepherds come up against him; afraid to go near enough to kill him, they try to frighten him away by shouting at him. But he holds his prey unshrinking.

It is a figure that startles at first. To liken God with a saving hold upon His own to a wild lion with his claws in the prey. But horror plays the part of a good emphasis; while, if we look into the figure, we shall feel our horror change to appreciation. There is something majestic in that picture of the lion with the shouting shepherds, too afraid to strike him. "He will not be dismayed at their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them." Is it, after all, an unworthy figure of the Divine Claimant for this city, who kept unceasing hold upon her after His own manner, mysterious and lionlike to men, undisturbed by the screams, formulas, and prayers of her mob of politicians and treaty-mongers? For these are the "shepherds" Isaiah means—sham shepherds, the shrieking crew of politicians with their treaties and military display. God will save and carry Jerusalem His own way, paying no heed to such. "He will not be dismayed at their voice, nor abase Himself for the noise of them."

There is more than the unyielding persistency of Divine grace taught here. There is that to begin with. God will never let go what He has made His own; the souls He has redeemed from sin, the societies He has redeemed from barbarism, the characters He has hold of, the lives He has laid His hand upon. Persistency of saving grace—let us learn that confidently in the parable. But that is only half of what it is meant to teach. Look at the shepherds: shepherds

shouting round a lion; why does Isaiah put it that way, and not as David did—lions growling round a brave shepherd, with the lamb in his arms? Because it so appeared then in the life Isaiah was picturing, because it often looks the same in real life still. These politicians—they seemed, they played the part of shepherds; and Jehovah, who persistently frustrated their plans for the salvation of the State—He looked the lion, delivering Jerusalem to destruction. And very often to men does this arrangement of the parts repeat itself; and while human friends are anxious and energetic about them, God Himself appears in providences more lionlike than shepherdly. He grasps with the savage paw of death some one as dear to us as that city was to Isaiah. He rends our body or soul or estate. And friends and our own thoughts gather round the cruel bereavement or disaster with remonstrance and complaint. Our hearts cry out, doing, like shepherds, their best to scare by prayer and cries the foe they are too weak to kill. We all know the scene, and how shabby and mean that mob of human remonstrances looks in face of the great Foe, majestic though inarticulate, that with sullen persistence carries off its prey. All we can say in such times is that if it is God who is the lion, then it is for the best. For "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him;" and, after all, it is safer to rely on the mercies of God, lionlike though they be, than on the weak benevolences and officious pities of the best of human advisers. "Thy will be done"—let perfect reverence teach us to feel that, even when providence seems as savage as men that day thought God's will towards Jerusalem.

In addition then to remembering, when men seem by their cleverness and success to rule life, that God is wiser and His plans more powerful than theirs, we are not to forget, when men seem more anxious and merciful than His dark providence, that for all their argument and action His will shall not alter. But now we are to hear that this will, so hard and mysterious, is as merciful and tender as a mother's.

III. THE MOTHER-BIRD AND HER NEST (ver. 5).

"As birds hovering, so will Jehovah of hosts cover Jerusalem; He will cover and deliver it: He will pass over and preserve it." At last we are through dark providence, to the very heart of the Almighty. The meaning is familiar from its natural simplicity and frequent use in Scripture. Two features of it our version has not reproduced. The word "birds" means the smaller kind of feathered creatures, and the word "hovering" is feminine in the original: "As little mother-birds hovering, so will Jehovah of hosts protect Jerusalem." We have been watching in spring the hedge where we know is a nest. Suddenly the mother-bird, who has been sitting on a branch close by, flutters off her perch, passes backwards and forwards, with flapping wings that droop nervously towards the nest over her young. A hawk is in the sky, and till he disappears she will hover—the incarnation of motherly anxiety. This is Isaiah's figure. His native city, on which he poured so much of his heart in lyrics and parables, was again in danger. Sennacherib was descending upon her; and the pity of Isaiah's own heart for her, evil though she was, suggested to him a motherhood of pity in the breast of God. The suggestion

God Himself approved. Centuries after, when He assumed our flesh and spoke our language, when He put His love into parables lowly and familiar to our affections, there were none of them more beautiful than that which He uttered of this same city, weeping as He spake: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"

With such fountains in Scripture, we need not, as some have done, exalt the Virgin, or virtually make a fourth person in the Godhead, and that a woman, in order to satisfy those natural longings of the heart which the widespread worship of the mother of Jesus tells us are so peremptory. For all fulness dwelleth in God Himself. Not only may we rejoice in that pity and wise provision for our wants, in that pardon and generosity, which we associate with the name of father, but also in the wakefulness, the patience, the love, lovelier with fear, which make a mother's heart so dear and indispensable. We cannot tell along what wakened nerve the grace of God may reach our hearts; but Scripture has a medicine for every pain. And if any feel their weakness as little children feel it, let them know that the Spirit of God broods over them, as a mother over her babe; and if any are in pain or anxiety, and there is no human heart to suffer with them, let them know that as closely as a mother may come to suffer with her child, and as sensitive as she is to its danger, so sensitive is God Almighty to theirs, and that He gives them proof of their preciousness to Him by suffering with them.

How these three descriptions meet the three failings of our faith! We forget that God is ceaselessly at work in wisdom in our lives. We forget that God must sometimes, even when He is saving us, seem lionlike and cruel. We forget that "the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

Having thus made vivid the presence of their Lord to the purged eyes of His people, patient, powerful in order, wise in counsel, persistent in grace, and, last of all, very tender, Isaiah concludes with a cry to the people to turn to this Lord, from whom they have so deeply revolted. Let them cast away their idols, and there shall be no fear of the result of the Assyrian invasion. The Assyrians shall fall, not by the sword of man, but the immediate stroke of God. "And his rock shall pass away by reason of terror, and his princes shall be dismayed at the ensign, saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem." And so Isaiah closes this series of prophecies on the keynote with which it opened in the first verse of chap. xxix.: that Jerusalem is Ariel—"the hearth and altar, the dwelling-place and sanctuary, of God."

CHAPTER XV.

A MAN: CHARACTER AND THE CAPACITY TO DISCRIMINATE CHARACTER.

ISAIAH xxxii. 1-8.

ABOUT 720 B. C.?

THE Assyrians being thus disposed of, Isaiah turns to a prospect, on which we have scarcely heard him speak these twenty years, since As-

syria appeared on the frontier of Judah—the religious future and social progress of his own people. This he paints in a small prophecy of eight verses, the first eight of chap. xxxii.—verses 9-20 of that chapter apparently springing from somewhat different conditions.

The first eight verses of chap. xxxii. belong to a class of prophecies which we may call Isaiah's "escapes." Like St. Paul, Isaiah, when he has finished some exposition of God's dealings with His people or argument with the sinners among them, bursts upon an unencumbered vision of the future, and with roused conscience, and voice resonant from long debate, takes his loftiest flights of eloquence. In Isaiah's book we have several of these visions, and each bears a character of its own, according to the sort of sinners from whom the prophet shook himself loose to describe it and the kind of indignation that filled his heart at the time. We have already seen how in some of Isaiah's visions the Messiah has the chief place, while from others He is altogether absent. But here we come upon another inconsistency. Sometimes, as in chap. xi., Isaiah is content with nothing but a new dispensation—the entire transformation of nature, when there shall be no more desert or storm, but to the wild animals docility shall come, and among men an end to sorrow, fraud, and war. But again he limits his prophetic soul and promises less. As if, overcome by the spectacle of the more clamant needs and horrible vices of society, he had said, we must first get rid of these, we must supply those, before we can begin to dream of heaven. Such is Isaiah's feeling here. This prophecy is not a vision of society glorified, but of society established and reformed, with its foundation firmly settled (ver. 1), with its fountain forces in full operation (ver. 2), and with an absolute check laid upon its worst habits, as, for instance, the moral grossness, lying, and pretence which the prophet has been denouncing for several chapters (vv. 3-8). This moderation of the prophecy brings it within the range of practical morals; while the humanity of it, its freedom from Jewish or Oriental peculiarities, renders it thoroughly modern. If every unfulfilled prophecy ought to be an accusing conscience in the breast of the Christian Church, there will be none more clamant and practical than this one. Its demands are essential to the social interests of to-day.

In ver. 1 we have the presupposition of the whole prophecy: "Behold, in righteousness shall a king reign, and princes—according to justice shall they rule." A just government is always the basis of Isaiah's vision of the future. Here he defines it with greater abstractness than he has been wont to do. It is remarkable, that a writer, whose pen has already described the figure of the coming King so concretely and with so much detail, should here content himself with a general promise of a righteous government, regarding, as he seems to do, rather the office of kinghood, than any single eminent occupier of it. That the prophet of Immanuel, and still more the prophet of the Prince-of-the-Four-Names (ix. 7), and of the Son of Jesse (xi. 1), should be able to paint the ideal future, and speak of the just government that was to prevail in it, without at the same time referring to his previous very explicit promises of a royal Individual, is a fact which we cannot overlook in support of the opinion we have expressed on

pp. 661 and 662 concerning the object of Isaiah's Messianic hopes.

Nor is the vagueness of the first verse corrected by the terms of the second: "And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind," etc. We have already spoken of this verse as an ethical advance upon Isaiah's previous picture of the Messiah (see p. 662). But while, of course, the Messiah was to Isaiah the ideal of human character, and therefore shared whatsoever features he might foresee in its perfect development, it is evident that in this verse Isaiah is not thinking of the Messiah alone or particularly. When he says with such simplicity *a* man, he means any man, he means the ideal for every man. Having in ver. 1 laid down the foundation for social life, he tells us in ver. 2 what the shelter and fountain force of society are to be: not science nor material wealth, but personal influence, the strength and freshness of the human personality. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." After just government (ver. 1) great characters are the prophet's first demand (ver. 2), and then (vv. 3-8) he will ask for the capacity to discriminate character. "Character and the capacity to discriminate character" indeed summarises this prophecy.

I. A MAN (ver. 2).

Isaiah has described personal influence on so grand a scale that it is not surprising that the Church has leapt to his words as a direct prophecy of Jesus Christ. They are indeed a description of Him, out of whose shadow advancing time has not been able to carry the children of men, who has been the shelter and fertility of every generation since He was lifted up, and to whom the affections of individual hearts never rise higher than when they sing—

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

Such a rock was Christ indeed; but, in accordance with what we have said above, the prophet here has no individual specially in his view, but is rather laying down a general description of the influence of individual character, of which Christ Jesus was the highest instance. Taken in this sense, his famous words present us, *first*, with a philosophy of history, at the heart of which there is, *secondly*, a great gospel, and in the application of which there is, *thirdly*, a great ideal and duty for ourselves.

1. Isaiah gives us in this verse a *philosophy of history*. Great men are not the whole of life, but they are the condition of all the rest; if it were not for the big men, the little ones could scarcely live. The first requisites of religion and civilisation are outstanding characters.

In the East the following phenomenon is often observed. Where the desert touches a river-valley or oasis, the sand is in a continual state of drift from the wind, and it is this drift which is the real cause of the barrenness of such portions of the desert at least as abut upon the fertile land. For under the rain, or by infiltration of the river, plants often spring up through the sand, and there is sometimes promise of considerable fertility. It never lasts. Down comes

the periodic drift, and life is stunted or choked out. But set down a rock on the sand, and see the difference its presence makes. After a few showers, to the leeward side of this some blades will spring up; if you have patience, you will see in time a garden. How has the boulder produced this? Simply by arresting the drift.

Now that is exactly how great men benefit human life. A great man serves his generation, serves the whole race, by arresting the drift. Deadly forces, blind and fatal as the desert wind, sweep down human history. In the beginning it was the dread of Nature, the cold blast which blows from every quarter on the barbarian, and might have stunted men to animals. But into some soul God breathed a great breath of freedom, and the man defied Nature. Nature has had her revenge by burying the rebel in oblivion. On the distant horizon of history we can see, merely in some old legend, the evidence of his audacity. But the drift was arrested; behind the event men took shelter, in the shelter grew free, and learned to think out what the first great resister felt.

When history had left this rock behind, and the drift had again space to grow, the same thing happened; and the hero this time was Abraham. He laid his back to the practice of his forefathers, and lifting his brow to heaven, was the first to worship the One Unseen God. Abraham believed; and in the shadow of his faith, and sheltered by his example, his descendants learned to believe too. To-day from within the three great spiritual religions men look back to him as the father of the faithful.

When Isaiah, while all his countrymen were rushing down the mad, steep ways of politics, carried off by the only powers that were as yet known in these ways, fear of death and greed to be on the side of the strongest—when Isaiah stood still amid that panic rush, and uttered the memorable words, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; in returning and rest shall ye be saved," he stopped one of the most dangerous drifts in history, and created in its despite a shelter for those spiritual graces, which have always been the beauty of the State, and are now coming to be recognised as its strength.

When in the early critical days of the Church, that dark drift of Jewish custom, which had overflowed the barriers set to the old dispensation, threatened to spread its barrenness upon the fields of the Gentile world, already white to the harvest of Christ, and Peter and Barnabas and all the Apostles were carried away by it, what was it that saved Christianity? Under God, it was this: that Paul got up and, as he tells us, withstood Peter to the face.

And, again, when the powers of the Roman Church and the Roman Empire, checked for a little by the efforts which began the Reformation, gathered themselves together and rose in one awful front of emperor, cardinals, and princes at the Diet of Worms, what was it that stood fast against that drift of centuries, and proved the rock, under whose shelter men dared to read God's pure word again, and preach His Gospel? It was the word of a lonely monk: "Here stand I. I cannot otherwise. So help me, God."

So that Isaiah is right. A single man has been as "an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." History is swept by drifts: superstition, error, poisonous custom, dust-laden

controversy. What has saved humanity has been the uprising of some great man to resist those drifts, to set his will, strong through faith, against the prevailing tendency, and be the shelter of the weaker, but not less desirous, souls of his brethren. "The history of what man has accomplished in the world is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked there." Under God, personal human power is the highest force, and God has ever used it as His chief instrument.

2. But in this philosophy of history there is a Gospel. Isaiah's words are not only man's ideal; they are God's promise, and that promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the most conspicuous example—none others are near Him—of this personal influence in which Isaiah places all the shelter and revival of society. God has set His seal to the truth, that the greatest power in shaping human destiny is man himself, by becoming one with man, by using a human soul to be the Saviour of the race. "A man," says Isaiah, "shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land;" and the Rock of Ages was a Man. The world indeed knew that personal character could go higher than all else in the world, but they never knew how high till they saw Jesus Christ, or how often till they numbered His followers.

This figure of a rock, a rock resisting drift, gives us some idea, not only of the commanding influence of Christ's person, but of that special office from which all the glory of His person and of His name arises: that "He saves His people from their sins."

For what is sin? Sin is simply the longest, heaviest drift in human history. It arose in the beginning, and has carried everything before it since. "The oldest custom of the race," it is the most powerful habit of the individual. Men have reared against it government, education, philosophy, system after system of religion. But sin overwhelmed them all.

Only Christ resisted, and His resistance saves the world. Alone among human lives presented to our view, that of Christ is sinless. What is so prevalent in human nature that we cannot think of a human individual without it never stained Christ's life. Sin was about Him; it was not that He belonged to another sphere of things which lay above it. Sin was about Him. He rose from its midst with the same frailty as other men, encompassed by the same temptations; but where they rose to fall, He rose to stand, and standing, became the world's Saviour. The great tradition was broken; the drift was arrested. Sin never could be the same again after the sinless manhood of Christ. The old world's sins and cruel customs were shut out from the world that came after. Some of them ceased so absolutely as scarcely to be afterwards named; and the rest were so curbed that no civilised society suffered them to pass from its constraint, and no public conscience tolerated them as natural or necessary evils.

What the surface of the world's life bears so deeply, that does every individual, who puts his trust in Jesus, feel to the core. Of Jesus the believer can truly say that life on *this* side of Him is very different from life on *that*. Temptations keep far away from the heart that keeps near to Christ. Under the shadow of our Rock, for us the evil of the present loses all its suggestive-

ness, the evil of the past its awful surge of habit and guilty fear.

3. But there is not only a philosophy of history and a gospel in this promise of a *man*. There is a great duty and ideal for every one. If this prophecy distinctly reaches forward to Jesus Christ as its only perfect fulfilment, the vagueness of its expression permits of its application to all, and through Him its fulfilment by all becomes a possibility. Now each of us may be a rock, a shelter, and a source of fertility to the life around him in three modes of constant influence. We can be like Christ, the Rock, in shutting out from our neighbours the knowledge and infection of sin, in keeping our conversation so unsuggestive and unprovocative of evil, that, though sin drift upon us, it shall never drift through us. And we may be like Christ, the Rock, in shutting out blame from other men; in sheltering them from the east wind of pitiless prejudice, quarrel, or controversy; in stopping the unclean and bitter drifts of scandal and gossip. How many lives have lost their fertility for the want of a little silence and a little shadow! Some righteous people have a terribly northeastern exposure; children do not play about their doors, nor the prodigal stop there. And again, as there are a number of men and women who fall in struggling for virtue simply because they never see it successful in others, and the spectacle of one pure, heroic character would be their salvation, here is another way in which each servant of God may be a rock. Of the late Clerk Maxwell it was said, "He made faith in goodness easy to other men." "A man shall be as streams of water in a desert place."

II. CAPACITY TO DISTINGUISH CHARACTER (vv. 3-8).

But after the coming of this ideal, it is not paradise that is regained. Paradise is farther off. We must have truth to begin with: truth and the capacity to distinguish character. The sternness with which Isaiah thus postpones his earlier vision shows us how sore his heart was about the "lying" temper of his people. We have heard him deploring the fascination of their false minds by the Egyptian Pretence. Their falseness, however, had not only shown itself in their foreign politics, but in their treatment of one another, in their social fashions, judgments, and worships. In society there prevailed a want of moral insight and of moral courage. At home also the Jews had failed to call things by their right names (*cf.* p. 672). Therefore next in their future Isaiah desires the cure of moral blindness, haste, and cowardice (vv. 3, 4), with the explosion of all social lies (ver. 5). Men shall stand out for what they are, whether they be bad—for the bad shall not be wanting (vv. 6, 7)—or good (ver. 8). On righteous government (ver. 1) and influence of strong men (ver. 2) must follow social truthfulness (vv. 3-8). Such is the line of the prophet's demands. The details of vv. 3-8 are exceedingly interesting.

"And not closed shall be the eyes of them that see, and the ears of them that hear shall be pricked up." The context makes it clear that this is spoken, not of intellectual, but of moral, insight and alertness. "And the heart of the hasty shall learn how to know, and the tongue

of the stammerer be quick" (the verb is the same as the "hasty" of the previous clause) "to speak plain things. Startlingly plain things"—for the word literally means "blinding-white," and is so used of the sun—"startlingly plain," like that scorching epigram upon Egypt. The morally rash and the morally timid are equal fathers of lies.

In illustration Isaiah takes the conventional abuse of certain moral terms, exposes it and declares it shall cease: "The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful." "Liberal" and "bountiful" were conventional names. The Hebrew word for "liberal" originally meant exactly that—"open-hearted, generous, magnanimous." In the East it is the character which above all they call princely. So like our words "noble" and "nobility," it became a term of rank, lord or prince, and was often applied to men who were not at all great-hearted, but the very opposite—even to the "vile person." "Vile person" is literally the "faded" or the "exhausted," whether mentally or morally—the last kind of character that could be princely. The other conventional terms used by Isaiah refers to wealth rather than rank. The Hebrew for "bountiful" literally means "abundant," a man blessed with plenty, and is used in the Old Testament both for the rich and the fortunate. Its nearest English equivalent is perhaps "the successful man." To this Isaiah fitly opposes a name, wrongly rendered in our version "churl," but corrected in the margin to "crafty"—the "fraudulent," "the knave." When moral discrimination comes, says Isaiah, men will not apply the term "princely" to "worn-out" characters, nor grant them the social respect implied by the term. They will not call the "fraudulent" the "fortunate," nor canonise him as successful, who has gotten his wealth by underhand means. "The worthless character shall no more be called princely, nor the knave hailed as the successful." But men's characters shall stand out true in their actions, and by their fruits ye shall know them. In those magic days the heart shall come to the lips, and its effects be unmistakable. "For the worthless person, worthless shall he speak"—what else can he?—"and his heart shall do iniquity, to practise profaneness and to utter against the Lord rank error, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The tools, too, of the knave" (a play upon words here—"Keli Keláv"—the knave his knives) "are evil; he! low tricks he deviseth to destroy the poor with words of falsehood, even when the poor speaks justice" (that is, has justice as well as poverty to plead for him). "But the princely things shall stand"—not upon conventional titles or rank, or the respect of insincere hearts, but upon actual deeds of generosity and sacrifice.

After great characters, then, what society needs is capacity to discern character, and the chief obstacle in the way of this discernment is the substitution of a conventional morality for a true morality, and of some distinction of man's making for the eternal difference which God has set between right and wrong.

Human progress consists, according to Isaiah, of getting rid of these conventions; and in this history bears him out. The abolition of slavery, the recognition of the essential nobility of la-

bour, the abolition of infanticide, the emancipation of woman—all these are due to the release of men's minds from purely conventional notions, and the courageous application in their place of the fundamental laws of righteousness and love. If progress is still to continue, it must be by the same method. In many directions it is still a false conventionalism,—sometimes the relic of barbarism, sometimes the fruit of civilisation,—that blocks the way. The savage notions which obstruct the enforcement of masculine purity have to be exposed. Nor shall we ever get true commercial prosperity, or the sense of security which is indispensable to that, till men begin to cease calling transactions all right merely because they are the customs of the trade and the means to which its members look for profits.

But, above all, as Isaiah tells us, we need to look to our use of language. It is one of the standing necessities of pure science to revise the terminology, to reserve for each object a special name, and see that all men understand the same object by the same name. Otherwise confusion comes in, and science is impossible. The necessity, though not so faithfully recognised, is as imperative in morals. If we consider the disgraceful mistakes in popular morals which have been produced by the transference and degradation of names, we shall feel it to be a religious duty to preserve for these their proper meaning. In the interests of morality, we must not be careless in our use of moral terms. As Socrates says in the *Thædo*: "To use words wrongly and indefinitely is not merely an error in itself; it also creates evil in the soul."* What noxious misconceptions, what mistaken ideals of life, are due to the abuse of these four words alone: "noble," "gentleman," "honour" and "Christian"! By applying these, in flattery or deceit, to persons unworthy of them, men have not only deprived them of the virtue which originally the mere utterance of them was enough to instil into the heart, but have sent forth to the world under their attractiveness second-rate types of character and ideals. The word "gentleman"! How the heart sickens as it thinks what a number of people have been satisfied to aim at a shoddy and superficial life because it was labelled with this gracious name. Conventionalism has deprived the English language of some of its most powerful sermons by devoting terms of singular moral expressiveness to do duty as mere labels upon characters that are dead, or on ranks and offices, for the designation of which mere cyphers might have sufficed.

We must not forget, however, Isaiah's chief means for the abolition of this conventionalism and the substitution of a true moral vision and terminology. These results are to follow from the presence of the great character, "A Man," whom he has already lifted up. Conventionalism is another of the drifts which that Rock has to arrest. Setting ourselves to revise our dictionaries or to restore to our words their original meanings out of our memories is never enough. The rising of a conspicuous character alone can dissipate the moral haze; the sense of his influence will alone fill emptied forms with meaning. So Christ Jesus judged and judges the world by His simple presence; men fall to His right hand and to His left. He calls things by their

* Cf. further with this passage F. J. Church, "Trial and Death of Socrates," *Introd.* xli. ff.

right names, and restores to each term of religion and morals its original ideal, which the vulgar use of the world has worn away.*

CHAPTER XVI.

ISAIAH TO WOMEN.

ISAIAH xxxii. 9-20.

DATE UNCERTAIN.

THE date of this prophecy, which has been appended to those spoken by Isaiah during the Egyptian intrigues (704-702), is not certain. It is addressed to women, and there is no reason why the prophet, when he was upbraiding the men of Judah for their false optimism, should not also have sought to awaken the conscience of their wives and daughters on what is the besetting sin rather of women than of men. The chief evidence for dissociating the prophecy from its immediate predecessors is that it predicts, or apparently predicts (vv. 13-14), the ruin of Jerusalem, whereas in these years Isaiah was careful to exempt the Holy City from the fate which he saw falling on the rest of the land. But otherwise the argument of the prophecy is almost exactly that of chaps. xxix.-xxx. By using the same words when he blames the women for "ease" and "carelessness" in vv. 9-11, as he does when he promises "confidence" and "quiet resting-places" in vv. 17, 18, Isaiah makes clear that his purpose is to contrast the false optimism of society during the postponement of the Assyrian invasion with that confidence and stability upon righteousness which the Spirit of God can alone create. The prophecy, too, has the usual three stages: sin in the present, judgment in the immediate future, and a state of blessedness in the latter days. The near date at which judgment is threatened—"days beyond a year"—ought to be compared with chap. xxix. 1: "Add ye a year to a year; let the feasts come round."

The new points are—that it is the women who are threatened, that Jerusalem itself is pictured in ruin, and that the pouring out of the Spirit is promised as the cause of the blessed future.

I. THE CHARGE TO THE WOMEN (vv. 9-12)

is especially interesting, not merely for its own terms, but because it is only part of a treatment of women which runs through the whole of Scripture.

Isaiah had already delivered against the women of Jerusalem a severe diatribe (chap. iii.), the burden of which was their vanity and haughtiness. With the satiric temper, which distinguishes his earlier prophecies, he had mimicked their ogling and mincing gait, and described pin by pin their fashions and ornaments, promising them instead of these things "rottenness" and "baldness," and "a girdle of sackcloth and branding for beauty." But he has grown older, and penetrating below their outward fashion and gait, he charges them with thoughtlessness as

* Cf. with the fifth and sixth verses of chap. xxxii. the forcible passage in the introduction to Carlyle's "Cromwell's Letters," beginning, "Sure enough, in the Heroic Century, as in the Unheroic, knaves and cowards . . . were not wanting. But the question always remains, Did they lie chained?" etc.

the besetting sin of their sex. "Ye women that are at ease, rise up, and hear my voice; ye careless daughters, give ear to my speech. For days beyond a year shall ye be troubled, O careless women, for the vintage shall fail; the ingathering shall not come. Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones." By a pair of epithets he describes their fault; and almost thrice does he repeat the pair, as if he would emphasise it past all doubt. The besetting sin of women, as he dips into them, is ease; an ignorant and unthinking contentment with things as they are; thoughtlessness with regard to the deeper mysteries of life; disbelief in the possibility of change.

But Isaiah more than hints that these besetting sins of women are but the defects of their virtues. The literal meaning of the two adjectives he uses, "at ease" and "careless," is "restful" and "trustful." Scripture throughout employs these words both in a good and a bad sense. Isaiah does so himself in this very chapter (compare these verses with vv. 17, 18). In the next chapter he describes the state of Jerusalem after redemption as a state of "ease" or "restfulness," and we know that he never ceased urging the people to "trustfulness." For such truly religious conditions he uses exactly the same names as for the shallow optimism with which he now charges his countrywomen. And so doing, he reminds us of an important law of character. The besetting sins of either sex are its virtues prostituted. A man's greatest temptations proceed from his strength; but the glory of the feminine nature is repose, and trust is the strength of the feminine character, in which very things, however, lies all the possibility of woman's degradation. Woman's faith amounts at times to real intuition; but what risks are attached to this prophetic power—of impatience, of contentment with the first glance at things, "the inclination," as a great moralist has put it, "to take too easily the knowledge of the problems of life, and to rest content with what lies nearest her, instead of penetrating to a deeper foundation." Women are full of indulgence and hope; but what possibilities lie there of deception, false optimism, and want of that anxiety which alone makes progress possible. Women are more inclined than men to believe all things; but how certain is such a temper to sacrifice the claims of truth and honour. Women are full of tact, the just favourites of success, with infinite power to plead and please; but if they are aware of this, how certain is such a self-consciousness to produce negligence and the fatal sleep of the foolish virgins.

Scripture insists repeatedly on this truth of Isaiah's about the besetting sin of women. The prophet Amos has engraved it in one of his sharpest epigrams, declaring that thoughtlessness is capable of turning women into very brutes, and their homes into desolate ruins: "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say unto their lords, Bring and let us drink. The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by His holiness that, lo, the days shall come upon you that they shall take you away with hooks, and your residue with fish-hooks, and ye shall go out at the breaches, every one straight before her, and ye shall cast yourselves into Harmon, saith Jehovah." It is a cowherd's picture of women: a troop of cows,

heavy, heedless animals, tramping in their anxiety for food upon every frail and lowly object in the way. There is a cowherd's coarseness in it, but a prophet's insight into character. Not of Jezebels, or Messalinas, or Lady Macbeths is it spoken, but of the ordinary matrons of Samaria. Thoughtlessness is able to make brutes out of women of gentle nurture, with homes and a religion. For thoughtlessness, when joined to luxury or beauty, plays with cruel weapons. It means greed, arrogance, indifference to suffering, wantonness, pride of conquest, dissimulation in love, and revenge for little slights; and there is no waste, unkind sport, insolence, brutality, or hysterical violence to which it will not lead. Such women are known, as Amos pictured them, through many degrees of this thoughtlessness: interrupters of conversation, an offence to the wise; devourers of many of the little ones of God's creation for the sake of their own ornament; tormentors of servants and subordinates for the sake of their own ease; out of the enjoyment of power or for admiration's sake breakers of hearts. And are not all such victims of thoughtlessness best compared, with Amos, to a cow—an animal that rushes at its grass careless of the many daisies and ferns it tramples, that will destroy the beauty of a whole country lane for a few mouthfuls of herbage? Thoughtlessness, says Amos,—“and the Lord God hath sworn it by His holiness”—is the very negation of womanhood, the ruin of homes.

But when we turn from the degradation of woman as thus exposed by the prophets to her glory as lifted up in the New Testament, we find the same note is struck. Woman in the New Testament is gracious according as she is thoughtful; she offends even when otherwise beautiful by her feeling overpowering her thought. Martha spoils a most estimable character by one moment of unthinking passion, in which she accuses the Master of carelessness. Mary chooses the better part in close attention to her Master's words. The Ten Virgins are divided into five wise and five foolish. Paul seems to have been struck, as Isaiah was, with the natural tendency of the female character, for the first duty he lays upon the old women is to “teach the young women to think discreetly,” and he repeats the injunction, putting it before chastity and industry—“Teach them,” he says, “teach them discretion” (Titus ii. 4, 5). In Mary herself, the mother of our Lord, we see two graces of character, to the honour of which Scripture gives equal place—faith and thoughtfulness. The few sentences, which are all that he devotes to Mary's character, the Evangelist divides equally between these two. She was called “blessed” because she believed the word of the Lord. But trustfulness did not mean in her, as in other women, neglect to think. Twice, at an interval of twelve years, we are shown thoughtfulness and carefulness of memory as the habitual grace of this first among women. “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. His mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” * What was Mary's glory was other women's salvation. By her logic the sufferer of Capernaum, whom many physicians failed to benefit, found her cure; by her persistent argument the Syrophenician woman received her daughter to health again. And when our Lord met that flip-pant descendant of “the kine of Bashan, that

are in the mount of Samaria,” how did He treat her that He might save her but by giving her matter to think about, by speaking to her in riddles, by exploding her superficial knowledge, and scattering her easy optimism?

So does all Scripture declare in harmony with the oracle of Isaiah, that thoughtlessness and easy contentment with things as they be, are the besetting sins of woman. But her glory is discretion.

II. The next new point in this prophecy is the

DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (vv. 13-15).

“Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: for the palace shall be forsaken; the populous city shall be deserted; Ophel and the Watch-tower shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks.” The attempt has been made to confine this reference to the outskirts of the sacred city, but it is hardly a just one. The prophet, though he does not name the city, evidently means Jerusalem, and means the whole of it. Some therefore deny the authenticity of the prophecy. Certainly it is almost impossible to suppose that so definite a sentence of ruin can have been published at the same time as the assurances of Jerusalem's inviolability in the preceding orations. But that does not prevent the hypothesis that it was uttered by Isaiah at an earlier period, when, as in chaps. ii. and iii., he did say extreme things about the destruction of his city. It must be noticed, however, that Isaiah speaks with some vagueness; that at the present moment he is not concerned with any religious truth or will of the Almighty, but simply desires to contrast the careless gaiety of the women of Jerusalem with the fate hanging over them. How could he do this more forcibly than by turning the streets and gardens of their delights into ruins and the haunts of the wild ass, even though it should seem inconsistent with his declaration that Zion was inviolable? License for a certain amount of inconsistency is absolutely necessary in the case of a prophet who had so many divers truths to utter to so many opposite interests and tempers. Besides, at this time he had already reduced Jerusalem very low (xxix. 4).

III. THE SPIRIT OUTPOURED vv. 15-20).

The rest of the prophecy is luminous rather than lucid, full of suffused rather than distinct meanings. The date of the future regeneration is indefinite—another feature more in harmony with Isaiah's earlier prophecies than his later. The cause of the blessing is the outpouring of the Spirit of God (ver. 15). Righteousness and peace are to come to earth by a distinct creative act of God. Isaiah adds his voice to the invariable testimony of prophets and apostles, who, whether they speak of society or the heart of individual man, place their hope in new life from above by the Spirit of the living God. Victor Hugo says, “There are no weeds in society, only bad cultivators;” and places all hope of progress towards perfection in proper methods of social culture. These are needed, as much as the corn, which will not spring from the sunshine alone, requires the hand of the sower, and the harrow. And Isaiah, too, speaks here of human conduct

* Cf. Newman, “Oxford University Sermons,” xv.

and effort as required to fill up the blessedness of the future: righteousness and labour. But first, and indispensably, he, with all the prophets, places the Spirit of God.

It appears that Isaiah looked for the fruits of the Spirit both as material and moral. He bases the quiet resting-places and regular labours of the future not on righteousness only, but on fertility and righteousness. "The wilderness shall become a fruitful field," and "what is" to-day "a fruitful field shall be counted as a forest." That this proverb, used by Isaiah more than once, is not merely a metaphor for the moral revolution he describes in the next verse, is proved by his having already declared the unfruitfulness of their soil as part of his people's punishment. Fertility is promised for itself, and as the accompaniment of moral bountifulness. "And there shall dwell in the wilderness justice, and righteousness shall abide in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect." or "service, of righteousness, quietness and confidence for ever. And my people shall abide in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places. . . Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth the feet of the ox and the ass!"

There is not a prophecy more characteristic of Isaiah. It unfolds what for him were the two essential and equal contents of the will of God: a secure land and a righteous people, the fertility of nature and the purity of society. But in those years (705-702) he did not forget that something must come between him and that paradise. Across the very middle of his vision of felicity there dashes a cruel storm. In the gap indicated above Isaiah wrote, "But it shall hail in the downfall of the forest, and the city shall be utterly laid low." A hailstorm between the promise and fulfilment of summer! Isaiah could only mean the Assyrian invasion, which was now lowering so dark. Before it bursts we must follow him to the survey which he made, during these years before the siege of Jerusalem, of the foreign nations on whom, equally with Jerusalem, that storm was to sweep.

CHAPTER XVII.

ISAIAH TO THE FOREIGN NATIONS.

ISAIAH xiv. 24-32, xv.-xxi., and xxiii.

736-702 B. C.

THE centre of the Book of Isaiah (chaps. xiii. to xxiii.) is occupied by a number of long and short prophecies which are a fertile source of perplexity to the conscientious reader of the Bible. With the exhilaration of one who traverses plain roads and beholds vast prospects, he has passed through the opening chapters of the book as far as the end of the twelfth; and he may look forward to enjoying a similar experience when he reaches those other clear stretches of vision from the twenty-fourth to the twenty-seventh and from the thirtieth to the thirty-second. But here he loses himself among a series of prophecies obscure in themselves and without obvious relation to one another. The subjects of them are the nations, tribes, and cities with which in Isaiah's day, by war or treaty or common fear in face of the Assyrian conquest,

Judah was being brought into contact. There are none of the familiar names of the land and tribes of Israel which meet the reader in other obscure prophecies and lighten their darkness with the face of a friend. The names and allusions are foreign, some of them the names of tribes long since extinct, and of places which it is no more possible to identify. It is a very jungle of prophecy, in which, without much Gospel or geographical light, we have to group our way, thankful for an occasional gleam of the picturesque—a sandstorm in the desert, the forsaken ruins of Babylon haunted by wild beasts, a view of Egypt's canals or Phœnicia's harbours, a glimpse of an Arab raid or of a grave Ethiopian embassy.

But in order to understand the Book of Isaiah, in order to understand Isaiah himself in some of the largest of his activities and hopes, we must traverse this thicket. It would be tedious and unprofitable to search every corner of it. We propose, therefore, to give a list of the various oracles, with their dates and titles, for the guidance of Bible-readers, then to take three representative texts and gather the meaning of all the oracles round them.

First, however, two of the prophecies must be put aside. The twenty-second chapter does not refer to a foreign State, but to Jerusalem itself; and the large prophecy which opens the series (chaps. xiii.-xiv. 23) deals with the overthrow of Babylon in circumstances that did not arise till long after Isaiah's time, and so falls to be considered by us along with similar prophecies at the close of this volume. (See Book V.)

All the rest of these chapters—xiv.-xxi. and xxiii.—refer to Isaiah's own day. They were delivered by the prophet at various times throughout his career; but the most of them evidently date from immediately after the year 705, when, on the death of Sargon, there was a general rebellion of the Assyrian vassals.

1. xiv. 24-27.—OATH OF JEHOVAH that the Assyrian shall be broken. Probable date, towards 701.

2. xiv. 28-32.—ORACLE FOR PHILISTIA. Warning to Philistia not to rejoice because one Assyrian king is dead, for a worse one shall arise: "Out of the serpent's root shall come forth a basilisk. Philistia shall be melted away, but Zion shall stand." The inscription to this oracle (ver. 28) is not genuine. The oracle plainly speaks of the death and accession of Assyrian, not Judæan, kings. It may be ascribed to 705, the date of the death of Sargon and accession of Sennacherib. But some hold that it refers to the previous change on the Assyrian throne—the death of Salmanassar and the accession of Sargon.

3. xv.-xvi. 12.—ORACLE FOR MOAB. A long prophecy against Moab. This oracle, whether originally by himself at an earlier period of his life, or more probably by an older prophet, Isaiah adopts and ratifies, and intimates its immediate fulfilment, in xvi. 13, 14: "This is the word which Jehovah spake concerning Moab long ago. But now Jehovah hath spoken, saying, Within three years, as the years of an hireling, and the glory of Moab shall be brought into contempt with all the great multitude, and the remnant shall be very small and of no account." The dates both of the original publication of this prophecy and of its reissue with the appendix are quite uncertain. The latter may fall about 711, when

Moab was threatened by Sargon for complicity in the Ashdod conspiracy (p. 666), or in 704, when, with other States, Moab came under the cloud of Sennacherib's invasion. The main prophecy is remarkable for its vivid picture of the disaster that has overtaken Moab and for the sympathy with her which the Jewish prophet expresses; for the mention of a "remnant" of Moab; for the exhortation to her to send tribute in her adversity "to the mount of the daughter of Zion" (xvi. 1); for an appeal to Zion to shelter the outcasts of Moab and to take up her cause: "Bring counsel, make a decision, make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noon-day; hide the outcasts, bewray not the wanderer;" for a statement of the Messiah similar to those in chaps. ix. and xi.; and for the offer to the oppressed Moabites of the security of Judah in Messianic times (vv. 4, 5). But there is one great obstacle to this prospect of Moab lying down in the shadow of Judah—Moab's arrogance. "We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud" (ver. 6, *cf.* Jer. xlviii. 29, 42; Zeph. ii. 10), which pride shall not only keep this country in ruin, but prevent the Moabites prevailing in prayer at their own sanctuary (ver. 12)—a very remarkable admission about the worship of another god than Jehovah.

4. xvii. 1-11.—ORACLE FOR DAMASCUS. One of the earliest and most crisp of Isaiah's prophecies. Of the time of Syria's and Ephraim's league against Judah, somewhere between 736 and 732.

5. xvii. 12-14.—UNTITLED. The crash of the peoples upon Jerusalem and their dispersion. This magnificent piece of sound, which we analyse below, is usually understood of Sennacherib's rush upon Jerusalem. Verse 14 is an accurate summary of the sudden break-up and "retreat from Moscow" of his army. The Assyrian hosts are described as "nations," as they are elsewhere more than once by Isaiah (xxii. 6, xxix. 7). But in all this there is no final reason for referring the oracle to Sennacherib's invasion, and it may just as well be interpreted of Isaiah's confidence of the defeat of Syria and Ephraim (734-723). Its proximity to the oracle against Damascus would then be very natural, and it would stand as a parallel prophecy to viii. 9: "Make an uproar, O ye peoples, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of the distances of the earth: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces"—a prophecy which we know belongs to the period of the Syro-Ephraimitic league.

6. xviii.—UNTITLED. An address to Ethiopia, "land of a rustling of wings, land of many sails, whose messengers dart to and fro upon the rivers in their skiffs of reed." The prophet tells Ethiopia, cast into excitement by the news of the Assyrian advance, how Jehovah is resting quietly till the Assyrian be ripe for destruction. When the Ethiopians shall see His sudden miracle they shall send their tribute to Jehovah, "to the place of the name of Jehovah of hosts, Mount Zion." It is difficult to know to which southward march of Assyria to ascribe this prophecy—Sargon's or Sennacherib's? For at the time of both of these an Ethiopian ruled Egypt.

7. xix.—ORACLE FOR EGYPT. The first fifteen verses describe judgment as ready to fall on the land of the Pharaohs. The last ten speak of

the religious results to Egypt of that judgment, and they form the most universal and "missionary" of all Isaiah's prophecies. Although doubts have been expressed of the Isaian authorship of the second half of this chapter on the score of its universalism, as well as of its literary style, which is judged to be "a pale reflection" of Isaiah's own, there is no final reason for declining the credit of it to Isaiah, while there are insuperable difficulties against relegating it to the late date which is sometimes demanded for it. On the date and authenticity of this prophecy, which are of great importance for the question of Isaiah's "missionary" opinions, see Cheyne's introduction to the chapter and Robertson Smith's notes in "The Prophets of Israel" (p. 433). The latter puts it in 703, during Sennacherib's advance upon the south. The former suggests that the second half may have been written by the prophet much later than the first, and justly says, "We can hardly imagine a more 'swan-like end' for the dying prophet."

8. xx.—UNTITLED. Also upon Egypt, but in narrative and of an earlier date than at least the latter half of xix. Tells how Isaiah walked naked and barefoot in the streets of Jerusalem for a sign against Egypt and against the help Judah hoped to get from her in the years 711-709, when the Tartan, or Assyrian commander-in-chief, came south to subdue Ashdod. See pp. 666-667.

9. xxi. 1-10.—ORACLE FOR THE WILDERNESS OF THE SEA, announcing but lamenting the fall of Babylon. Probably 709. See p. 667.

10. xxi. 11-12.—ORACLE FOR DUMAH. Dumah, or *Silence*—in Ps. xciv. 17, cxv. 17, "the land of the silence of death," the grave—is probably used as an anagram for Edom and an enigmatic sign to the wise Edomites, in their own fashion, of the kind of silence their land is lying under—the silence of rapid decay. The prophet hears this silence at last broken by a cry. Edom cannot bear the darkness any more. "Unto me one is calling from Seir, Watchman, how much off the night? how much off the night?*" Said the watchman, Cometh the morning, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire, come back again." What other answer is possible for a land on which the silence of decay seems to have settled down? He may, however, give them an answer later on, if they will come back. Date uncertain, perhaps between 704 and 701.

11. xxi. 13-17.—ORACLE FOR ARABIA. From Edom the prophet passes to their neighbours the Dedanites, travelling merchants. And as he saw night upon Edom, so, by a play upon words, he speaks of evening upon Arabia: "in the forest, in Arabia," or with the same consonants, "in the evening." In the time of the insecurity of the Assyrian invasion the travelling merchants have to go aside from their great trading roads "in the evening to lodge in the thickets." There they entertain fugitives, or (for the sense is not quite clear) are themselves as fugitives entertained. It is a picture of the "grievousness of war," which was now upon the world, flowing down even those distant, desert roads. But things have not yet reached the worst. The fugi-

* Our translation, though picturesque, is misleading. The voice does not inquire, "What of the night?" *i. e.*, whether it be fair or foul weather, but "How much of the night is passed?" literally "What from off the night?" This brings out a pathos that our English version has disguised. Edom feels that her night is lasting terribly long.

tives are but the heralds of armies, that "within a year" shall waste the "children of Kedar," for Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath spoken it. So did the prophet of little Jerusalem take possession of even the far deserts in the name of his nation's God.

12. xxiii.—ORACLE FOR TYRE. Elegy over its fall, probably as Sennacherib came south upon it in 703 or 702. To be further considered by us (pp. 688 ff.).

These, then, are Isaiah's oracles for the Nations, who tremble, intrigue, and go down before the might of Assyria.

We have promised to gather the circumstances and meaning of these prophecies round three representative texts. These are—

1. "Ah! the booming of the peoples, the multitudes, like the booming of the seas they boom; and the rushing of the nations, like the rushing of mighty waters they rush; nations, like the rushing of many waters they rush. But He rebuketh it, and it fleeth afar off, and is chased like the chaff on the mountains before the wind and like whirling dust before the whirlwind" (xvii. 12, 13).

2. "What then shall one answer the messengers of a nation? That Jehovah hath founded Zion, and in her shall find refuge the afflicted of His people" (xiv. 32).

3. "In that day shall Israel be a third to Egypt and to Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, for that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and Mine inheritance Israel" (xix. 24, 25).

1. The first of these texts shows all the prophet's prospect filled with storm, the second of them the solitary rock and lighthouse in the midst of the storm: Zion, His own watchtower and His people's refuge; while the third of them, looking far into the future, tells us, as it were, of the firm continent which shall rise out of the waters—Israel no longer a solitary lighthouse, "but in that day shall Israel be a third to Egypt and to Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth." These three texts give us a summary of the meaning of all Isaiah's obscure prophecies to the foreign nations—a stormy ocean, a solitary rock in the midst of it, and the new continent that shall rise out of the waters about the rock.

The restlessness of Western Asia beneath the Assyrian rule (from 719, when Sargon's victory at Rafia extended that rule to the borders of Egypt) found vent, as we saw (p. 666), in two great Explosions, for both of which the mine was laid by Egyptian intrigue. The first Explosion happened in 711, and was confined to Ashdod. The second took place on Sargon's death in 705, and was universal. Till Sennacherib marched south on Palestine in 701, there were all over Western Asia hurrying to and fro, consultations and intrigues, embassies and engineerings from Babylon to Meroe in far Ethiopia, and from the tents of Kedar to the cities of the Philistines. For these Jerusalem, the one inviolate capital from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt, was the natural centre. And the one far-seeing, steady-hearted man in Jerusalem was Isaiah. We have already seen that there was enough within the city to occupy Isaiah's attention, especially from 705 onward; but for Isaiah the walls of Jerusalem, dear as

they were and thronged with duty, neither limited his sympathies nor marked the scope of the gospel he had to preach. Jerusalem is simply his watchtower. His field—and this is the peculiar glory of the prophet's later life—his field is the world.

How well fitted Jerusalem then was to be the world's watchtower, the traveller may see to this day. The city lies upon the great central ridge of Palestine, at an elevation of two thousand five hundred feet above the level of the sea. If you ascend the hill behind the city, you stand upon one of the great view-points of the earth. It is a forepost of Asia. To the east rise the red hills of Moab and the uplands of Gilead and Bashan, on to which wandering tribes of the Arabian deserts beyond still push their foremost camps. Just beyond the horizon lie the immemorial paths from Northern Syria into Arabia. Within a few hours' walk along the same central ridge, and still within the territory of Judah, you may see to the north, over a wilderness of blue hills, Hermon's snowy crest; you know that Damascus is lying just beyond, and that through it and round the base of Hermon swings one of the longest of the old world's highways—the main caravan road from the Euphrates to the Nile. Stand at gaze for a little, while down that road there sweep into your mind thoughts of the great empire whose troops and commerce it used to carry. Then, bearing these thoughts with you, follow the line of the road across the hills to the western coastland, and so out upon the great Egyptian desert, where you may wait till it has brought you imagination of the southern empire to which it travels. Then, lifting your eyes a little further, let them sweep back again from south to north, and you have the whole of the west, the new world, open to you, across the fringe of yellow haze that marks the sands of the Mediterranean. It is even now one of the most comprehensive prospects in the world. But in Isaiah's day, when the world was smaller, the high places of Judah either revealed or suggested the whole of it.

But Isaiah was more than a spectator of this vast theatre. He was an actor upon it. The court of Judah, of which during Hezekiah's reign he was the most prominent member, stood in more or less close connection with the courts of all the kingdoms of Western Asia; and in those days, when the nations were busy with intrigue against their common enemy, this little highland town and fortress became a gathering place of peoples. From Babylon, from far-off Ethiopia, from Edom, from Philistia, and no doubt from many other places also, embassies came to King Hezekiah, or to inquire of his prophet. The appearance of some of them lives for us still in Isaiah's descriptions: "tall and shiny" figures of Ethiopians (xviii. 2), with whom we are able to identify the lithe, silky-skinned, shining-black bodies of the present tribes of the Upper Nile. Now the prophet must have talked much with these strangers, for he displays a knowledge of their several countries and ways of life that is full and accurate. The agricultural conditions of Egypt; her social ranks and her industries (xix.); the harbours and markets of Tyre (xxiii.); the caravans of the Arab nomads, as in times of war they shun the open desert and seek the thickets (xxi. 14)—Isaiah paints these for us with a vivid realism. We see

how this statesman of the least of States, this prophet of a religion which was confessed over only a few square miles, was aware of the wide world, and how he loved the life that filled it. They are no mere geographical terms with which Isaiah thickly studs these prophecies. He looks out upon and paints for us, lands and cities surging with men—their trades, their castes, their religions, their besetting tempers and sins, their social structures and national policies, all quick and bending to the breeze and the shadow of the coming storm from the north.

We have said that in nothing is the legal power of our prophet's style so manifest as in the vast horizons, which, by the use of a few words, he calls up before us. Some of the finest of these revelations are made in this part of his book, so obscure and unknown to most. Who can ever forget those descriptions of Ethiopia in the eighteenth chapter?—"Ah! the land of the rustling of wings, which borders on the rivers of Cush, which sendeth heralds on the sea, and in vessels of reed on the face of the waters! Travel, fleet messengers, to a people lithe and shining, to a nation feared from ever it began to be, a people strong, strong and trampling, whose land the rivers divide;" or of Tyre in chapter xxiii.?—"And on great waters the seed of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue; and she was the mart of nations." What expanses of sea! what fleets of ships! what floating loads of grain! what concourse of merchants moving on stately wharves beneath high warehouses!

Yet these are only segments of horizons, and perhaps the prophet reaches the height of his power of expression in the first of the three texts, which we have given as representative of his prophecies on foreign nations (p. 686). Here three or four lines of marvellous sound repeat the effect of the rage of the restless world as it rises, storms, and breaks upon the steadfast will of God. The phonetics of the passage are wonderful. The general impression is that of a stormy ocean booming in to the shore and then crashing itself out into one long hiss of spray and foam upon its barriers. The details are noteworthy. In ver. 12 we have thirteen heavy M-sounds, besides two heavy B's, to five N's, five H's, and four sibilants. But in ver. 13 the sibilants predominate; and before the sharp rebuke of the Lord the great, booming sound of ver. 12 scatters out into a long *yish-shā'oon*. The occasional use of a prolonged vowel amid so many hurrying consonants produces exactly the effect now of the lift of a storm swell out at sea and now of the pause of a great wave before it crashes on the shore. "Ah, the booming of the peoples, the multitudes, like the booming of the seas they boom; and the rushing of the nations, like the rushing of the mighty waters they rush: nations, like the rushing of many waters they rush. But He checketh it"—a short, sharp word with a choke and a snort in it—"and it fleeth far away, and is chased like chaff on mountains before wind, and like swirling dust before a whirlwind."

So did the rage of the world sound to Isaiah as it crashed into pieces upon the steadfast providence of God. To those who can feel the force of such language nothing need be added upon the prophet's view of the politics of the outside world these twenty years, whether portions

of it threatened Judah in their own strength, or the whole power of storm that was in it rose with the Assyrian, as in all his flood he rushed upon Zion in the year 701.

2. But amid this storm Zion stands immovable. It is upon Zion that the storm crashes itself into impotence. This becomes explicit in the second of our representative texts: "What then shall one answer the messengers of a nation? That Jehovah hath founded Zion, and in her shall find a refuge the afflicted of His people" (xiv. 32). This oracle was drawn from Isaiah by an embassy of the Philistines. Stricken with panic at the Assyrian advance, they had sent messengers to Jerusalem, as other tribes did, with questions and proposals of defences, escapes, and alliances. They got their answer. Alliances are useless. Everything human is going down. Here, here alone, is safety, because the Lord hath decreed it.

With what light and peace do Isaiah's words break out across that unquiet, hungry sea! How they tell the world for the first time, and have been telling it ever since, that, apart from all the struggle and strife of history, there is a refuge and security of men, which God Himself has assured. The troubled surface of life, nations heaving uneasily, kings of Assyria and their armies carrying the world before them—these are not all. The world and her powers are not all. Religion, in the very teeth of life, builds her a refuge for the afflicted.

The world seems wholly divided between force and fear. Isaiah says, It is not true. Faith has her abiding citadel in the midst, a house of God, which neither force can harm nor fear enter.

This then was Isaiah's Interim-Answer to the Nations—Zion at least is secure for the people of Jehovah.

3. Isaiah could not remain content, however, with so narrow an interim-answer: Zion at least is secure, whatever happens to the rest of you. The world was there, and had to be dealt with and accounted for—had even to be saved. As we have already seen, this was the problem of Isaiah's generation; and to have shirked it would have meant the failure of his faith to rank as universal.

Isaiah did not shirk it. He said boldly to his people, and to the nations: "The faith we have covers this vaster life. Jehovah is not only God of Israel. He rules the world." These prophecies to the foreign nations are full of revelations of the sovereignty and providence of God. The Assyrian may seem to be growing in glory; but Jehovah is watching from the heavens, till he be ripe for cutting down (xviii. 4). Egypt's statesmen may be perverse and wilful; but Jehovah of hosts swingeth His hand against the land: "they shall tremble and shudder" (xix. 16). Egypt shall obey His purposes (17). Confusion may reign for a time, but a signal and a centre shall be lifted up, and the world gather itself in order round the revealed will of God. The audacity of such a claim for his God becomes more striking when we remember that Isaiah's faith was not the faith of a majestic or a conquering people. When he made his claim, Judah was still tributary to Assyria, a petty highland principality, that could not hope to stand by material means against the force which had thrown down her more powerful neighbour. It was no experience of

success, no mere instinct of being on the side of fate, which led Isaiah so resolutely to pronounce that not only should his people be secure, but that his God would vindicate His purposes upon empires like Egypt and Assyria. It was simply his sense that Jehovah was exalted in righteousness. Therefore, while inside Judah only the remnant that took the side of righteousness would be saved, outside Judah wherever there was unrighteousness, it would be rebuked, and wherever righteousness, it would be vindicated. This is the supremacy which Isaiah proclaimed for Jehovah over the whole world.

How spiritual this faith of Isaiah was, is seen from the next step the prophet took. Looking out on the troubled world, he did not merely assert that his God ruled it, but he emphatically said, what was a far more difficult thing to say, that it would all be consciously and willingly God's. God rules this, not to restrain it only, but to make it His own. The knowledge of Him, which is to-day our privilege, shall be to-morrow the blessing of the whole world.

When we point to the Jewish desire, so often expressed in the Old Testament, of making the whole world subject to Jehovah, we are told that it is simply a proof of religious ambition and jealousy. We are told that this wish to convert the world no more stamps the Jewish religion as being a universal, and therefore presumably a Divine, religion than the Mohammedans' zeal to force their tenets on men at the point of the sword is a proof of the truth of Islam.

Now we need not be concerned to defend the Jewish religion in its every particular, even as propounded by an Isaiah. It is an article of the Christian creed that Judaism was a minor and imperfect dispensation, where truth was only half revealed and virtue half developed. But at least let us do the Jewish religion justice; and we shall never do it justice till we pay attention to what its greatest prophets thought of the outside world, how they sympathised with this, and *in what way* they proposed to make it subject to their own faith.

Firstly then, there is something in the very manner of Isaiah's treatment of foreign nations, which causes the old charges of religious exclusiveness to sink in our throats. Isaiah treats these foreigners at least as men. Take his prophecies on Egypt or on Tyre or on Babylon—nations which were the hereditary enemies of his nation—and you find him speaking of their natural misfortunes, their social decays, their national follies and disasters, with the same pity and with the same purely moral considerations with which he has treated his own land. When news of those far-away sorrows comes to Jerusalem, it moves this large-hearted prophet to mourning and tears. He breathes out to distant lands elegies as beautiful as he has poured upon Jerusalem. He shows as intelligent an interest in their social evolutions as he does in those of the Jewish State. He gives a picture of the industry and politics of Egypt as careful as his pictures of the fashions and statecraft of Judah. In short, as you read his prophecies upon foreign nations, you perceive that before the eyes of this man humanity, broken and scattered in his days as it was, rose up one great whole, every part of which was subject to the same laws of righteousness, and deserved from the prophet of God the same love and pity. To some few tribes he says decisively that they shall

certainly be wiped out, but even them he does not address in contempt or in hatred. The large empire of Egypt, the great commercial power of Tyre, he speaks of in language of respect and admiration; but that does not prevent him from putting the plain issue to them which he put to his own countrymen: If you are unrighteous, intemperate, impure—lying diplomats and dishonest rulers—you shall certainly perish before Assyria. If you are righteous, temperate, pure, if you do trust in truth and God, nothing can move you.

But, *secondly*, he, who thus treated all nations with the same strict measures of justice and the same fulness of pity with which he treated his own, was surely not far from extending to the world the religious privileges which he has so frequently identified with Jerusalem. In his old age, at least, Isaiah looked forward to the time when the particular religious opportunities of the Jew should be the inheritance of humanity. For their old oppressor Egypt, for their new enemy Assyria, he anticipates the same experience and education which have made Israel the firstborn of God. Speaking to Egypt, Isaiah concludes a missionary sermon, fit to take its place beside that which Paul uttered on the Areopagus to the younger Greek civilisation, with the words, "In that day shall Israel be a third to Egypt and to Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, for that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands and Israel Mine inheritance."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TYRE; OR, THE MERCENARY SPIRIT.

ISAIAH xxiii.

702 B. C.

THE task, which was laid upon the religion of Israel while Isaiah was its prophet, was the task, as we have often told ourselves, of facing the world's forces, and of explaining how they were to be led captive and contributory to the religion of the true God. And we have already seen Isaiah accounting for the largest of these forces: the Assyrian. But besides Assyria, that military empire, there was another power in the world, also novel to Israel's experience and also in Isaiah's day grown large enough to demand from Israel's faith explanation and criticism. This was Commerce, represented by the Phœnicians, with their chief seats at Tyre and Sidon, and their colonies across the seas. Not even Egypt exercised such influence on Isaiah's generation as Phœnicia did; and Phœnician influence, though less visible and painful than Assyrian, was just as much more subtle and penetrating as in these respects the influence of trade exceeds that of war. Assyria herself was fascinated by the glories of Phœnician commerce. The ambition of her kings, who had in that century pushed south to the Mediterranean, was to found a commercial empire. The mercenary spirit, as we learn from prophets earlier than Isaiah, had begun also to leaven the life of the agricultural and shepherd tribes of Western Asia. For good or for evil commerce had established itself as a moral force in the world.

Isaiah's chapter on Tyre is, therefore, of the greatest interest. It contains the prophet's vision of commerce the first time commerce had grown vast enough to impress his people's imagination, as well as a criticism of the temper of commerce from the standpoint of the religion of the God of righteousness. Whether as a historical study or a message addressed to the mercantile tempers of our own day, the chapter is worthy of close attention.

But we must first impress ourselves with the utter contrast between Phœnicia and Judah in the matter of commercial experience, or we shall not feel the full force of this excursion which the prophet of a high, inland tribe of shepherds makes among the wharves and warehouses of the great merchant city on the sea.

The Phœnician empire, it has often been remarked, presents a very close analogy to that of Great Britain; but even more entirely than in the case of Great Britain the glory of that empire was the wealth of its trade, and the character of the people was the result of their mercantile habits. A little strip of land, one hundred and forty miles long, and never more than fifteen broad, with the sea upon one side and the mountains upon the other, compelled its inhabitants to become miners and seamen. The hills shut off the narrow coast from the continent to which it belongs, and drove the increasing populations to seek their destiny by way of the sea. These took to it kindly, for they had the Semite's born instinct for trading. Planting their colonies all round the Mediterranean, exploiting every mine within reach of the coastland, establishing great trading depôts both on the Nile and the Euphrates, with fleets that passed the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic and the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb into the Indian Ocean, the Phœnicians constructed a system of trade, which was not exceeded in range or influence till, more than two thousand years later, Portugal made the discovery of America and accomplished the passage of the Cape of Good Hope. From the coasts of Britain to those of Northwest India, and probably to Madagascar, was the extent of Phœnician credit and currency. Their trade tapped river basins so far apart as those of the Indus, the Euphrates, probably the Zambesi, the Nile, the Rhone, the Guadalquivir. They built ships and harbours for the Pharaohs and for Solomon. They carried Egyptian art and Babylonian knowledge to the Grecian archipelago, and brought back the metals of Spain and Britain. No wonder the prophet breaks into enthusiasm as he surveys Phœnician enterprise! "And on great waters the seed of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue; and she was the mart of nations."

But upon trade the Phœnicians had built an empire. At home their political life enjoyed the freedom, energy, and resources which are supplied by long habits of an extended commerce with other peoples. The constitution of the different Phœnician cities was not, as is sometimes supposed, republican, but monarchical; and the land belonged to the king. Yet the large number of wealthy families at once limited the power of the throne, and saved the commonwealth from being dependent upon the fortunes of a single dynasty. The colonies in close relation with the mother country assured an empire with its life in better circulation and with more reserve of power than either Egypt or

Assyria. Tyre and Sidon were frequently overthrown, but they rose again oftener than the other great cities of antiquity, and were still places of importance when Babylon and Nineveh lay in irreparable ruin. Besides their native families of royal wealth and influence and their flourishing colonies, each with its prince, these commercial States kept foreign monarchs in their pay, and sometimes determined the fate of a dynasty. Isaiah entitles Tyre "the giver of crowns, the maker of kings, whose merchants are princes, and her traffickers are the honourable of the earth."

But trade with political results so splendid had an evil effect upon the character and spiritual temper of the people. By the indiscriminating ancients the Phœnicians were praised as inventors; the rudiments of most of the arts and sciences, of the alphabet and of money have been ascribed to them. But modern research has proved that of none of the many elements of civilisation which they introduced to the West were they the actual authors. The Phœnicians were simply carriers and middlemen. In all time there is no instance of a nation so wholly given over to buying and selling, who frequented even the battlefields of the world that they might strip the dead and purchase the captive. Phœnician history—though we must always do the people the justice to remember that we have their history only in fragments—affords few signs of the consciousness that there are things which a nation may strive after for their own sake, and not for the money they bring in. The world, which other peoples, still in the reverence of the religious youth of the race, regarded as a house of prayer, the Phœnicians had already turned into a den of thieves. They trafficked even with the mysteries and intelligences; and their own religion is largely a mixture of the religions of the other peoples with whom they came into contact. The national spirit was venal and mercenary—the heart of an hireling, or, as Isaiah by a baser name describes it, the heart of "an harlot." There is not throughout history a more perfect incarnation of the mercenary spirit than the Phœnician nation.

Now let us turn to the experience of the Jews, whose faith had to face and account for this world-force.

The history of the Jews in Europe has so identified them with trade that it is difficult for us to imagine a Jew free from its spirit or ignorant of its methods. But the fact is that in the time of Isaiah Israel was as little acquainted with commerce as it is possible for a civilised nation to be. Israel's was an inland territory. Till Solomon's reign the people had neither navy nor harbour. Their land was not abundant in materials for trade—it contained almost no minerals, and did not produce a greater supply of food than was necessary for the consumption of its inhabitants. It is true that the ambition of Solomon had brought the people within the temptations of commerce. He established trading cities, annexed harbours and hired a navy. But even then, and again in the reign of Uzziah, which reflects much of Solomon's commercial glory, Israel traded by deputies, and the mass of the people remained innocent of mercantile habits. Perhaps to moderns the most impressive proof of how little Israel had to do with trade is to be found in their laws of money-lending and of interest. The absolute prohibition which

Moses placed upon the charging of interest could only have been possible among a people with the most insignificant commerce. To Isaiah himself commerce must have appeared alien. Human life, as he pictures it, is composed of war, politics, and agriculture; his ideals for society are those of the shepherd and the farmer. We moderns cannot dissociate the future welfare of humanity from the triumphs of trade.

"For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that
would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic
sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly
bales."

But all Isaiah's future is full of gardens and busy fields, of irrigating rivers and canals:—

"Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. . . . Blessed are ye, that sow beside all waters, that send forth the feet of the ox and the ass."

"And He shall give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal, and bread-corn, the increase of the ground; and it shall be juicy and fat: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures."

Conceive how trade looked to eyes which dwelt with enthusiasm upon scenes like these! It must have seemed to blast the future, to disturb the regularity of life with such violence as to shake religion herself! With all our convictions of the benefits of trade, even we feel no greater regret or alarm than when we observe the invasion by the rude forces of trade of some scene of rural felicity: blackening of sky and earth and stream; increasing complexity and entanglement of life; enormous growth of new problems and temptations; strange knowledge, ambitions and passions that throb through life and strain the tissue of its simple constitution, like novel engines, which shake the ground and the strong walls, accustomed once to re-echo only the simple music of the mill-wheel and the weaver's shuttle. Isaiah did not fear an invasion of Judah by the habits and the machines of trade. There is no foreboding in this chapter of the day when his own people were to take the place of the Phœnicians as the commercial "harlots" of the world, and a Jew was to be synonymous with usurer and "publican." Yet we may employ our feelings to imagine his, and understand what this prophet—seated in the sanctuary of a pastoral and agricultural tribe, with its simple offerings of doves, and lambs, and sheaves of corn, telling how their homes, and fields and whole rustic manner of life were subject to God—thought, and feared, and hoped of the vast commerce of Phœnicia, wondering how it also should be sanctified to Jehovah.

First of all, Isaiah, as we might have expected from his large faith and broad sympathies, accepts and acknowledges this great world-force. His noble spirit shows neither timidity nor jealousy before it. Before his view what an unblemished prospect of it spreads! His descriptions tell more of his appreciation than long laudations would have done. He grows enthusiastic upon the grandeur of Tyre; and even when he prophesies that Assyria shall destroy it, it is with the feeling that such a destruction is really a desecration, and as if there lived essential glory in great commercial enterprise. Certainly from such a spirit we have much to learn. How often has religion, when brought face to face

with the new forces of a generation—commerce, democracy, or science—shown either a base timidity or baser jealousy, and met the innovations with cries of detraction or despair! Isaiah reads a lesson to the modern Church in the preliminary spirit with which she should meet the novel experiences of Providence. Whatever judgment may afterwards have to be passed, there is the immediate duty of frankly recognising greatness wherever it may occur. This is an essential principle, from the forgetfulness of which modern religion has suffered much. Nothing is gained by attempting to minimise new departures in the world's history; but everything is lost if we sit down in fear of them. It is a duty we owe to ourselves, and a worship which Providence demands from us, that we ungrudgingly appreciate every magnitude of which history brings us the knowledge.

It is almost an unnecessary task to apply Isaiah's meaning to the commerce of our own day. But let us not miss his example in this: that the right to criticise the habits of trade and the ability to criticise them healthily are alone won by a just appreciation of trade's world-wide glory and serviceableness. There is no use preaching against the venal spirit and manifold temptations and degradations of trade, until we have realised the indispensableness of trade and its capacity for disciplining and exalting its ministers. The only way to correct the abuses of "the commercial spirit," against which many in our day are loud with indiscriminate rebuke, is to impress its victims, having first impressed yourself, with the opportunities and the ideals of commerce. A thing is great partly by its traditions and partly by its opportunities—partly by what it has accomplished and partly by the doors of serviceableness of which it holds the key. By either of these standards the magnitude of commerce is simply overwhelming. Having discovered the world-forces, commerce has built thereon the most powerful of our modern empires. Its exigencies compel peace; its resources are the sinews of war. If it has not always preceded religion and science in the conquest of the globe, it has shared with them their triumphs. Commerce has recast the modern world, so that we hardly think of the old national divisions in the greater social classes which have been its direct creation. Commerce determines national policies; its markets are among the schools of statesmen; its merchants *are* still "princes, and its traffickers the honourable of the earth."

Therefore let all merchants and their apprentices believe, "Here is something worth putting our manhood into, worth living for, not with our brains only or our appetites, but with our conscience, with our imagination, with every curiosity and sympathy of our nature. Here is a calling with a healthy discipline, with a free spirit, with unrivalled opportunities of service, with an ancient and essential dignity." The reproach which is so largely imagined upon trade is the relic of a barbarous age. Do not tolerate it, for under its shadow, as under other artificial and unhealthy contempts of society, there are apt to grow up those sordid and slavish tempers, which soon make men deserve the reproach that was at first unjustly cast upon them. Dissipate the base influence of this reproach by lifting the imagination upon the antiquity and world-wide opportunities of trade—trade, "whose origin,"

as Isaiah so finely puts it, "is of ancient days; and her feet carry her afar off to sojourn."

So generous an appreciation of the grandeur of commerce does not prevent Isaiah from exposing its besetting sin, and degradation.

The vocation of a merchant differs from others in this, that there is no inherent nor instinctive obligation in it to ends higher than those of financial profit—emphasised in our days into the more dangerous constraint of *immediate* financial profit. No profession is of course absolutely free from the risk of this servitude; but other professions offer escapes, or at least mitigations, which are not possible to nearly the same extent in trade. Artist, artisan, preacher, and statesman have ideals which generally act contrary to the compulsion of profit and tend to create a nobility of mind strong enough to defy it. They have given, so to speak, hostages to heaven—ideals of beauty, of accurate scholarship, or of moral influence, which they dare not risk by abandoning themselves to the hunt for gain. But the calling of a merchant is not thus safeguarded. It does not afford those visions, those occasions of being caught away to the heavens, which are the inherent glories of other lives. The habits of trade make this the first thought—not what things of beauty are in themselves, not what men are as brothers, not what life is as God's discipline, but what things of beauty, and men, and opportunities are worth to us—and in these times what they are *immediately* worth—as measured by money. In such an absorption art, humanity, morals, and religion become matters of growing indifference.

To this spirit, which treats all things and men, high or low, as matters simply of profit, Isaiah gives a very ugly name. We call it the mercenary or venal spirit. Isaiah says it is the spirit of "the harlot."

The history of Phœnicia justified his words. To-day we remember her by nothing that is great, by nothing that is original. She left no art nor literature, and her once brave and skilful populations degenerated till we know them only as the slave-dealers, panders, and prostitutes of the Roman empire. If we desire to find Phœnicia's influence on the religion of the world, we have to seek for it among the most sensual of Greek myths and the abominable practices of Corinthian worship. With such terrible literalness was Isaiah's harlot-curse fulfilled.

What is true of Phœnicia may become true of Britain, and what has been seen on the large scale of a nation is exemplified every day in individual lives. The man who is entirely eaten up with the zeal of gain is no better than what Isaiah called Tyre. He has prostituted himself to covetousness. If day and night our thoughts are of profit, and the habit, so easily engendered in these times, of asking only, "What can I make of this?" is allowed to grow upon us, it shall surely come to pass that we are found sacrificing, like the poor unfortunate, the most sacred of our endowments and affections for gain, demeaning our natures at the feet of the world for the sake of the world's gold. A woman sacrifices her purity for coin, and the world casts her out. But some who would not touch her have sacrificed honour and love and pity for the same base wage, and in God's sight are no better than she. Ah, how much need is there for these bold, brutal standards of the Hebrew prophet to correct our own social misappreciations!

Now for a very vain delusion upon this subject! It is often imagined in our day that if a man seek atonement for the venal spirit through the study of art, through the practice of philanthropy, or through the cultivation of religion, he shall surely find it. This is false—plausible and often practised, but utterly false. Unless a man see and reverence beauty in the very workshop and office of his business, unless he feel those whom he meets there, his employes and customers, as his brethren, unless he keep his business methods free from fraud, and honestly recognise his gains as a trust from the Lord, then no amount of devotion elsewhere to the fine arts, nor perseverance in philanthropy, nor fondness for the Church evinced by ever so large subscriptions, will deliver him from the devil of mercenariness. This is a plea of *alibi* that shall not prevail on the judgment day. He is only living a double life, whereof his art, philanthropy, or religion is the occasional and dilettante portion, with not nearly so much influence on his character as the other, his calling and business, in which he still sacrifices love to gain. His real world—the world in which God set him, to buy and sell indeed, but also to serve and glorify his God—he is treating only as a big warehouse and exchange. And so much is this the case at the present day, in spite of all the worship of art and religion which is fashionable in mercantile circles, that we do not go too far when we say that if Jesus were now to visit our large markets and manufactories, in which the close intercourse of numbers of human persons renders the opportunities of service and testimony to God so frequent, He would scourge men from them, as He scourged the traffickers of the Temple, for that they had forgotten that *here* was their Father's house, where their brethren had to be owned and helped, and their Father's glory revealed to the world.

A nation with such a spirit was of course foredoomed to destruction. Isaiah predicts the absolute disappearance of Tyre from the attention of the world. "Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years. Then," like some poor unfortunate whose day of beauty is past, she shall in vain practise her old advertisements on men. "After the end of seventy years it shall be unto Tyre as in the song of the harlot: Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered."

But Commerce is essential to the world. Tyre must revive; and the prophet sees her revive as the minister of Religion, the purveyor of the food of the servants of the Lord, and of the accessories of their worship. It must be confessed, that we are not a little shocked when we find Isaiah continuing to apply to Commerce his metaphor of a harlot, even after Commerce has entered the service of the true religion. He speaks of her wages being devoted to Jehovah, just in the same manner as those of certain notorious women of heathen temples were devoted to the idol of the temple. This is even against the directions of the Mosaic law. Isaiah, however, was a poet; and in his flights we must not expect him to carry the whole Law on his back. He was a poet, and probably no analogy would have more vividly appealed to his Oriental audience. It will be foolish to allow our natural prejudice against what we may feel to be the unhealthiness of the metaphor to blind us to the

magnificence of the thought which he clothes in it.

All this is another proof of the sanity and far sight of our prophet. Again we find that his conviction that judgment is coming does not render his spirit morbid, nor disturb his eye for things of beauty and profit in the world. Commerce, with all her faults, is essential, and must endure, nay shall prove in the days to come Religion's most profitable minister. The generosity and wisdom of this passage are the more striking when we remember the extremity of unrelieved denunciation to which other great teachers of religion have allowed themselves to be hurled by their rage against the sins of trade. But Isaiah, in the largest sense of the expression, is a man of the world—a man of the world because God made the world and rules it. Yet even from his far sight was hidden the length to which in the last days Commerce would carry her services to man and God, proving as she has done, under the flag of another Phœnicia, to all the extent of Isaiah's longing, one of Religion's most sincere and profitable handmaids.

BOOK IV.

JERUSALEM AND SENNACHERIB.

701 B. C.

INTO this fourth book we put all the rest of the prophecies of the Book of Isaiah, that have to do with the prophet's own time: chaps. i., xxii. and xxxiii., with the narrative in xxxvi., xxxvii. All these refer to the only Assyrian invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem: that undertaken by Sennacherib in 701.

It is, however, right to remember once more, that many authorities maintain that there were two Assyrian invasions of Judah—one by Sargon in 711, the other by Sennacherib in 701—and that chaps. i. and xxii. (as well as x. 5-34) belong to the former of these. The theory is ingenious and tempting; but, in the silence of the Assyrian annals about any invasion of Judah by Sargon, it is impossible to adopt it. And although chaps. i. and xxii. differ very greatly in tone from chap. xxxiii., yet to account for the difference it is not necessary to suppose two different invasions, with a considerable period between them. Virtually, as will appear in the course of our exposition, Sennacherib's invasion of Judah was a double one.

1. The first time Sennacherib's army invaded Judah they took all the fenced cities, and probably invested Jerusalem, but withdrew on payment of tribute and the surrender of the *casus belli*, the Assyrian vassal Padi, whom the Ekronites had deposed and given over to the keeping of Hezekiah. To this invasion refer Isa. i., xxii. and the first verse of xxxvi.: "Now it came to pass in the fourteenth* year of King Hezekiah

* It is confusing to find this date attached to Sennacherib's invasion of 701, unless, with one or two critics, we place Hezekiah's accession in 715. But Hezekiah acceded in 728 or 727, and 701 would therefore be his twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh year. Mr. Cheyne, who takes 727 as the year of Hezekiah's accession, gets out of the difficulty by reading "Sargon" for "Sennacherib" in this verse and in 2 Kings xiii. and thus secures another reference to that invasion of Judah, which he supposes to have taken place under Sargon between 712 and 710. By the change of a letter some would read *twenty-fourth* for *fourteenth*. But in any case this date is confusing.

that Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them." This verse is the same as 2 Kings xviii. 13, to which, however, there is added in vv. 14-16 an account of the tribute sent by Hezekiah to Sennacherib at Lachish, that is not included in the narrative in Isaiah. Compare 2 Chron. xxxii. 1.

2. But scarcely had the tribute been paid when Sennacherib, himself advancing to meet Egypt, sent back upon Jerusalem a second army of investment, with which was the Rabshakeh; and this was the army that so mysteriously disappeared from the eyes of the besieged. To the treacherous return of the Assyrians and the sudden deliverance of Jerusalem from their grasp refer Isa. xxxiii., xxxvi. 2-xxxvii., with the fuller and evidently original narrative in 2 Kings xviii. 17-xix. Compare 2 Chron. xxxii. 9-23.

To the history of this double attempt upon Jerusalem in 701—xxxvi. and xxxvii.—there has been appended in xxxviii. and xxxix. an account of Hezekiah's illness and of an embassy to him from Babylon. These events probably happened some years before Sennacherib's invasion. But it will be most convenient for us to take them in the order in which they stand in the canon. They will naturally lead us up to a question that it is necessary we should discuss before taking leave of Isaiah—whether this great prophet of the endurance of the kingdom of God upon earth had any gospel for the individual who dropped away from it into death.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE LOWEST EBB.

ISAIAH i. and xxii.

701 B. C.

IN the drama of Isaiah's life we have now arrived at the final act—a short and sharp one of a few months. The time is 701 B. C., the fortieth year of Isaiah's ministry, and about the twenty-sixth of Hezekiah's reign. The background is the invasion of Palestine by Sennacherib. The stage itself is the city of Jerusalem. In the clear atmosphere before the bursting of the storm Isaiah has looked round the whole world—his world—uttering oracles on the nations from Tyre to Egypt and from Ethiopia to Babylon. But now the Assyrian storm has burst, and all except the immediate neighbourhood of the prophet is obscured. From Jerusalem Isaiah will not again lift his eyes.

The stage is thus narrow and the time short, but the action one of the most critical in the history of Israel, taking rank with the Exodus from Egypt and the Return from Babylon. To Isaiah himself it marks the summit of his career. For half a century Zion has been preparing for, forgetting and again preparing for, her first and final struggle with the Assyrian. Now she is to meet her foe, face to face across her own walls. For forty years Isaiah has predicted for the Assyrian an uninterrupted path of conquest to the very gates of Jerusalem, but certain check and confusion there. Sennacherib has overrun the world, and leaps upon Zion. The Jewish nation await their fate, Isaiah his vindication, and the credit of Israel's religion, one of the most ex-

traordinary tests to which a spiritual faith was ever subjected.

In the end, by the mysterious disappearance of the Assyrian, Jerusalem was saved, the prophet was left with his remnant and the future still open for Israel. But at the beginning of the end such an issue was by no means probable. Jewish panic and profligacy almost prevented the Divine purpose, and Isaiah went near to breaking his heart over the city, for whose redemption he had travailed for a lifetime. He was as sure as ever that this redemption must come, but a collapse of the people's faith and patriotism at the eleventh hour made its coming seem worthless. Jerusalem appeared bent on forestalling her deliverance by moral suicide. Despair, not of God but of the city, settled on Isaiah's heart; and in such a mood he wrote chap. xxii. We may entitle it therefore, though written at a time when the tide should have been running to the full, "At the Lowest Ebb."

We have thus stated at the outset the motive of this chapter, because it is one of the most unexpected and startling of all Isaiah's prophecies. In it "we can discern precipices." Beneath our eyes, long lifted by the prophet to behold a future "stretching very far forth," this chapter suddenly yawns, a pit of blackness. For utterness of despair and the absolute sentence which it passes on the citizens of Zion we have had nothing like it from Isaiah since the evil days of Ahaz. The historical portions of the Bible which cover this period are not cleft by such a crevasse, and of course the official Assyrian annals, full as they are of the details of Sennacherib's campaign in Palestine, know nothing of the moral condition of Jerusalem.* Yet if we put the Hebrew and Assyrian narratives together, and compare them with chaps. i. and xxii. of Isaiah, we may be sure that the following was something like the course of events which led down to this woeful depth in Judah's experience.

In a Syrian campaign Sennacherib's path was plain—to begin with the Phœnician cities, march quickly south by the level coastland, subduing the petty chieftains upon it, meet Egypt at its southern end, and then, when he had rid himself of his only formidable foe, turn to the more delicate task of warfare among the hills of Judah—a campaign which he could scarcely undertake with a hostile force like Egypt on his flank. This course, he tells us, he followed. "In my third campaign, to the island of Syria I went. Luliah (Elulæus), King of Sidón—for the fearful splendour of my majesty overwhelmed him—fled to a distant spot in the midst of the sea. His land I entered." City after city fell to the invader. The princes of Aradus, Byblus and Ashdod, by the coast, and even Moab and Edom, far inland, sent him their submission. He attacked Ascalon, and captured its king. He went on, and took the Philistine cities of Beth-dagon, Joppa, Barka, and Azor, all of them within forty miles of Jerusalem, and some even visible from her neighbourhood. South of this group, and a little over twenty-five miles from Jerusalem, lay Ekron; and here Sennacherib had so good a reason for anger, that the inhabitants, expecting no mercy at his hands, prepared a stubborn defence.

Ten years before this Sargon had set Padi, a vassal of his own, as king over Ekron; but the Ekronites had risen against Padi, put him in chains, and sent him to their ally Hezekiah, who now held him in Jerusalem. "These men," says Sennacherib, "were now terrified in their hearts; the shadows of death overwhelmed them."* Before Ekron was reduced, however, the Egyptian army arrived in Philistia, and Sennacherib had to abandon the siege for these arch-enemies. He defeated them in the neighbourhood, at Eltekeh, returned to Ekron, and completed its siege. Then, while he himself advanced southwards in pursuit of the Egyptians, he detached a corps, which, marching eastwards through the mountain passes, overran all Judah and threatened Jerusalem. "And Hezekiah, King of Judah, who had not bowed down at my feet, forty-six of his strong cities, his castles and the smaller towns in their neighbourhood beyond number, by casting down ramparts and by open attack, by battle—*zûk*, of the feet; *nîsi*, hewing to pieces and casting down (?)—I besieged, I captured. . . . He himself, like a bird in a cage, inside Jerusalem, his royal city, I shut him up; siege-towers against him I constructed, for he had given commands to renew the bulwarks of the great gate of his city."† But Sennacherib does not say that he took Jerusalem, and simply closes the narrative of his campaign with the account of large tribute which Hezekiah sent after him to Nineveh.

Here, then, we have material for a graphic picture of Jerusalem and her populace, when chaps. i. and xxii. were uttered by Isaiah.

At Jerusalem we are within a day's journey of any part of the territory of Judah. We feel the kingdom throb to its centre at Assyria's first footfall on the border. The nation's life is shuddering in upon its capital, couriers dashing up with the first news; fugitives hard upon them; palace, arsenal, market, and temple thrown into commotion; the politicians busy; the engineers hard at work completing the fortifications, leading the suburban wells to a reservoir within the walls, levelling every house and tree outside which could give shelter to the besiegers, and heaping up the material on the ramparts, till there lies nothing but a great, bare, waterless circle round a high-banked fortress. Across this bareness the lines of fugitives streaming to the gates; provincial officials and their retinues; soldiers whom Hezekiah had sent out to meet the foe, returning without even the dignity of defeat upon them; husbandmen, with cattle and remnants of grain in disorder; women and children; the knaves, cowards, and helpless of the whole kingdom pouring their fear, dissoluteness, and disease into the already-unsettled populace of Jerusalem. Inside the walls opposing political factions and a weak king; idle crowds, swaying to every rumour and intrigue; the ordinary restraints and regularities of life suspended, even patriotism gone with counsel and courage, but in their place fear and shame and greed of life. Such was the state in which Jerusalem faced the hour of her visitation.

Gradually the Visitant came near over the thirty miles which lay between the capital and the border. Signs of the Assyrian advance were given in the sky, and night after night the watchers on Mount Zion, seeing the glare in the

* "Records of the Past," i. 33 ff. vii.; Schrader's "Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament" (Whitehouse's translation).

* "Records of the Past," i. 38 : vii. 62.

† *Ibid.*, i. 40; Schrader, i. 286.

west, must have speculated which of the cities of Judah was being burned. Clouds of smoke across the heavens from prairie and forest fires told how war, even if it passed, would leave a trail of famine; and men thought with breaking hearts of the villages and fields, heritage of the tribes of old, that were now bare to the foot and the fire of the foreigner. "Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate as the overthrow of strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. Except Jehovah of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah." * Then came touch of the enemy, the appearance of armed bands, vistas down Jerusalem's favourite valleys of chariots, squadrons of horsemen emerging upon the plateaus to north and west of the city, heavy siege-towers and swarms of men innumerable. "And Elam bare the quiver, with troops of men and horsemen; and Kir uncovered the shield." At last they saw their fears of fifty years face to face! Far-away names were standing by their gates, actual bowmen and flashing shields! As Jerusalem gazed upon the terrible Assyrian armaments, how many of her inhabitants remembered Isaiah's words delivered a generation before!—"Behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall be weary or stumble among them; neither shall the string of their loins be lax nor the latchet of their shoes be broken; whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind; their roaring shall be like a lion: they shall roar like young lions. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."

There were, however, two supports on which that distracted populace within the walls still steadied themselves. The one was the Temple-worship, the other the Egyptian alliance.

History has many remarkable instances of peoples betaking themselves in the hour of calamity to the energetic discharge of the public rites of religion. But such a resort is seldom, if ever, a real moral conversion. It is merely physical nervousness, apprehension for life, clutching at the one thing within reach that feels solid, which it abandons as soon as panic has passed. When the crowds in Jerusalem betook themselves to the Temple, with unwonted wealth of sacrifice, Isaiah denounced this as hypocrisy and futility. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith Jehovah. . . . I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (i. 11-15).

Isaiah might have spared his scornful orders to the people to desist from worship. Soon afterwards they abandoned it of their own will, but from motives very different from those urged by him. The second support to which Jerusalem clung was the Egyptian alliance—the pet project of the party then in power. They had carried it to a successful issue, taunting Isaiah with their success.* He had continued to denounce it, and now the hour was approaching when their cleverness and confidence were to be put to the test. It was known in Jerusalem that an Egyptian army was advancing to meet Sen-

nacherib, and politicians and people awaited the encounter with anxiety.

We are aware what happened. Egypt was beaten at Eltekeh; the alliance was stamped a failure; Jerusalem's last worldly hope was taken from her. When the news reached the city, something took place, of which our moral judgment tells us more than any actual record of facts. The Government of Hezekiah gave way; the rulers, whose courage and patriotism had been identified with the Egyptian alliance, lost all hope for their country, and fled, as Isaiah puts it, *en masse* (xxii. 3). There was no battle, no defeat at arms (*id.* 2, 3); but the Jewish State collapsed.

Then, when the last material hope of Judah fell, fell her religion too. The Egyptian disappointment, while it drove the rulers out of their false policies, drove the people out of their unreal worship. What had been a city of devotees became in a moment a city of revellers. Formerly all had been sacrifices and worship, but now feasting and blasphemy. "Behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die" (*id.* 13. The reference of ver. 12 is probably to chap. i.).

Now all Isaiah's ministry had been directed just against these two things: the Egyptian alliance and the purely formal observance of religion—trust in the world and trust in religiousness. And together both of these had given way, and the Assyrian was at the gates. Truly it was the hour of Isaiah's vindication. Yet—and this is the tragedy—it had come too late. The prophet could not use it. The two things he said would collapse had collapsed, but for the people there seemed now no help to be justified from the thing which he said would remain. What was the use of the city's deliverance, when the people themselves had failed! The feelings of triumph, which the prophet might have expressed, were swallowed up in unselfish grief over the fate of his wayward and abandoned Jerusalem.

"What aileth thee now"—and in these words we can hear the old man addressing his fickle child, whose changefulness by this time he knew so well—"what aileth thee now that thou art wholly gone up to the house-tops"—we see him standing at his door watching this ghastly holiday—"O thou that art full of shoutings, a tumultuous city, a joyous town?" What are you rejoicing at in such an hour as this, when you have not even the bravery of your soldiers to celebrate, when you are without that pride which has brought songs from the lips of a defeated people as they learned that their sons had fallen with their faces to the foe, and has made even the wounds of the dead borne through the gate lips of triumph, calling to festival! "For thy slain are not slain with the sword, neither are they dead in battle."

"All thy chiefs fled in heaps;
Without bow they were taken;
All thine that were found were taken in heaps;
From far had they run.
Wherefore I say, Look away from me;
Let me make bitterness bitterer by weeping.
Press not to comfort me
For the ruin of the daughter of my people."

Urge not your mad holiday upon me! "For a day of discomfiture and of breaking and of perplexity hath the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, in

* i. 7-9.

† See p. 675.

the valley of vision, a breaking down of the wall and a crying to the mountain." These few words of prose, which follow the pathetic elegy, have a finer pathos still. The cumulative force of the successive clauses is very impressive: *disappointment* at the eleventh hour; the sense of a being *trampled* and overborne by sheer brute force; the counsels, courage, hope, and faith of fifty years crushed to blank *perplexity*, and all this from Himself—"the Lord, Jehovah of hosts"—in the very "valley of vision," the home of prophecy; as if He had meant of purpose to destroy these long confidences of the past on the floor where they had been wrestled for and asserted, and not by the force of the foe, but by the folly of His own people, to make them ashamed. The last clause crashes out the effect of it all; every spiritual rampart and refuge torn down, there is nothing left but an appeal to the hills to fall and cover us—"a breaking down of the wall and a crying to the mountain."

On the brink of the precipice, Isaiah draws back for a moment, to describe with some of his old fire the appearance of the besiegers (vv. 6-8a). And this suggests what kind of preparation Jerusalem had made for her foe—every kind, says Isaiah, but the supreme one. The arsenal, Solomon's "forest-house," with its cedar pillars, had been looked to (ver. 8), the fortifications inspected and increased, and the suburban waters brought within them (vv. 9-11a). "But ye looked not unto Him that had done this," who had brought this providence upon you; "neither had ye respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago," whose own plan it had been. To your alliances and fortifications you fled in the hour of calamity, but not to Him in whose guidance the course of calamity lay. And therefore, when your engineering and diplomacy failed you, your religion vanished with them. "In that day did the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; but, behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." It was the dropping of the mask. For half a century this people had worshipped God, but they had never trusted Him beyond the limits of their treaties and their bulwarks. And so when their allies were defeated, and their walls began to tremble, their religion, bound up with these things, collapsed also; they ceased even to be men, crying like beasts, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." For such a state of mind Isaiah will hold out no promise; it is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and for it there is no forgiveness. "And Jehovah of hosts revealed Himself in mine ears. Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts."

Back forty years the word had been, "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again and be healed." What happened now was only what was foretold then: "And if there be yet a tenth in it, it shall again be for consumption." That radical revision of judgment was now being literally fulfilled, when Isaiah, sure at last of his *remnant* within the walls of Jerusalem,

was forced for their sin to condemn even them to death.

Nevertheless, Isaiah had still respect to the ultimate survival of a remnant. How firmly he believed in it could not be more clearly illustrated than by the fact that when he had so absolutely devoted his fellow-citizens to destruction he also took the most practical means for securing a better political future. If there is any reason, it can only be this, for putting the second section of chap. xxii., which advocates a change of ministry in the city (vv. 15-22), so close to the first, which sees ahead nothing but destruction for the State (vv. 1-14).

The *mayor of the palace* at this time was one Shebna, also called *minister* or *deputy* (lit. *friend of the king*). That his father is not named implies perhaps that Shebna was a foreigner; his own name betrays a Syrian origin; and he has been justly supposed to be the leader of the party then in power, whose policy was the Egyptian alliance, and whom in these latter years Isaiah had so frequently denounced as the root of Judah's bitterness. To this unfamilied intruder, who had sought to establish himself in Jerusalem, after the manner of those days, by hewing himself a great sepulchre, Isaiah brought sentence of violent banishment: "Behold, Jehovah will be hurling, hurling thee away, thou big man, and crumpling, crumpling thee together. He will roll, roll thee on, thou rolling-stone, like a ball" (thrown out) "on broad level ground; there shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, thou shame of the house of thy lord. And I thrust thee from thy post, and from thy station do they pull thee down." This vagabond was not to die in his bed, nor to be gathered in his big tomb to the people on whom he had foisted himself. He should continue a *rolling-stone*. For him, like Cain, there was a land of Nod; and upon it he was to find a vagabond's death.

To fill this upstart's place, Isaiah solemnly designated a man with a father: Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah. The formulas he uses are perhaps the official ones customary upon induction to an office. But it may be also, that Isaiah has woven into these some expressions of even greater promise than usual. For this change of office-bearers was critical, and the overthrow of the "party of action" meant to Isaiah the beginning of the blessed future. "And it shall come to pass that in that day I will call My servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah; and I will clothe him with thy robe, and with thy girdle will I strengthen him, and thine administration will I give into his hand, and he shall be for a father to the inhabitant of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will set the key of the house of David upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shut: and he shall shut, and none open. And I will hammer him in, a nail in a firm place, and he shall be for a throne of glory to his father's house." Thus to the last Isaiah will not allow Shebna to forget that he is without root among the people of God, that he has neither father nor family.

But a family is a temptation, and the weight of it may drag even the man of the Lord's own hammering out of his place. This very year we find Eliakim in Shebna's post,* and Shebna reduced to be secretary; but Eliakim's family

seem to have taken advantage of their relative's position, and either at the time he was designated, or more probably later, Isaiah wrote two sentences of warning upon the dangers of nepotism. Catching at the figure, with which his designation of Eliakim closed, that Eliakim would be a peg in a solid wall, a throne on which the glory of his father's house might settle, Isaiah reminds the much-encumbered statesman that the firmest peg will give way if you hang too much on it, the strongest man be pulled down by his dependent and indolent family. "They shall hang upon him all the weight of his father's house, the scions and the offspring" (terms contrasted as degrees of worth), "all the little vessels, from the vessels of cups to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, shall the peg that was knocked into a firm place give way, and it shall be knocked out and fall, and down shall be cut the burden that was upon it, for Jehovah hath spoken."

So we have not one, but a couple of tragedies. Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, follows Shebna, the son of Nobody. The fate of the overburdened nail is as grievous as that of the rolling-stone. It is easy to pass this prophecy over as a trivial incident; but when we have carefully analysed each verse, restored to the words their exact shade of signification, and set them in their proper contrasts, we perceive the outlines of two social dramas, which it requires very little imagination to invest with engrossing moral interest.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE: MORAL EFFECTS OF FORGIVENESS.

ISAIAH xxii., contrasted with xxxiii.

701 B. C.

THE collapse of Jewish faith and patriotism in the face of the enemy was complete. Final and absolute did Isaiah's sentence ring out: "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith Jehovah of hosts." So we learn from chap. xxii., written, as we conceive, in 701, when the Assyrian armies had at last invested Jerusalem. But in chap. xxxiii., which critics unite in placing a few months later in the same year, Isaiah's tone is entirely changed. He hurls the woe of the Lord upon the Assyrians; confidently announces their immediate destruction; turns, while the whole city's faith hangs upon him, in supplication to the Lord; and announces the stability of Jerusalem, her peace, her glory, and the forgiveness of all her sins. It is this great moral difference between chaps. xxii. and xxxiii.—prophecies that must have been delivered within a few months of each other—which this chapter seeks to expound.

In spite of her collapse, as pictured in chap. xxii., Jerusalem was not taken. Her rulers fled; her people, as if death were certain, betook themselves to dissipation; and yet the city did not fall into the hands of the Assyrian. Sennacherib himself does not pretend to have taken Jerusalem. He tells us how closely he invested Jerusalem, but he does not add that he took

it, a silence which is the more significant that he records the capture of every other town which his armies attempted. He says that Hezekiah offered him tribute, and details the amount he received. He adds that the tribute was not paid at Jerusalem (as it would have been had Jerusalem been conquered), but that for "the payment of the tribute and the performance of homage" Hezekiah "despatched his envoy" * to him when he was at some distance from Jerusalem. All this agrees with the Bible narrative. In the book of Kings we are told how Hezekiah sent to the King of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have offended; return from me; that which thou puttest upon me I will bear. And the King of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah, King of Judah, three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of Jehovah and in the treasures of the king's house. At the same time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of Jehovah, and from the pillars which Hezekiah, King of Judah, had overlaid, and gave it to the King of Assyria."† It was indeed a sore submission, when even the Temple of the Lord had to be stripped of its gold. But it purchased the relief of the city, and no price was too high to pay for that at such a moment as the present, when the populace was demoralised. We may even see Isaiah's hand in the submission. The integrity of Jerusalem was the one fact on which the word of the Lord had been pledged, on which the promised remnant would be rallied. The Assyrian must not be able to say that he has made Zion's God like the gods of the heathen; and her people must see that even when they have given her up Jehovah can hold her for Himself, though in holding He tear and wound (xxx. 4). The Temple is greater than the gold of the Temple; let even the latter be stripped off and sold to the heathen if it can purchase the integrity of the former. So Jerusalem remained inviolate; she was still "the virgin, the daughter of Zion."

And now upon the redeemed city Isaiah could proceed to rebuild the shattered faith and morals of her people. He could say to them, "Everything has turned out as, by the word of the Lord, I said it should. The Assyrian has come down; Egypt has failed you. Your politicians, with their scorn of religion and their confidence in their cleverness, have deserted you. I told you that your numberless sacrifices and pomp of unreal religion would avail you nothing in your day of disaster, and lo when this came, your religion collapsed. Your abounding wickedness, I said, could only close in your ruin and desertion by God. But one promise I kept steadfast: that Jerusalem would not fall; and to your penitence, whenever it should be real, I assured forgiveness. Jerusalem stands to-day, according to my word; and I repeat my gospel. History has vindicated my word, but 'Come now, let us bring our reasoning to a close, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red like crimson,

* Schrader, "Cuneiform Inscriptions, O. T.," i. p. 286.

† 2 Kings xviii. 13-16. Here closes a paragraph. Ver. 17 begins to describe what Sennacherib did, in spite of Hezekiah's submission. He had withdrawn the army that had invested Jerusalem, for Hezekiah purchased its withdrawal by the tribute he sent. But Sennacherib, in spite of this, sent another corps of war against Jerusalem, which second attack is described in ver. 17 and onwards.

they shall be as wool.' I call upon you to build again on your redeemed city, and by the grace of this pardon, the fallen ruins of your life."

Some such sermon—if indeed not actually part of chap. i.—we must conceive Isaiah to have delivered to the people when Hezekiah had bought off Sennacherib, for we find the state of Jerusalem suddenly altered. Instead of the panic, which imagined the daily capture of the city, and rushed in hectic holiday to the house-tops, crying, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," we see the citizens back upon the walls, trembling yet trusting. Instead of sweeping past Isaiah in their revelry and leaving him to feel that after forty years of travail he had lost all his influence with them, we see them gathering round about him, as their single hope and confidence (xxxvii.). King and people look to Isaiah as their counsellor, and cannot answer the enemy without consulting him. What a change from the days of the Egyptian alliance, embassies sent off against his remonstrance, and intrigues developed without his knowledge; when Ahaz insulted him, and the drunken magnates mimicked him, and, in order to rouse an indolent people, he had to walk about the streets of Jerusalem for three years, stripped like a captive! Truly this was the day of Isaiah's triumph, when God by events vindicated his prophecy, and all the people acknowledged his leadership.

It was the hour of the prophet's triumph, but the nation had as yet only trials before it. God has not done with nations or men when He has forgiven them. This people, whom of His grace, and in spite of themselves, God had saved from destruction, stood on the brink of another trial. God had given them a new lease of life, but it was immediately to pass through the furnace. They had bought off Sennacherib, but Sennacherib came back.

When Sennacherib got the tribute, he repented of the treaty he had made with Hezekiah. He may have felt that it was a mistake to leave in his rear so powerful a fortress, while he had still to complete the overthrow of the Egyptians. So, in spite of the tribute, he sent a force back to Jerusalem to demand her surrender. We can imagine the moral effect upon King Hezekiah and his people. It was enough to sting the most demoralised into courage. Sennacherib had doubtless expected so pliant a king and so crushed a people to yield at once. But we may confidently picture the joy of Isaiah, as he felt the return of the Assyrians to be the very thing required to restore spirit to his demoralised countrymen. Here was a foe, whom they could face with a sense of justice, and not, as they had met him before, in carnal confidence and the pride of their own cleverness. Now was to be a war not, like former wars, undertaken merely for party glory, but with the purest feelings of patriotism and the firmest sanctions of religion, a campaign to be entered upon, not with Pharaoh's support and the strength of Egyptian chariots, but with God Himself as an ally—of which it could be said to Judah, "Thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward."

On what free, exultant wings the spirit of Isaiah must have risen to the sublime occasion! We know him as by nature an ardent patriot and passionate lover of his city, but through

circumstance her pitiless critic and unsparing judge. In all the literature of patriotism there are no finer odes and orations than those which it owes to him; from no lips came stronger songs of war, and no heart rejoiced more in the valour that turns the battle from the gate. But till now Isaiah's patriotism had been chiefly a conscience of his country's sins, his passionate love for Jerusalem repressed by as stern a loyalty to righteousness, and all his eloquence and courage spent in holding his people from war and persuading them to *returning and rest*. At last this conflict is at an end. The stubbornness of Judah, which has divided like some rock the current of her prophet's energies, and forced it back writhing and eddying upon itself, is removed. Isaiah's faith and his patriotism run free with the force of twin-tides in one channel, and we hear the fulness of their roar as they leap together upon the enemies of God and the fatherland. "Woe to thee, thou spoiler, and thou wast not spoiled, thou treacherous dealer, and they did not deal treacherously with thee! Whenever thou ceasest to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and whenever thou hast made an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee. O Jehovah, be gracious unto us; for Thou have we waited: be Thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble. From the noise of a surging the peoples have fled; from the lifting up of Thyself the nations are scattered. And gathered is your spoil, the gathering of the caterpillar; like the leaping of locusts, they are leaping upon it. Exalted is Jehovah; yea, He dwelleth on high: He hath filled Zion with justice and righteousness. And there shall be stability of thy times, wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of Jehovah, it shall be his treasure" (xxxiii. 1-6).

Thus, then, do we propose to bridge the gulf which lies between chaps. i. and xxii. on the one hand and chap. xxxiii. on the other. If they are all to be dated from the year 701, some such bridge is necessary. And the one we have traced is both morally sufficient and in harmony with what we know to have been the course of events.

What do we learn from it all? We learn a great deal upon that truth which chap. xxxiii. closes by announcing—the truth of Divine forgiveness.

The forgiveness of God is the foundation of every bridge from a hopeless past to a courageous present. That God can make the past be for guilt as though it had not been is always to Isaiah the assurance of the future. An old Greek miniature* represents him with Night behind him, veiled and sullen and holding a reversed torch. But before him stands Dawn and Innocence, a little child, with bright face and forward step and torch erect and burning. From above a hand pours light upon the face of the prophet, turned upwards. It is the message of a Divine pardon. Never did prophet more wearily feel the moral continuity of the generations, the lingering and ineradicable effects of crime. Only faith in a pardoning God could have enabled him, with such conviction of the inseparableness of yesterday and to-morrow, to make divorce between them, and turning his back on the past, as this miniature represents, hail the future as Immanuel, a child of infinite promise.

* Didron, "Christian Iconography," fig. 52.

From exposing and scourging the past, from proving it corrupt and pregnant with poison for all the future, Isaiah will turn on a single verse, and give us a future without war, sorrow, or fraud. His pivot is ever the pardon of God. But nowhere is his faith in this so powerful, his turning upon it so swift, as at this period of Jerusalem's collapse, when, having sentenced the people to death for their iniquity—"It was revealed in mine ears by Jehovah of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts" (xxii. 14)—he swings round on his promise of a little before—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow"—and to the people's penitence pronounces in the last verse of chap. xxxiii. a final absolution: "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquity." If chap. xxxiii. be, as many think, Isaiah's latest oracle, then we have the literal crown of all his prophesying in these two words: *forgiven iniquity*. It is as he put it early that same year: "Come now, let us bring our reasoning to a close; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." If man is to have a future, this must be the conclusion of all his past.

But the absoluteness of God's pardon, making the past as though it had not been, is not the only lesson which the spiritual experience of Jerusalem in that awful year of 701 has for us. Isaiah's gospel of forgiveness is nothing less than this: that when God gives pardon He gives himself. The name of the blessed future, which is entered through pardon—as in that miniature, a child—is Immanuel: *God-with-us*. And if it be correct that we owe the forty-sixth Psalm to these months when the Assyrian came back upon Jerusalem, then we see how the city, that had abandoned God, is yet able to sing when she is pardoned, "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in the midst of troubles." And this gospel of forgiveness is not only Isaiah's. According to the whole Bible, there is but one thing which separates man from God—that is sin, and when sin is done away with, God cannot be kept from man. In giving pardon to man, God gives back to man Himself. How gloriously evident this truth becomes in the New Testament! Christ, who is set before us as the Lamb of God, who beareth the sins of the world, is also Immanuel—God-with-us. The Sacrament, which most plainly seals to the believer the value of the One Sacrifice for sin, is the Sacrament in which the believer feeds upon Christ and appropriates Him. The sinner, who comes to Christ, not only receives pardon for Christ's sake, but receives Christ. Forgiveness means nothing less than this: that in giving pardon God gives Himself.

But if forgiveness mean all this, then the objections frequently brought against a conveyance of it so unconditioned as that of Isaiah fall to the ground. Forgiveness of such a kind cannot be either unjust or demoralising. On the contrary, we see Jerusalem permodalised by it. At first, it is true, the sense of weakness and fear abounds, as we learn from the narrative in chaps. xxxvi. and xxxvii. But where there was vanity, recklessness, and despair, giving way to

dissipation, there is now humility, discipline, and a leaning upon God, that are led up to confidence and exultation. Jerusalem's experience is just another proof that any moral results are possible to so great a process as the return of God to the soul. Awful is the responsibility of them who receive such a Gift and such a Guest; but the sense of that awfulness is the atmosphere, in which obedience and holiness and the courage that is born of both love best to grow. One can understand men scoffing at messages of pardon so unconditioned as Isaiah's, who think they "mean no more than a clean slate." Taken in this sense, the gospel of forgiveness must prove a savour of death unto death. But just as Jerusalem interpreted the message of her pardon to mean that "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved," and straight-way obedience was in all her hearts, and courage upon all her walls, so neither to us can be futile the New Testament form of the same gospel, which makes our pardoned soul the friend of God, accepted in the Beloved, and our body His holy temple.

Upon one other point connected with the forgiveness of sins we get instruction from the experience of Jerusalem. A man has difficulty in squaring his sense of forgiveness with the return on the back of it of his old temptations and trials, with the hostility of fortune and with the inexorableness of nature. Grace has spoken to his heart, but Providence bears more hard upon him than ever. Pardon does not change the outside of life; it does not immediately modify the movements of history, or suspend the laws of nature. Although God has forgiven Jerusalem, Assyria comes back to besiege her. Although the penitent be truly reconciled to God, the constitutional results of his fall remain: the frequency of temptation, the power of habit, the bias and facility downwards, the physical and social consequences. Pardon changes none of these things. It does not keep off the Assyrians.

But if pardon means the return of God to the soul, then in this we have the secret of the return of the foe. Men could not try nor develop a sense of the former except by their experience of the latter. We have seen why Isaiah must have welcomed the perfidious re-appearance of the Assyrians after he had helped to buy them off. Nothing could better test the sincerity of Jerusalem's repentance, or rally her dissipated forces. Had the Assyrians not returned, the Jews would have had no experimental proof of God's restored presence, and the great miracle would never have happened that rang through human history for evermore—a trumpet-call to faith in the God of Israel. And so still "the Lord scourgeth every son whom He receiveth," because He would put our penitence to the test; because He would discipline our disorganised affections, and give conscience and will a chance of wiping out defeat by victory; because He would baptise us with the most powerful baptism possible—the sense of being trusted once more to face the enemy upon the fields of our disgrace.

That is why the Assyrians came back to Jerusalem, and that is why temptations and penalties still pursue the penitent and forgiven.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUR GOD A CONSUMING FIRE.

ISAIAH xxxiii.

701 B. C.

WE have seen how the sense of forgiveness and the exultant confidence, which fill chap. xxxiii., were brought about within a few months after the sentence of death, that cast so deep a gloom on chap. xxii. We have expounded some of the contents of chap. xxxiii., but have not exhausted the chapter; and in particular we have not touched one of Isaiah's principles, which there finds perhaps its finest expression: the consuming righteousness of God.

There is no doubt that chap. xxxiii. refers to the sudden disappearance of the Assyrian from the walls of Jerusalem. It was written, part perhaps on the eve of that deliverance, part immediately after morning broke upon the vanished host. Before those verses which picture the disappearance of the investing army, we ought in strict chronological order to take the narrative in chaps. xxxvi. and xxxvii.—the return of the besiegers, the insolence of the Rabshakeh, the prostration of Hezekiah, Isaiah's solitary faith, and the sudden disappearance of the Assyrian. It will be more convenient, however, since we have already entered chap. xxxiii., to finish it, and then to take the narrative of the events which led up to it.

The opening verses of chap. xxxiii. fit the very moment of the crisis, as if Isaiah had flung them across the walls in the teeth of the Rabshakeh and the second embassy from Sennacherib, who had returned to demand the surrender of the city in spite of Hezekiah's tribute for her integrity: "Woe to thee, thou spoiler, and thou wast not spoiled, thou treacherous dealer, and they did not deal treacherously with thee! When thou ceapest to spoil thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou makest an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee." Then follows the prayer, as already quoted, and the confidence in the security of Jerusalem (ver. 2). A new paragraph (vv. 7-12) describes Rabshakeh and his company demanding the surrender of the city; the disappointment of the ambassadors who had been sent to treat with Sennacherib (ver. 7); the perfidy of the great king, who had broken the covenant they had made with him and swept his armies back upon Judah (ver. 8); the disheartening of the land under this new shock (ver. 9); and the resolution of the Lord now to rise and scatter the invaders: "Now will I arise, saith Jehovah; now will I lift up Myself; now will I be exalted. Ye shall conceive chaff; ye shall bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire, that shall devour you. And the peoples shall be as the burnings of lime, as thorns cut down that are burned in the fire" (vv. 10-12).

After an application of this same fire of God's righteousness to the sinners *within* Jerusalem, to which we shall presently return, the rest of the chapter pictures the stunned populace awaking to the fact that they are free. Is the Assyrian really gone, or do the Jews dream as they crowd the walls, and see no trace of him? Have they all vanished—the Rabshakeh, "by the conduit

of the upper pool, with his loud voice" and insults; the scribes to whom they handed the tribute, and who prolonged the agony by counting it under their eyes; the scouts and engineers insolently walking about Zion and mapping out her walls for the assault; the close investment of barbarian hordes, with their awesome speech and uncouth looks! "Where is he that counted? where is he that weighed the tribute? where is he that counted the towers? Thou shalt not see the fierce people, a people of a deep speech that thou canst not perceive, of a strange tongue that thou canst not understand." They have vanished. Hezekiah may lift his head again. O people—sore at heart to see thy king in sackcloth and ashes * as the enemy devoured province after province of thy land and cooped thee up within the narrow walls, thou scarcely didst dare to peep across—take courage, the terror is gone! "A king in his beauty thine eyes shall see; they shall behold the land spreading very far forth" (ver. 17). We had thought to die in the restlessness and horror of war, never again to know what stable life and regular worship were, our Temple services interrupted, our home a battlefield. But "look upon Zion;" behold again "she is the city of our solemn diets; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent that shall not be removed, the stakes whereof shall never be plucked up, neither shall the cords thereof be broken. But there Jehovah," whom we have known only for affliction, "shall be in majesty for us." Other peoples have their natural defences, Assyria and Egypt their Euphrates and Nile; but God Himself shall be for us "a place of rivers, streams, broad on both hands, on which never a galley shall go, nor gallant ship shall pass upon it." Without sign of battle, God shall be our refuge and our strength. It was that marvellous deliverance of Jerusalem by the hand of God, with no effort of human war, which caused Isaiah to invest with such majesty the meagre rock, its squalid surroundings and paltry defences. The insignificant and waterless city was glorious to the prophet because God was in her. One of the richest imaginations which patriot ever poured upon his fatherland was inspired by the simplest faith saint ever breathed. Isaiah strikes again the old keynote (chap. viii.) about the waterlessness of Jerusalem. We have to keep in mind the Jews' complaints of this, in order to understand what the forty-sixth Psalm means when it says, "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High"—or what Isaiah means when he says, "Glorious shall Jehovah be unto us, a place of broad rivers and streams." Yea, he adds, Jehovah is everything to us: "Jehovah is our Judge; Jehovah is our Lawgiver; Jehovah is our King: He will save us."

Such were the feelings aroused in Jerusalem by the sudden relief of the city. Some of the verses, which we have scarcely touched, we will now consider more fully as the expression of a doctrine which runs throughout Isaiah, and indeed is one of his two or three fundamental truths—that the righteousness of God is an all-pervading atmosphere, an atmosphere that wears and burns.

For forty years the prophet had been preach-

* Chap. xxxvii.

ing to the Jews his gospel, "God-with-us;" but they never awakened to the reality of the Divine presence till they saw it in the dispersion of the Assyrian army. Then God became real to them (ver. 14). The justice of God, preached so long by Isaiah, had always seemed something abstract. Now they saw how concrete it was. It was not only a doctrine: it was a fact. It was a fact that was a fire. Isaiah had often called it a fire; they thought this was rhetoric. But now they saw the actual burning—"the peoples as the burning of lime, as thorns cut down that are burned in the fire." And when they felt the fire so near, each sinner of them awoke to the fact that he had something burnable in himself, something which could as little stand the fire as the Assyrians could. There was no difference in this fire outside and inside the walls. What it burned there it would burn here. Nay, was not Jerusalem the dwelling-place of God, and Ariel the very hearth and furnace of the fire which they saw consume the Assyrians? "Who," they cried in their terror—"Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

We are familiar with Isaiah's fundamental God-with-us, and how it was spoken not for mercy only, but for judgment (chap. viii.). If "God-with-us" meant love with us, salvation with us, it meant also holiness with us, judgment with us, the jealousy of God breathing upon what is impure, false, and proud. Isaiah felt this so hotly that his sense of it has broken out into some of the fieriest words in all prophecy. In his younger days he told the citizens not "to provoke the eyes of God's glory," as if Heaven had fastened on their life two gleaming orbs, not only to pierce them with its vision, but to consume them with its wrath. Again, in the lowering cloud of calamity he had seen "lips of indignation, a tongue as a devouring fire," and in the overflowing stream which finally issued from it the hot "breath of the Almighty." These are unforgettable descriptions of the ceaseless activity of Divine righteousness in the life of man. They set our imaginations on fire with the prophet's burning belief in this. But they are excelled by another, more frequently used by Isaiah, wherein he likens the holiness of God to an universal and constant fire. To Isaiah life was so penetrated by the active justice of God, that he described it as bathed in fire, as blown through with fire. Righteousness was no mere doctrine to this prophet: it was the most real thing in history; it was the presence which pervaded and explained all phenomena. We shall understand the difference between Isaiah and his people if we have ever for our eyes' sake looked at a great conflagration through a coloured glass which allowed us to see the solid materials—stone, wood, and iron—but prevented us from perceiving the flames and shimmering heat. To look thus is to see pillars, lintels, and cross-beams twist and fall, crumble and fade; but how inexplicable the process seems! Take away the glass, and everything is clear. The fiery element is filling all the interstices, that were blank to us before, and beating upon the solid material. The heat becomes visible, shimmering even where there is no flame. Just so had it been with the sinners in Judah these forty years. Their society and politics, individual fortunes and careers, personal and national habits—the home, the Church, the State—common outlines and

shapes of life—were patent to every eye, but no man could explain the constant decay and diminution, because all were looking at life through a glass darkly. Isaiah alone faced life with open vision, which filled up for him the interstices of experience and gave terrible explanation to fate. It was a vision that nearly scorched the eyes out of him. Life as he saw it was steeped in flame—the glowing righteousness of God. Jerusalem was full "of the spirit of justice, the spirit of burning. The light of Israel is for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame." The Assyrian empire, that vast erection which the strong hands of kings had reared, was simply their pyre, made ready for the burning. "For a Topheth is prepared of old; yea, for the king it is made ready; He hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of Jehovah, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it."* So Isaiah saw life, and flashed it on his countrymen. At last the glass fell from their eyes also, and they cried aloud, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Isaiah replied that there is one thing which can survive the universal flame, and that is character: "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of fraud, that shaketh his hands from the holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from the hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking on evil, he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: his bread shall be given him: his water shall be sure."

Isaiah's Vision of Fire suggests two thoughts to us.

1. Have we done well to confine our horror of the consuming fires of righteousness to the next life? If we would but use the eyes which Scripture lends us, the rifts of prophetic vision and awakened conscience by which the fogs of this world and of our own hearts are rent, we should see fires as fierce, a consumption as pitiless, about us here as ever the conscience of a startled sinner fearfully looked for across the grave. Nay, have not the fires, with which the darkness of eternity has been made lurid, themselves been kindled at the burnings of this life? Is it not because men have felt how hot this world was being made for sin that they have had a "certain fearful expectation of judgment and the fierceness of fire?" We shudder at the horrible pictures of hell which some older theologians and poets have painted for us; but it was not morbid fancy, nor the barbarism of their age, nor their own heart's cruelty that inspired these men. It was their hot honour for the Divine holiness; it was their experience of how pitiless to sin Providence is already in this life; it was their own scorched senses and affections—brands, as many honest men among them felt themselves, plucked from the burning. Our God is a consuming fire—here as well as yonder. Hell has borrowed her glare from the imagination of men aflame with the real fieriness of life, and may be—more truly than of old—pictured as the dead and hollow cinder left by those fires, of which, as every true man's conscience is aware, this life is full. It was not hell that created conscience; it was conscience that created hell, and conscience was fired by the vision which fired

* iv. 4; xxx. 33.

Isaiah—of all life aglow with the righteousness of God—"God with us," as He was with Jerusalem, "a spirit of burning and a spirit of justice." This is the pantheism of conscience, and it stands to reason. God is the one power of life. What can exist beside Him except what is like Him? Nothing—sooner or later nothing but what is like Him. The will that is as His will, the heart that is pure, the character that is transparent—only these dwell with the everlasting fire, and burning with God, as the bush which Moses saw, are nevertheless not consumed. Let us lay it to heart—Isaiah has nothing to tell us about hell-fire, but a great deal about the pitiless justice of God in this life.

2. The second thought suggested by Isaiah's Vision of Life is a comparison of it with the theory of life which is fashionable to-day. Isaiah's figure for life was a burning. Ours is a battle, and at first sight ours looks the truer. Seen through a formula which has become everywhere fashionable, life is a fierce and fascinating warfare. Civilised thought, when asked to describe any form of life or to account for a death or survival, most monotonously replies, "The struggle for existence." The sociologist has borrowed the phrase from the biologist, and it is on everybody's lips to describe their idea of human life. It is uttered by the historian when he would explain the disappearance of this national type, the prevalence of that one. The economist traces depression and failures, the fatal fevers of speculation, the cruelties and bad humours of commercial life, to the same source. A merchant with profits lessening and failure before him relieves his despair and apologises to his pride with the words, "It is all due to competition." Even character and the spiritual graces are sometimes set down as results of the same material process. Some have sought to deduce from it all intelligence, others more audaciously all ethics; and it is certain that in the silence of men's hearts after a moral defeat there is no excuse more frequently offered to conscience by will than that the battle was too hot.

But fascinating as life is when seen through this formula, does not the formula act on our vision precisely as the glass we supposed, which when we look through it on a conflagration shows us the solid matter and the changes through which this passes, but hides from us the real agent? One need not deny the reality of the struggle for existence, or that its results are enormous. We struggle with each other, and affect each other for good and for evil, sometimes past all calculation. But we do not fight a vacuum. Let Isaiah's vision be the complement of our own feeling. We fight in an atmosphere that affects every one of us far more powerfully than the opposing wits or wills of our fellow-men. Around us and through us, within and without as we fight, is the all-pervading righteousness of God; and it is far oftener the effects of this which we see in the falls and the changes of life than the effects of our struggle with each other, enormous though these may be. On this point there is an exact parallel between our days and the days of Isaiah. Then the politicians of Judah, looking through their darkened glass at life, said, Life is simply a war in which the strongest prevail, a game which the most cunning win. So they made fast their alliances, and were ready to meet the Assyrian, or they fled in panic before him, according as Egypt or he seemed the

stronger. Isaiah saw that with Assyrian and Jew another Power was present—the real reason of every change in politics, collapse or crash in either of the empires—the active righteousness of God. Assyrian and Jew had not only to contend with each other. They were at strife with Him. We now see plainly that Isaiah was right. Far more operative than the intrigues of politicians or the pride of Assyria, because it used these simply as its mines and its fuel, was the law of righteousness, the spiritual force which is as impalpable as the atmosphere, yet strong to burn and try as a furnace seven times heated. And Isaiah is equally right for to-day. As we look at life through our fashionable formula it does seem a mass of struggle, in which we catch only now and then a glimpse of the decisions of righteousness, but the prevailing lawlessness of which we do not hesitate to make the reason of all that happens, and in particular the excuse of our own defeats. We are wrong. Righteousness is not an occasional spark; righteousness is the atmosphere. Though our dull eyes see it only now and then strike into flame in the battle of life, and take for granted that it is but the flash of meeting wits or of steel, God's justice is everywhere, pervasive and pitiless, affecting the combatants far more than they have power to affect one another.

We shall best learn the truth of this in the way the sinners in Jerusalem learned it—each man first looking into himself. "Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?" Can we attribute all our defeats to the opposition that was upon us at the moment they occurred? When our temper failed, when our charity relaxed, when our resoluteness gave way, was it the hotness of debate, was it the pressure of the crowd, was it the sneer of the scorner, that was to blame? We all know that these were only the occasions of our defeats. Conscience tells us that the cause lay in a slothful or self-indulgent heart, which the corrosive atmosphere of Divine righteousness had been consuming, and which, sapped and hollow by its effect, gave way at every material shock.

With the knowledge that conscience gives us, let us now look at a kind of figure which must be within the horizon of all of us. Once it was the most commanding stature among its fellows, the straight back and broad brow of a king of men. But now what is the last sight of him that will remain with us, flung out there against the evening skies of his life? A bent back (we speak of character), a stooping face, the shrinking outlines of a man ready to collapse. It was not the struggle for existence that killed him, for he was born to prevail in it. It was the atmosphere that told on him. He carried in him that on which the atmosphere could not but tell. A low selfishness or passion inhabited him, and became the predominant part of him, so that his outward life was only its shell; and when the fire of God at last pierced this, he was as thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire.

We can explain much with the outward eye, but the most of the explanation lies beyond. Where our knowledge of a man's life ends, the great meaning of it often only begins. All the vacancy beyond the outline we see is full of that meaning. God is there, and "God is a consuming fire." Let us not seek to explain lives only by what we see of them, the visible strife of man with man and nature. It is the invisible that

contains the secret of what is seen. We see the shoulders stoop, but not the burden upon them; the face darken, but look in vain for what casts the shadow; the light sparkle in the eye, but cannot tell what star of hope its glance has caught. And even so, when we behold fortune and character go down in the warfare of this world, we ought to remember that it is not always the things we see that are to blame for the fall, but that awful flame which, unseen by common man, has been revealed to the prophets of God.

Righteousness and retribution, then, are an atmosphere—not lines or laws that we may happen to stumble upon, not explosives, that, being touched, burst out on us, but the atmosphere—always about us and always at work, invisible and yet more mighty than aught we see. “God, in whom we live and move and have our being, is a consuming fire.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RABSHAKEH; OR, LAST TEMPTATIONS OF FAITH.

ISAIAH xxxvi.

701 B. C.

It remains for us now to follow in chaps. xxxvi., xxxvii., the historical narrative of the events, the moral results of which we have seen so vivid in chap. xxxiii.—the perfidious return of the Assyrians to Jerusalem after Hezekiah had bought them off, and their final disappearance from the Holy Land.

This historical narrative has also its moral. It is not annals, but drama. The whole moral of Isaiah's prophesying is here flung into a duel between champions of the two tempers, which we have seen in perpetual conflict throughout his book. The two tempers are—on Isaiah's side an absolute and unselfish faith in God, Sovereign of the world and Saviour of His people; on the side of the Assyrians a bare, brutal confidence in themselves, in human cleverness and success, a vaunting contempt of righteousness and of pity. The main interest of Isaiah's book has consisted in the way these tempers oppose each other, and alternately influence the feeling of the Jewish community. That interest is now to culminate in the scene which brings near such thorough representatives of the two tempers as Isaiah and the Rabshakeh, with the crowd of wavering Jews between. Most strikingly, Assyria's last assault is not of force, but of speech, delivering upon faith the subtle arguments of the worldly temper; and as strikingly, while all official religion and power of State stand helpless against them, these arguments are met by the bare word of God. In this mere statement of the situation, however, we perceive that much more than the quarrel of a single generation is being decided. This scene is a parable of the everlasting struggle between faith and force, with doubt and despair between them. In the clever, self-confident, persuasive personage with two languages on his tongue and an army at his back; in the fluttered representatives of official religion who meet him and are afraid of the effect of his speech on the common people; in

the ranks of dispirited men who hear the dialogue from the wall; in the sensitive king so aware of faith, and yet so helpless to bring faith forth to peace and triumph; and, in the background of the whole situation, the serene prophet of God, grasping only God's word, and by his own steadfastness carrying the city over the crisis and proving that faith indeed can be “the substance of things hoped for”—we have a phase of the struggle ordained unto every generation of men, and which is as fresh to-day as when Rabshakeh played the cynic and the scribes and elders filled the part of nervous defenders of the faith, under the walls of faith's fortress, two thousand five hundred years ago.

THE RABSHAKEH.

This word is a Hebrew transliteration of the Assyrian Rab-sak, “chief of the officers.” Though there is some doubt on the point, we may naturally presume from the duties he here discharges that the Rabshakeh was a civilian—probably the civil commissioner or political officer attached to the Assyrian army, which was commanded, according to 2 Kings xviii. 16, by the Tartan or commander-in-chief himself.

In all the Bible there is not a personage more clever than this Rabshakeh, nor more typical. He was an able deputy of the king who sent him, but he represented still more thoroughly the temper of the civilisation to which he belonged. There is no word of this man which is not characteristic. A clever, fluent diplomatist, with the traveller's knowledge of men and the conqueror's contempt for them, the Rabshakeh is the product of a victorious empire like the Assyrian, or, say, like the British. Our services sometimes turn out the like of him—a creature able to speak to natives in their own language, full and ready of information, mastering the surface of affairs at a glance, but always baffled by the deeper tides which sway nations; a deft player upon party interests and the superficial human passions, but unfit to touch the deep springs of men's religion and patriotism. Let us speak, however, with respect of the Rabshakeh. From his rank (Sayce calls him the Vizier), as well as from the cleverness with which he explains what we know to have been the policy of Sennacherib towards the populations of Syria, he may well have been the inspiring mind at this time of the great Assyrian empire—Sennacherib's Bismarck.

The Rabshakeh had strutted down from the great centre of civilisation, with its temper upon him, and all its great resources at his back, confident to twist these poor provincial tribes round his little finger. How petty he conceived them we infer from his never styling Hezekiah “the king.” This was to be an occasion for the Rabshakeh's own glorification. Jerusalem was to fall to his clever speeches. He had indeed the army behind him, but the work to be done was not the rough work of soldiers. All was to be managed by him, the civilian and orator. This fellow, with his two languages and clever address, was to step out in front of the army and finish the whole business.

The Rabshakeh spoke extremely well. With his first words he touched the sore point of Judah's policy: her trust in Egypt. On this he spoke like a very Isaiah. But he showed a

deeper knowledge of Judah's internal affairs, and a subtler deftness in using it, when he referred to the matter of the altars. Hezekiah had abolished the high places in all parts of the land, and gathered the people to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. The Assyrian knew that a number of Jews must look upon this disestablishment of religion in the provinces as likely to incur Jehovah's displeasure and turn Him against them. Therefore he said, "But if thou say unto me, We trust in Jehovah our God, is not that He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar"? And then, having shaken their religious confidence, he made sport of their military strength. And finally he boldly asserted, "Jehovah said unto me, Go up against this land and destroy it." All this shows a master in diplomacy, a most clever demagogue. The scribes and elders felt the edge, and begged him to sheathe it in a language unknown to the common people. But he, conscious of his power, spoke the more boldly, addressing himself directly to the poorer sort of the garrison, on whom the siege would press most heavily. His second speech to them is a good illustration of the policy pursued by Assyria at this time towards the cities of Palestine. We know from the annals of Sennacherib that his customary policy, to seduce the populations of a hostile State from allegiance to their rulers, had succeeded in other cases; and it was so plausibly uttered in this case, that it seemed likely to succeed again. To the common soldiers on the walls, with the prospect of being reduced to the foul rations of a prolonged siege (ver. 12), Sennacherib's ambassador offers rich and equal property and enjoyment. "Make a treaty with me, and come out to me, and eat every one of his vine and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one of the water of his cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and grapes, a land of bread-corn and orchards. Every one!"—it is a most subtle assault upon the discipline, comradeship, and patriotism of the common soldiers by the promises of a selfish, sensuous equality and individualism. But then the speaker's native cynicism gets the better of him—it is not possible for an Assyrian long to play the part of clemency—and, with a flash of scorn, he asks the sad men upon the walls whether they really believe that Jehovah can save them: "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria, . . . that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" All the range of their feelings does he thus run through, seeking with sharp words to snap each cord of faith in God, of honour to the king and love of country. Had the Jews heart to answer him, they might point out the inconsistency between his claim to have been sent by Jehovah and the contempt he now pours upon their God. But the inconsistency is characteristic. The Assyrian has some acquaintance with the Jewish faith; he makes use of its articles when they serve his purpose, but his ultimatum is to tear them to shreds in their believers' faces. He treats the Jews as men of culture still sometimes treat barbarians, first scornfully humouring their faith and then savagely trampling it under foot.

So clever were the speeches of the Rabshakeh. We see why he was appointed to this mission.

He was an expert both in the language and religion of this tribe, perched on its rock in the remote Judæan highlands. For a foreigner he showed marvellous familiarity with the temper and internal jealousies of the Jewish religion. He turned these on each other almost as adroitly as Paul himself did in the disputes between Sadducees and Pharisees. How the fellow knew his cleverness, strutting there betwixt army and town! He would show his soldier friends the proper way of dealing with stubborn barbarians. He would astonish those faith-proud highlanders by exhibiting how much he was aware of the life behind their thick walls and silent faces, "for the king's commandment was, Answer him not."

And yet did the Rabshakeh, with all his raking, know the heart of Judah? No, truly. The whole interest of this man is the incongruity of the expertness and surface-knowledge, which he spattered on Jerusalem's walls, with the deep secret of God, that, as some inexhaustible well, the fortress of the faith carried within her. Ah, Assyrian, there is more in starved Jerusalem than thou canst put in thy speeches! Suppose Heaven were to give those sharp eyes of thine power to look through the next thousand years, and see this race and this religion thou puffest at, the highest-honoured, hottest-hated of the world, centre of mankind's regard and debate, but thou, and thy king and all the glory of your empire wrapped deep in oblivion. To this little fortress of highland men shall the heart of great peoples turn: kings for its nursing-fathers and queens for its nursing-mothers, the forces of the Gentiles shall come to it, and from it new civilisations take their laws; while thou and all thy paraphernalia disappear into blackness, haunted only by the antiquary, the world taking an interest in thee just in so far as thou didst once hopelessly attempt to understand Jerusalem and capture her faith by thine own interpretation of it. Curious pigmy, very grand thou thinkest thyself, and surely with some right as delegate of the king of kings, parading thy cleverness and thy bribes before these poor barbarians; but the world, called to look upon you both from this eminence of history, grants thee to be a very good head of an intelligence department, with a couple of languages on thy glib tongue's end, but adjudges that with the starved and speechless men before thee lies the secret of all that is worth living and dying for in this world.

The Rabshakeh's plausible futility and Jerusalem's faith, greatly distressed before him, are typical. Still as men hang moodily over the bulwarks of Zion, doubtful whether life is worth living within the narrow limits which religion prescribes, or righteousness worth fighting for with such privations and hope deferred, comes upon them some elegant and plausible temptation, loudly calling to give the whole thing up. Disregarding the official arguments and evidences that push forward to parley, it speaks home in practical tones to men's real selves—their appetites and selfishness. "You are foolish fellows," it says, "to confine yourselves to such narrowness of life and self-denial! The fall of your faith is only a matter of time: other creeds have gone; yours must follow. And why fight the world for the sake of an idea, or from the habits of a discipline? Such things only starve the human spirit; and the world is so generous, so free to every one, so tolerant of each enjoy-

ing his own, unhampered by authority or religion."

In our day what has the greatest effect on the faith of many men is just this mixture, that pervades the Rabshakeh's address,—of a superior culture pretending to expose religion, with the easy generosity, which offers to the individual a selfish life, unchecked by any discipline or religious fear. That modern Rabshakeh, Ernest Renan, with the forces of historical criticism at his back, but confident rather in his own skill of address, speaking to us believers as poor picturesque provincials, patronising our Deity, and telling us that he knows His intentions better than we do ourselves, is a very good representative of the enemies of the Faith, who owe their impressiveness upon common men to the familiarity they display with the contents of the Faith, and the independent, easy life they offer to the man who throws his strict faith off. Superior knowledge, with the offer on its lips of a life on good terms with the rich and tolerant world—pretence of promising selfishness—that is to-day, as then under the walls of Jerusalem, the typical enemy of the Faith. But if faith be held simply as the silent garrison of Jerusalem held it, faith in a Lord God of righteousness, who has given us a conscience to serve Him, and has spoken to us in plain explanation of this by those whom we can see, understand, and trust—not only by an Isaiah, but by a Jesus—then neither mere cleverness nor the ability to promise comfort can avail against our faith. A simple conscience of God and of duty may not be able to answer subtle arguments word for word, but she can feel the incongruity of their cleverness with her own precious secret; she can at least expose the fallacy of their sensuous promises of an untroubled life. No man, who tempts us from a good conscience with God in the discipline of our religion and the comradeship of His people, can ensure that there will be no starvation in the pride of life, no captivity in the easy tolerance of the world. To the heart of man there will always be captivity in selfishness; there will always be exile in unbelief. Even where the romance and sentiment of faith are retained, after the manner of Renan, it is only to mock us with mirage. "As in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, our heart and flesh shall cry out for the living God, as we have aforetime seen Him in the sanctuary." The land in which the tempter promises a life undisturbed by religious restraints is not our home, neither is it freedom. By the conscience that is within us, God has set us on the walls of faith, with His law to observe, with His people to stand by; and against us are the world and its tempters, with all their wiles to be defied. If we go down from the charge and shelter of so simple a religion, then, whatever enjoyment we have, we shall enjoy it only with the fears of the deserter and the greed of the slave.

In spite of scorn and sensuous promise from Rabshakeh to Renan, let us lift the hymn which these silent Jews at last lifted from the walls of their delivered city: "Walk about Zion and go round about her; tell ye the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation to come. For this God is our God for ever and ever. He will be our Guide even unto death."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THIS IS THE VICTORY. . . . OUR FAITH.

ISAIAH xxxvii.

701 B. C.

WITHIN the fortress of the faith there is only silence and embarrassment. We pass from the Rabshakeh, posing outside the walls of Zion, to Hezekiah, prostrate within them. We pass with the distracted councillors, by the walls crowded with moody and silent soldiers, many of them—if this be the meaning of the king's command that they should not parley—only too ready to yield to the plausible infidel. We are astonished. Has faith nothing to say for herself? Have this people of so long Divine inspiration no habit of self-possession, no argument in answer to the irrelevant attacks of their enemy? Where are the traditions of Moses and Joshua, the songs of Deborah and David? Can men walk about Zion, and their very footsteps on her walls ring out no defiance?

Hezekiah's complaint reminds us that in this silence and distress we have no occasional perplexity of faith, but her perpetual burden. Faith is inarticulate because of her greatness. Faith is courageous and imaginative; but can she convert her confidence and visions into fact? Said Hezekiah, "This is a day of trouble, and rebuke and contumely, for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring them forth." These words are not a mere metaphor for anguish. They are the definition of a real miscarriage. In Isaiah's contemporaries faith has at last engendered courage, zeal for God's house, and strong assurance of victory; but she, that has proved fertile to conceive and carry these confidences, is powerless to bring them forth into real life, to transform them to actual fact. Faith, complains Hezekiah, is not the substance of things hoped for. At the moment when her subjective assurances ought to be realised as facts, she is powerless to bring them to the birth.

It is a miscarriage we are always deploring. Wordsworth has said, "Through love, through hope, through faith's transcendent dower, we feel that we are greater than we know." Yes, greater than we can articulate, greater than we can tell to men like the Rabshakeh, even though he talk the language of the Jews; and therefore, on the whole, it is best to be silent in face of his argument. But greater also, we sometimes fear, than we can realise to ourselves in actual character and victory. All life thrills with the pangs of inability to bring the children of faith to the birth of experience. The man who has lost his faith or who takes his faith easily, never knows, of course, this anguish of Hezekiah. But the more we have fed on the promises of the Bible, the more that the Spirit of God has engendered in our pure hearts assurances of justice and of peace, the more we shall sometimes tremble with the fear that in outward fact there is no life for these beautiful conceptions of the soul. Do we really believe in the Fatherhood of God—believe in it till it has changed us inwardly, and we carry a new sense of destiny, a new conscience of justice, a new disgust of sin, a new pity for pain? Then how full of the

anguish of impotence must our souls feel when they consciously survey one day of common life about us, or when we honestly look back on a year of our own conduct! Does it not seem as if upon one or two hideous streets in some centre of our civilisation all Christianity, with its eighteen hundred years of promise and impetus, had gone to wreck? Is God only for the imagination of man? Is there no God outwardly to control and grant victory? Is He only a Voice, and not the Creator? Is Christ only a Prophet, and not the King?

And then over these disappointments there faces us all the great miscarriage itself—black, inevitable death. Hezekiah cried from despair that the Divine assurance of the permanence of God's people in the world was about to be wrecked on fact. But often by a death-bed we utter the same lament about the individual's immortality. There is everything to prove a future life except the fact of it within human experience. This life is big with hopes, instincts, convictions of immortality: and yet where within our sight have these ever passed to the birth of fact? * Death is a great miscarriage. "The children have come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring them forth."

And yet within the horizon of this life at least—the latter part of the difficulty we postpone to another chapter—"faith is the substance of things hoped for," as Isaiah did now most brilliantly prove. For the miracle of Jerusalem's deliverance, to which the narrative proceeds, was not that by faith the prophet foretold it, but that by faith he did actually himself succeed in bringing it to pass. The miracle, we say, was not that Isaiah made accurate prediction of the city's speedy relief from the Assyrian, but far more that upon his solitary steadfastness, without aid of battle, he did carry her disheartened citizens through this crisis of temptation, and kept them, though silent, to their walls till the futile Assyrian drifted away. The prediction, indeed, was not, although its terms appear exact, so very marvellous for a prophet to make, who had Isaiah's religious conviction that Jerusalem must survive and Isaiah's practical acquaintance with the politics of the day. "Behold, I am setting in him a spirit; and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return into his own land." We may recall the parallel case of Charlemagne in his campaign against the Moors in Spain, from which he was suddenly and unseasonably hastened north on a disastrous retreat by news of the revolt of the Saxons.* In the vast Assyrian territories rebellions were constantly occurring, that demanded the swift appearance of the king himself; and God's spirit, to whose inspiration Isaiah traced all political perception, suggested to him the possibility of one of these. In the end, the Bible story implies that it was not a rumour from some far-away

quarter so much as a disaster here in Syria, which compelled Sennacherib's "retreat from Moscow." But it is possible that both causes were at work, and that as Napoleon offered the receipt of news from Paris as his reason for hurriedly abandoning the unfortunate Spanish campaign of 1808, so Sennacherib made the rumour of some news from his capital or the north the occasion for turning his troops from a theatre of war, where they had not met with unequivocal success, and had at last been half destroyed by the plague. Isaiah's further prediction of Sennacherib's death must also be taken in a general sense, for it was not till twenty years later that the Assyrian tyrant met this violent end: "I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." But do not let us waste our attention on the altogether minor point of the prediction of Jerusalem's deliverance, when the great wonder, of which the prediction is but an episode, lies lengthened and manifest before us—that Isaiah, when all the defenders of Jerusalem were distracted and her king prostrate, did by the single steadfastness of his spirit sustain her inviolate, and procure for her people a safe and glorious future.

The baffled Rabshakeh returned to his master, whom he found at Libnah, "for he had heard that he had broken up from Lachish." Sennacherib, the narrative would seem to imply, did not trouble himself further about Jerusalem till he learned that Tirhakah, the Ethiopian ruler of Egypt, was marching to meet him with probably a stronger force than that which Sennacherib had defeated at Eltekeh. Then, feeling the danger of leaving so strong a fortress as Jerusalem in his rear, Sennacherib sent to Hezekiah one more demand for surrender. Hezekiah spread his enemy's letter before the Lord. His prayer that follows is remarkable for two features, which enable us to see how pure and elevated a monotheism God's Spirit had at last developed from the national faith of Israel. The Being whom the king now seeks he addresses by the familiar name "Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel," and describes by the physical figure—"who art enthroned upon the cherubim." But he conceives of this God with the utmost loftiness and purity, ascribing to Him not only sovereignty and creatorship, but absolute singularity of Godhead. We have but to compare Hezekiah's prayer with the utterances of his predecessor Ahaz, to whom many gods were real, and none absolutely sovereign, or with the utterances of Israelites far purer than Ahaz, to whom the gods of the nations, though inferior to Jehovah, were yet real existences, in order to mark the spiritual advance made by Israel under Isaiah. It is a tribute to the prophet's force, which speaks volumes, when the deputation from Hezekiah talk to him of *thy God* (ver. 4). For Isaiah by his ministry had made Israel's God to be new in Israel's eyes.

Hezekiah's lofty prayer drew forth through the prophet an answer from Jehovah (vv. 21-32). This is one of the most brilliant of Isaiah's oracles. It is full of much with which we are now familiar: the triumph of the inviolable fortress, "the virgin daughter of Zion," and her scorn of the arrogant foe; the prophet's appreciation of Asshur's power and impetus, which only heightens his conviction that Asshur is but an instrument in the hand of God; the old figure of the enemy's sudden check as of a wild animal

* Cf. Browning's "La Saisiaz."

* A still more striking analogy may be found in the case of Napoleon I. when in the East in 1799. He had just achieved a small victory which partly masked the previous failure of his campaign, when "Sir Sydney Smith now contrived that he should receive a packet of journals, by which he was informed of all that had passed recently in Europe and the disasters that France had suffered. His resolution was immediately taken. On August 22d he wrote to Kleber announcing that he transferred to him the command of the expedition, and that he himself would return to Europe. . . . After carefully spreading false accounts of his intentions, he set sail on the night of the same day" (Professor Seeley, article "Napoleon" in the "Ency. Brit.").

by hook and bridle; his inevitable retreat to the north. But these familiar ideas are flung off with a terseness and vivacity which bear out the opinion that here we have a prophecy of Isaiah, not revised and elaborated for subsequent publication, like the rest of his book, but in its original form, struck quickly forth to meet the city's sudden and urgent prayer.

The new feature of this prophecy is the sign added to it (ver. 30). This sign reminds us of that which in opposite terms described to Ahaz the devastation of Judah by the approaching Assyrians (chap. vii.). The wave of Assyrian war is about to roll away again, and Judah to resume her neglected agriculture, but not quite immediately. During this year of 701 it has been impossible, with the Assyrians in the land, to sow the seed, and the Jews have been dependent on the precarious crop of what had fallen from the harvest of the previous year and sown itself—*saphiah*, or *aftergrowth*. Next year, it being now too late to sow for next year's harvest, they must be content with the *shahis*—"wild corn, that which springs of itself. But the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof." Perhaps we ought not to interpret these numbers literally. The use of three gives the statement a formal and general aspect, as if the prophet only meant, It may be not quite at once that we get rid of the Assyrians; but when they do go, then they go for good, and you may till your land again without fear of their return. Then rings out the old promise, so soon now to be accomplished, about "the escaped" and "the remnant"; and the great pledge of the promise is once more repeated: "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this." With this exclamation, as in ix. 7, the prophecy reaches a natural conclusion; and vv. 33-35 may have been uttered by Isaiah a little later, when he was quite sure that the Assyrian would not even attempt to repeat his abandoned blockade of Jerusalem.

At last in a single night the deliverance miraculously came. It is implied by the scattered accounts of those days of salvation, that an Assyrian corps continued to sit before Jerusalem even after the Rabshakeh had returned to the headquarters of Sennacherib. The thirty-third of Isaiah, as well as those Psalms which celebrate the Assyrian's disappearance from Judah, describe it as having taken place from under the walls of Jerusalem and the astonished eyes of her guardians. It was not, however, upon this force—perhaps little more than a brigade of observation (xxxiii. 18)—that the calamity fell which drove Sennacherib so suddenly from Syria. "And there went forth (*that night*, adds the book of Kings) the angel of Jehovah; and he smote in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when" the camp arose "in the morning, behold all of them were corpses, dead men. And Sennacherib, King of Assyria, broke up, and returned and dwelt in Nineveh." Had this pestilence dispersed the camp that lay before Jerusalem, and left beneath the walls so considerable a number of corpses, the exclamations of surprise at the sudden disappearance of Assyria, which occur in Isa. xxxiii. and in Psalms xlvi. and lxxvi., could hardly have failed to betray the fact. But these simply speak of vague "trouble" coming "upon them that were assembled about Zion," and of their

swift decampment. The trouble was the news of the calamity, whose victims were the main body of the Assyrian army, who had been making for the borders of Egypt, but were now scattered northwards like chaff.

For details of this disaster we look in vain, of course, to the Assyrian annals, which only record Sennacherib's abrupt return to Nineveh. But it is remarkable that the histories of both of his chief rivals in this campaign, Judah and Egypt, should contain independent reminiscences of so sudden and miraculous a disaster to his host. From Egyptian sources there has come down through Herodotus (ii. 14), a story that a king of Egypt, being deserted by the military caste, when "Sennacherib King of the Arabs and Assyrians" invaded his country, entered his sanctuary and appealed with weeping to his god; that the god appeared and cheered him; that he raised an army of artisans and marched to meet Sennacherib in Pelusium; that by night a multitude of field-mice ate up the quivers, bow-strings, and shield-straps of the Assyrians; and that, as these fled on the morrow, very many of them fell. A stone statue of the king, adds Herodotus, stood in the temple of Hephæstus, having a mouse in the hand. Now, since the mouse was a symbol of sudden destruction, and even of the plague, this story of Herodotus seems to be merely a picturesque form of a tradition that pestilence broke out in the Assyrian camp. The parallel with the Bible narrative is close. In both accounts it is a prayer of the king that prevails. In both the Deity sends His agent—in the grotesque Egyptian an army of mice, in the sublime Jewish His angel. In both the effects are sudden, happening in a single night. From the Assyrian side we have this corroboration: that Sennacherib did abruptly return to Nineveh without taking Jerusalem or meeting with Tirhakah, and that, though he reigned for twenty years more, he never again made a Syrian campaign. Sennacherib's convenient story of his return may be compared to the ambiguous account which Cæsar gives of his first withdrawal from Britain, laying emphasis on the submission of the tribes as his reason for a swift return to France—a return which was rather due to the destruction of his fleet by storm and the consequent uneasiness of his army. Or, as we have already said, Sennacherib's account may be compared to Napoleon's professed reason for his sudden abandonment of his Spanish campaign and his quick return to Paris in 1808.

The neighbourhood in which the Assyrian army suffered this great disaster* was notorious in antiquity for its power of pestilence. Making every allowance for the untutored imagination of the ancients, we must admit the Serbonian bog, between Syria and Egypt, to have been a place terrible for filth and miasma. The noxious vapours travelled far; but the plagues, with which this swamp several times desolated the world, were first engendered among the diseased and demoralised populations, whose villages festered upon its margin. A Persian army was decimated here in the middle of the fourth cen-

* The statement of the Egyptian legend, that it was from a point in the neighbourhood of Pelusium that Sennacherib's army commenced its retreat, is not contradicted by anything in the Jewish records, which leave the locality of the disaster very vague, but, on the contrary, receives some support from what Isaiah expresses as at least the intention of Sennacherib (xxxvii. 25).

tury before Christ. "The fatal disease which depopulated the earth in the time of Justinian and his successors first appeared in the neighbourhood of Pelusium, between the Serbonian bog and the eastern channel of the Nile." * To the north of the bog the Crusaders also suffered from the infection. It is, therefore, very probable that the moral terror of this notorious neighbourhood, as well as its malaria, acting upon an exhausted and disappointed army in a devastated land, was the secondary cause in the great disaster, by which the Almighty humbled the arrogance of Asshur. The swiftness, with which Sennacherib's retreat is said to have begun, has been equalled by the turning-points of other historical campaigns. Alexander the Great's decision to withdraw from India was, after victories as many as Sennacherib's, made in three days. Attila vanished out of Italy as suddenly as Sennacherib, and from a motive less evident. In the famous War of the Fosse the Meccan army broke off from their siege of Mohammed in a single stormy night. Napoleon's career went back upon itself with just as sharp a bend no less than thrice—in 1799, on Sennacherib's own ground in Syria; in 1808, in Spain; and in 1812, when he turned from Moscow upon "one memorable night of frost, in which twenty thousand horses perished, and the strength of the French army was utterly broken." †

The amount of the Assyrian loss is enormous, and implies of course a much higher figure for the army which was vast enough to suffer it; but here are some instances for comparison. In the early German invasions of Italy whole armies and camps were swept away by the pestilential climate. The losses of the First Crusade were over three hundred thousand. The soldiers of the Third Crusade, upon the scene of Sennacherib's war, were reckoned at more than half a million, and their losses by disease alone at over one hundred thousand. ‡ The Grand Army of Napoleon entered Russia two hundred and fifty thousand, but came out, having suffered no decisive defeat, only twelve thousand; on the retreat from Moscow alone ninety thousand perished.

What we are concerned with, however, is neither the immediate occasion nor the exact amount of Sennacherib's loss, but the bare fact, so certainly established, that, having devastated Judah to the very walls of Jerusalem, the Assyrian was compelled by some calamity apart from human war to withdraw before the sacred city itself was taken. For this was the essential part of Isaiah's prediction; upon this he had staked the credit of the pure monotheism, whose prophet he was to the world. If we keep before us these two simple certainties about the great Deliverance: *first*, that it had been foretold by Jehovah's word, and *second*, that it had been now achieved, despite all human probability; by Jehovah's own arm, we shall understand the enormous spiritual impression which it left upon Israel. The religion of the one supreme God, supreme in might because supreme in righteousness, received a most emphatic historical vindication, a signal and glorious triumph. Well might Isaiah exclaim, on the morning of the night during which that Assyrian host had drifted

away from Jerusalem, "Jehovah is our Judge; Jehovah is our Lawgiver; Jehovah is our King: He saveth us." No other god for the present had any chance in Judah. Idolatry was discredited, not by the political victory of a puritan faction, not even by the distinctive genius or valour of a nation, but by an evident act of Providence, to which no human aid had been contributory. It was nothing less than the baptism of Israel in spiritual religion, the grace of which was never wholly undone.

Nevertheless, the story of Jehovah's triumph cannot be justly recounted without including the reaction which followed upon it within the same generation. Before twenty years had passed from the day, on which Jerusalem, with the forty-sixth Psalm on her lips, sought with all her heart the God of Isaiah, she relapsed into an idolatry that wore only this sign of the uncompromising puritanism it had displaced: that it was gloomy, and filled with a sense of sin unknown to Israel's idolatries previous to the age of Isaiah. The change would be almost incomprehensible to us, who have realised the spiritual effects of Sennacherib's disappearance, if we had not within our own history a somewhat analogous experience. Puritanism was as gloriously accredited by event, and seemed to be as generally accepted by England under Cromwell, as faith in the spiritual religion of Isaiah was vindicated by the deliverance of Jerusalem and the peace of Judah under Hezekiah. But swiftly as the ruling temper in England changed after Cromwell's death, and Puritanism was laid under the ban, and persecution and licentiousness broke out, so quickly when Hezekiah died did Manasseh his son—no change of dynasty here—"do evil in the sight of Jehovah, and make Judah to sin, building again the high places and rearing up altars for Baal and altars in the house of Jehovah, whereof Jehovah had said, In Jerusalem will I put My name." Idolatry was never so rampant in Judah. "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood, till he filled Jerusalem from one end to another." It is in this carnage that tradition has placed the death of Isaiah. He, who had been Judah's best counsellor through five reigns, on whom the whole nation had gathered in the day of her distress, and by whose faith her long-hoped-for salvation had at last become substantive, was violently put to death by the son of Hezekiah. It is said that he was *sawn asunder*. *

The parallel, which we are pursuing, does not, however, close here. "As soon," says an English historian, "as the wild orgy of the Restoration was over, men began to see that nothing that was really worthy in the work of Puritanism had been undone. The whole history of English progress since the Restoration, on its moral and spiritual sides, has been the history of Puritanism."

For the principles of Isaiah and their victory we may make a claim as much larger than this claim, as Israel's influence on the world has been greater than England's. Israel never wholly lost the grace of the baptism wherewith she was baptised in 701. Even in her history there was no event in which the unaided interposition of God was more conspicuous. It is from an appreciation of the meaning of such a Providence that Israel derives her character—that character which marks her off so distinct-

* Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," xliii.

† Arnold, "Lectures on Modern History," 177, quoted by Stanley.

‡ Gibbon, xlii.; lix.

* Heb. xi.

ively from her great rival in the education of the human race, and endows her ministry with its peculiar value to the world. If we are asked for the characteristics of the Hellenic genius, we point to the august temples and images of beauty in which the wealth and art of man have evolved in human features most glorious suggestions of divinity, or we point to Thermopylæ, where human valour and devotion seem grander even in unavailing sacrifice than the almighty Fate that renders them the prey of the barbarian. In Greece the human is greater than the divine. But if we are asked to define the spirit of Israel, we remember the worship which Isaiah has enjoined in his opening chapter, a worship that dispenses even with the temple and with sacrifice, but, from the first strivings of conscience to the most certain enjoyment of peace, ascribes all man's experience to the word of God. In contrast with Thermopylæ, we recall Jerusalem's Deliverance, effected apart from human war by the direct stroke of Heaven. In Judah man is great simply as he rests on God. The rocks of Thermopylæ, how imperishably beautiful do they shine to latest ages with the comradeship, the valour, the sacrificial blood of human heroes! It is another beauty which Isaiah saw upon the bare, dry rocks of Zion, and which has drawn to them the admiration of the world. "There," he said, "Jehovah is glory for us, a place of broad rivers and streams."

"In returning and rest all ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence is your strength." How divine Isaiah's message is, may be proved by the length of time mankind is taking to learn it. The remarkable thing is, that he staked so lofty a principle, and the pure religion of which it was the temper, upon a political result, that he staked them upon, and vindicated them by, a purely local and material success—the relief of Jerusalem from the infidel. Centuries passed, and Christ came. He did not—for even He could not—preach a more spiritual religion than that which He had committed to His greatest forerunner, but He released this religion, and the temper of faith which Isaiah had so divinely expressed, from the local associations and merely national victories, with which even Isaiah had been forced to identify them. The destruction of Jerusalem by the heathen formed a large part of Christ's prediction of the immediate future; and He comforted the remnant of faith with these words, to some of which Isaiah's lips had first given their meaning: "Ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem worship the Father. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Again centuries passed—no less than eighteen from Isaiah—and we find Christendom, though Christ had come between, returning to Isaiah's superseded problem, and, while reviving its material conditions, unable to apply to them the prophet's spiritual temper. The Christianity of the Crusades fell back upon Isaiah's position without his spirit. Like him, it staked the credit of religion upon the relief of the holy city from the grasp of the infidel; but, in ghastly contrast to that pure faith and serene confidence with which a single Jew maintained the inviolateness of Mount Zion in the face of Assyria, with what pride and fraud, with what blood and cruelty, with what impious invention of miracle and parody of Divine testimony, did countless armies

of Christendom, excited by their most fervent prophets and blessed by their high-priest, attempt in vain the recovery of Jerusalem from the Saracen! The Crusades are a gigantic proof of how easy it is to adopt the external forms of heroic ages, how difficult to repeat their inward temper. We could not have more impressive witness borne to the fact that humanity—though obedient to the orthodox Church, though led by the strongest spirits of the age, though hallowed by the presence of its greatest saints, though enduring all trials, though exhibiting an unrivalled power of self-sacrifice and enthusiasm, though beautified by courtesy and chivalry, and though doing and suffering all for Christ's sake—may yet fail to understand the old precept that "in returning and rest men are saved, in quietness and in confidence is their strength." Nothing could more emphatically prove the loftiness of Isaiah's teaching than this failure of Christendom even to come within sight of it.

Have we learned this lesson yet? O God of Israel, God of Isaiah, in returning to whom and resting upon whom alone we are saved, purge us of self and of the pride of life, of the fever and the falsehood they breed. Teach us that in quietness and in confidence is our strength. Help us to be still and know that Thou art God.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A REVIEW OF ISAIAH'S PREDICTIONS CONCERNING THE DELIVERANCE OF JERUSALEM.

As we have gathered together all that Isaiah prophesied concerning the Messiah, so it may be useful to closer students of his book if we now summarise (even at the risk of a little repetition) the facts of his marvellous prediction of the siege and delivery of Jerusalem. Such a review, besides being historically interesting, ought to prove of edification in so far as it instructs us in the kind of faith by which the Holy Ghost inspired a prophet to foretell the future.

1. The primary conviction with which Isaiah felt himself inspired by the Spirit of Jehovah was a purely moral one—that a devastation of Judah was necessary for her people's sin, to which he shortly added a religious one: that a remnant would be saved. He had this double conviction as early as 740 B. C. (vi. 11-13).

2. Looking round the horizon for some phenomenon with which to identify this promised judgment, Isaiah described the latter at first without naming any single people as the invaders of Judah (v. 26 ff.). It may have been that for a moment he hesitated between Assyria and Egypt. Once he named them together as equally the Lord's instruments upon Judah (vii. 18), but only once. When Ahaz resolved to call Assyria into the Syrian quarrels, Isaiah exclusively designated the northern power as the scourge he had predicted; and when in 732 the Assyrian armies had overrun Samaria, he graphically described their necessary overflow into Judah also (viii.). This invasion did not spread to Judah, but Isaiah's combined moral and political conviction, for both elements of which he claimed the inspiration of God's Spirit, seized him with renewed strength in 725, when Salmanassar marched south upon Israel (xxxiii.); and in 721,

when Sargon captured Samaria, Isaiah uttered a vivid description of his speedy arrival before Jerusalem (x. 28 ff.). This prediction was again disappointed. But Sargon's departure without invading Judah, and her second escape from him on his return to Syria in 711, did not in the least induce Isaiah to relax either of his two convictions. Judah he proclaimed to be as much in need of punishment as ever (xxix.-xxxii.); and, though on Sargon's death all Palestine revolted from Assyria to Egypt, he persisted that this would not save her from Sennacherib (xiv. 29 ff.; xxix.-xxx.). The "dourness" with which his countrymen believed in Egypt naturally caused the prophet to fill his orations at this time with the *political* side of his conviction that Assyria was stronger than Egypt; but because Jerusalem's Egyptian policy springs from a deceitful temper (xxx. 1, 9, 10) he is as earnest as ever with his *moral* conviction that judgment is coming. After 705 his pictures of a siege of Jerusalem grow more definite (xxix.; xxx.). He seems scorched by the nearness of the Assyrian conflagration (xxx. 27 ff.). At last in 701, when Sennacherib comes to Palestine, the siege is pictured as immediate—chaps. i. and xx., which also show at its height the prophet's moral conviction of the necessity of the siege for punishing his people.

3. But over against this *moral* conviction, that Judah must be devastated for her sin, and this *political*, that Assyria is to be the instrument, even to the extreme of a siege of Jerusalem, the prophet still holds strongly to the *religious* assurance that God cannot allow His shrine to be violated or His people to be exterminated. At first it is only of the people that Isaiah speaks—the *remnant* (vi.; viii. 18). Jerusalem is not mentioned in the verses that describe the overflowing of all Judah by Assyria (viii. 7). It is only when at last, in 721, the prophet realises how near a siege of Jerusalem may be (x. 11, 28-32), that he also pictures the sudden destruction of the Assyrian on his arrival within sight of her walls (x. 33). In 705, when the siege of the sacred city once more becomes imminent, the prophet again reiterates to the heathen that Zion alone shall stand among the cities of Syria (xiv. 32). To herself he says that, though she shall be besieged and brought very low, she shall finally be delivered (xxix. 1-8); xxx. 19-26; xxxi. 1, 4, 5). It is true, this conviction seems to be broken—once by a prophecy of uncertain date (xxxii. 14), which indicates a desolation of the buildings of Jerusalem, and once by the prophet's sentence of death upon the inhabitants in the hour of their profligacy (xxii.)—but when the city has repented, and the enemy have perfidiously come back to demand her surrender, Isaiah again asseverates, though all are hopeless, that she shall not fall (xxxvii.).

4. Now, with regard to the method of Jerusalem's deliverance, Isaiah has uniformly described this as happening not by human battle. From the beginning he said that Israel should be delivered in the last extremity of their weakness (vi. 13). On the Assyrian's arrival over against the city, Jehovah is to lop him off (x. 33). When her enemies have invested Jerusalem, Jehovah is to come down in thunder and a hurricane and sweep them away (after 705, xxix. 5-8). They are to be suddenly disappointed, like a hungry man waking from a dream of food. A beautiful promise is given of

the raising of the siege without mention of struggle or any weapon (xxx. 20-26). The Assyrian is to be checked as a wild bull is checked "with a lasso," is to be slain "by the lighting down of the Lord's arm, by the voice of the Lord," through a judgment that shall be liker a solemn holocaust to God than a human battle (xxx. 30-33). When the Assyrian comes back, and Hezekiah is crushed by the new demand for surrender, Isaiah says that, by a Divinely inspired impulse, Sennacherib, hearing bad news, shall suddenly return to his own land (xxxviii. 7).

It is only in very little details that these predictions differ. The thunderstorm and torrents of fire are, of course, but poetic variations. In 721, however, the prophet hardly anticipates the very close siege, which he pictures after 705; and while from 705 to 702 he identifies the relief of Jerusalem with a great calamity to the Assyrian army about to invade Judah, yet in 701, when the Assyrians are actually on the spot, he suggests that nothing but a rumour shall cause their retreat and so leave Jerusalem free of them.

5. In all this we see a certain *fixity* and a certain *freedom*. The freedom, the changes and inconsistencies in the prediction, are entirely limited to those of Isaiah's convictions, which we have called political, and which the prophet evidently gathered from his observation of political circumstances as these developed before his eyes from year to year. But what was fixed and unalterable to Isaiah, he drew from the moral and religious convictions to which his political observation was subservient; viz., Judah's very sore punishment for sin, the survival of a people of God in the world, and their deliverance by His own act.

6. This "Bible-reading" in Isaiah's predictive prophecies reveals very clearly the nature of *inspiration* under the old covenant. To Isaiah inspiration was nothing more nor less than the possession of certain strong moral and religious convictions, which he felt he owed to the communication of the Spirit of God, and according to which he interpreted, and even dared to foretell, the history of his people and the world. Our study completely dispels, on the evidence of the Bible itself, that view of inspiration and prediction, so long held in the Church, which it is difficult to define, but which means something like this: that the prophet beheld a vision of the future in its actual detail and read this off as a man may read the history of the past out of a book or a clear memory. This is a very simple view, but too simple either to meet the facts of the Bible, or to afford to men any of that intellectual and spiritual satisfaction which the discovery of the Divine methods is sure to afford. The literal view of inspiration is too simple to be true, and too simple to be edifying. On the other hand, how profitable, how edifying, is the Bible's own account of its inspiration! To know that men interpreted, predicted, and controlled history in the power of the purest moral and religious convictions—in the knowledge of, and the loyalty to, certain fundamental laws of God—is to receive an account of inspiration, which is not only as satisfying to the reason as it is true to the facts of the Bible, but is spiritually very helpful by the lofty example and reward it sets before our own faith. By faith differing in degree, but not in kind, from ours, "faith which is the substance of things hoped for," these men became prophets of God, and received

the testimony of history that they spoke from Him. Isaiah prophesied and predicted all he did from loyalty to two simple truths, which he tells us he received from God Himself: that sin must be punished, and that the people of God must be saved. This simple faith, acting along with a wonderful knowledge of human nature and ceaseless vigilance of affairs, constituted inspiration for Isaiah.

There is thus, with great modifications, an analogy between the prophet and the scientific observer of the present day. Men of science are able to affirm the certainty of natural phenomena by their knowledge of the laws and principles of nature. Certain forces being present, certain results must come to pass. The Old Testament prophets, working in history, a sphere where the problems were infinitely more complicated by the presence and powerful operation of man's free-will, seized hold of principles as conspicuous and certain to them as the laws of nature are to the scientist; and out of their conviction of these they proclaimed the necessity of certain events. God is inflexibly righteous, He cannot utterly destroy His people or the witness of Himself among men: these were the laws. Judah shall be punished, Israel shall continue to exist: these were the certainties deduced from the laws. But for the exact conditions and forms both of the punishment and its relief the prophets depended upon their knowledge of the world, of which, as these pages testify, they were the keenest and largest-hearted observers that ever appeared.

This account of prophecy may be offered with advantage to those who are prejudiced against prophecy as full of materials, which are inexplicable to minds accustomed to find a law and reason for everything. Grant the truths of the spiritual doctrines, which the prophets made their premises, and you must admit that their predictions are neither arbitrary nor bewildering. Or begin at the other end: verify that these facts took place, and that the prophets actually predicted them; and if you are true to your own scientific methods, you will not be able to resist the conclusion that the spiritual laws and principles, by which the predictions were made, are as real as those by which in the realm of nature you proclaim the necessity of certain physical phenomena—and all this in spite of there being at work in the prophet's sphere a force, the free-will of man, which cannot interfere with the laws you work by, as it can with those on which they depend.

But, to turn from the apologetic value of this account of prophecy to the experimental, we maintain that it brings out a new sacredness upon common life. If it be true that Isaiah had no magical means for foretelling the future, but simply his own spiritual convictions and his observation of history, that may, of course, deprive some eyes of a light which they fancied they saw bursting from heaven. But, on the other hand, does it not cast a greater glory upon daily life and history, to have seen in Isaiah this close connection between spiritual conviction and political event? Does it not teach us that life is governed by faith; that the truths we profess are the things that make history; that we carry the future in our hearts; that not an event happens but is to be used by us as meaning the effect of some law of God, and not a fact appears but is the symbol and sacrament of His truth?

CHAPTER XXV.

AN OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVER'S SICKBED; OR, THE DIFFERENCE CHRIST HAS MADE.

ISAIAH xxxviii.; xxxix.

DATE UNCERTAIN.

To the great national drama of Jerusalem's deliverance, there have been added two scenes of a personal kind, relating to her king. Chaps. xxxviii. and xxxix. are the narrative of the sore sickness and recovery of King Hezekiah, and of the embassy which Merodach-Baladan sent him, and how he received the embassy. The date of these events is difficult to determine. If, with Canon Cheyne, we believe in an invasion of Judah by Sargon in 711, we shall be tempted to refer them, as he does, to that date—the more so that the promise of fifteen additional years made to Hezekiah in 711, the fifteenth year of his reign, would bring it up to the twenty-nine, at which it is set in 2 Kings xviii. 2. That, however, would flatly contradict the statement both of Isaiah xxxviii. 1 and 2 Kings xx. 1 that Hezekiah's sickness fell in the days of the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib; that is, after 705. But to place the promise of fifteen additional years to Hezekiah after 705, when we know he had been reigning for at least twenty years, would be to contradict the verse, just cited, which sums up the years of his reign as twenty-nine. This is, in fact, one of the instances in which we must admit our present inability to elucidate the chronology of this portion of the book of Isaiah. Mr. Cheyne thinks the editor mistook the siege by Sennacherib for the siege by Sargon. But as the fact of a siege by Sargon has never been satisfactorily established, it seems safer to trust the statement that Hezekiah's sickness occurred in the reign of Sennacherib, and to allow that there has been an error somewhere in the numbering of the years. It is remarkable that the name of Merodach-Baladan does not help us to decide between the two dates. There was a Merodach-Baladan in rebellion against Sargon in 710, and there was one in rebellion against Sennacherib in 705. It has not yet been put past doubt as to whether these two are the same. The essential is that there was a Merodach-Baladan alive, real or only claimant king of Babylon, about 705, and that he was likely at that date to treat with Hezekiah, being himself in revolt against Assyria. Unable to come to any decision about the conflicting numbers, we leave uncertain the date of the events recounted in chaps. xxxviii., xxxix. The original form of the narrative, but wanting Hezekiah's hymn, is given in 2 Kings xx.*

We have given to this chapter the title "An Old Testament Believer's Sickbed; or, The Difference Christ has made," not because this is the only spiritual suggestion of the story, but because it seems to the present expositor as if this were the predominant feeling left in Christian minds after reading for us the story. In Hezekiah's conduct there is much of courage

* Isa. xxxviii., xxxix., has evidently been abridged from 2 Kings xx., and in some points has to be corrected by the latter. Chap. xxxviii. 21, 22, of course, must be brought forward before ver. 7.

for us to admire, as there are other elements to warn us; but when we have read the whole story, we find ourselves saying, What a difference Christ has made to me! Take Hezekiah from two points of view, and then let the narrative itself bring out this difference.

Here is a man, who, although he lived more than twenty-five centuries ago, is brought quite close to our side. Death, who herds all men into his narrow fold, has crushed this Hebrew king so close to us that we can feel his very heart beat. Hezekiah's hymn gives us entrance into the fellowship of his sufferings. By the figures he so skilfully uses he makes us feel that pain, the shortness of life, the suddenness of death, and the utter blackness beyond were to him just what they are to us. And yet this kinship in pain, and fear, and ignorance only makes us the more aware of something else which we have and he has not.

Again, here is a man to whom religion gave all it could give without the help of Christ; a believer in the religion out of which Christianity sprang, perhaps the most representative Old Testament believer we could find, for Hezekiah was at once the collector of what was best in its literature and the reformer of what was worst in its worship; a man permeated by the past piety of his Church, and enjoying as his guide and philosopher the boldest prophet who ever preached the future developments of its spirit. Yet when we put Hezekiah and all that Isaiah can give him on one side, we shall again feel for ourselves on the other what a difference Christ has made.

This difference a simple study of the narrative will make clear.

I.

"In those days Hezekiah became sick unto death." They were critical days for Judah—no son born to the king (2 Kings xxi. 1), the work of reformation in Judah not yet consolidated, the big world tossing in revolution all around. Under God, everything depended on an experienced ruler; and this one, without a son to succeed him, was drawing near to death. We will therefore judge Hezekiah's strong passion for life to have been patriotic as well as selfish. He stood in the midtime of his days, with a faithfully executed work behind him and so good an example of kingship that for years Isaiah had not expressed his old longing for the Messiah. The Lord had counted Hezekiah righteous; that twin-sign had been given him which more than any other assured an Israelite of Jehovah's favour—a good conscience and success in his work. Well, therefore, might he cry when Isaiah brought him the sentence of death, "Ah, now, Jehovah, remember, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thine eyes. And Hezekiah wept with a great weeping."

There is difficulty in the strange story which follows. The dial was probably a pyramid of steps on the top of which stood a short pillar or obelisk. When the sun rose in the morning, the shadow cast by the pillar would fall right down the western side of the pyramid to the bottom of the lowest step. As the sun ascended the shadow would shorten, and creep up inch by inch to the foot of the pillar. After noon,

as the sun began to descend to the west, the shadow would creep down the eastern steps; and the steps were so measured that each one marked a certain degree of time. It was probably afternoon when Isaiah visited the king. The shadow was *going down* according to the regular law; the sign consisted in causing the shadow to shrink up the steps again. Such a reversal of the ordinary progress of the shadow may have been caused in either of two ways: by the whole earth being thrown back on its axis, which we may dismiss as impossible, or by the occurrence of the phenomenon known as refraction. Refraction is a disturbance in the atmosphere by which the rays of the sun are bent or deflected from their natural course into an angular one. In this case, instead of shooting straight over the top of the obelisk, the rays of the sun had been bent down and inward, so that the shadow fled up to the foot of the obelisk. There are many things in the air which might cause this; it is a phenomenon often observed; and the Scriptural narratives imply that on this occasion it was purely local (2 Chron. xxxii. 31). Had we only the narrative in the book of Isaiah, the explanation would have been easy. Isaiah, having given the sentence of death, passed the dial in the palace courtyard, and saw the shadow lying ten degrees farther up than it should have done, the sight of which coincided with the inspiration that the king would not die; and Isaiah went back to announce to Hezekiah his reprieve, and naturally call his attention to this as a sign, to which a weak and desponding man would be glad to cling. But the original narrative in the book of Kings tells us that Isaiah offered Hezekiah a choice of signs: that the shadow should either advance or retreat, and that the king chose the latter. The sign came in answer to Isaiah's prayer, and is narrated to us as a special Divine interposition. But a medicine accompanied it, and Hezekiah recovered through a poultice of figs laid on the boil from which he suffered.

While recognising for our own faith the uselessness of a discussion on this sign offered to a sick man, let us not miss the moral lessons of so touching a narrative, nor the sympathy with the sick king which it is fitted to produce, and which is our best introduction to the study of his hymn.

Isaiah had performed that most awful duty of doctor or minister—the telling of a friend that he must die. Few men have not in their personal experience a key to the prophet's feelings on this occasion. The leaving of a dear friend for the last time; the coming out into the sunlight which he will nevermore share with us; the passing by the dial; the observation of the creeping shadow; the feeling that it is only a question of time; the passion of prayer into which that feeling throws us that God may be pleased to put off the hour and spare our friend; the invention, that is born, like prayer, of necessity: a cure we suddenly remember; the confidence which prayer and invention bring between them; the return with the joyful news; the giving of the order about the remedy—cannot many in their degree rejoice with Isaiah in such an experience? But he has, too, a conscience of God and God's work to which none of us may pretend: he knows how indispensable to that work his royal pupil is, and out of this inspiration he prophesies the will of the Lord that Hezekiah shall recover.

Then the king, with a sick man's sacramental longing, asks a sign. Out through the window the courtyard is visible; there stands the same step-dial of Ahaz, the long pillar on the top of the steps, the shadow creeping down them through the warm afternoon sunshine. To the sick man it must have been like the finger of death coming nearer. "Shall the shadow," asks the prophet, "go forward ten steps or go back ten steps? It is easy," says the king, alarmed, "for the shadow to go down ten steps." Easy for it to go down! Has he not been feeling that all the afternoon? "Do not," we can fancy him saying, with the gasp of a man who has been watching its irresistible descent—"do not let that black thing come farther; but 'let the shadow go backward ten steps.'"

The shadow returned, and Hezekiah got his sign. But when he was well, he used it for more than a sign. He read a great spiritual lesson in it. The time, which upon the dial had been apparently thrown back, had in his life been really thrown back; and God had given him his years to live over again. The past was to be as if it had never been, its guilt and weakness wiped out. "Thou hast cast behind Thy back all my sins." As a new born child Hezekiah felt himself uncommitted by the past, not a sin's-doubt nor a sin's-cowardice in him, with the heart of a little child, but yet with the strength and dignity of a grown man, for it is the magic of tribulation to bring innocence with experience. "I shall go softly," or literally, "with dignity or caution, as in a procession, all my years because of the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, upon such things do men live; and altogether in them is the life of my spirit. . . . Behold, for perfection was it bitter to me, so bitter." And through it all there breaks a new impression of God. "What shall I say? He hath both spoken with me, and Himself hath done it." As if afraid to impute his profits to the mere experience itself, "In them is the life of my spirit," he breaks in with "Yea, Thou hast recovered me; yea, Thou hast made me to live." And then, by a very pregnant construction, he adds, "Thou hast loved my soul out of the pit of destruction;" that is, of course, "loved, and by Thy love lifted," but he uses the one word "loved," and gives it the active force of "drawing" or "lifting." In this lay the head and glory of Hezekiah's experience. He was a religious man, an enthusiast for the Temple services, and had all his days as his friend the prophet whose heart was with the heart of God; but it was not through any of these means God came near him, not till he lay sick and had turned his face to the wall. Then indeed he cried, "What shall I say? He hath both spoken with me, and Himself hath done it!"

Forgiveness, a new peace, a new dignity, and a visit from the living God! Well might Hezekiah exclaim that it was only through a near sense of death that men rightly learned to live. "Ah, Lord, it is upon these things that men live; and wholly therein is the life of my spirit." It is by these things men live, and therein I have learned for the first time what life is!

In all this at least we cannot go beyond Hezekiah, and he stands an example to the best Christian among us. Never did a man bring richer harvest from the fields of death. Everything that renders life really life—peace, dignity, a new sense of God and of His forgiveness—these were

the spoils which Hezekiah won in his struggle with the grim enemy. He had snatched from death a new meaning for life; he had robbed death of its awful pomp, and bestowed this on careless life. Hereafter he should walk with the step and the mien of a conqueror—"I shall go in solemn procession all my years because of the bitterness of my soul"—or with the carefulness of a worshipper, who sees at the end of his course the throne of the Most High God, and makes all his life an ascent thither.

This is the effect which every great sorrow and struggle has upon a noble soul. Come to the streets of the living. Who are these, whom we can so easily distinguish from the crowd by their firmness of step and look of peace, walking softly where some spurt and some halt, holding, without rest or haste, the tenor of their way, as if they marched to music heard by their ears alone? These are they which have come out of great tribulation. They have brought back into time the sense of eternity. They know how near the invisible worlds lie to this one, and the sense of the vast silences stills all idle laughter in their hearts. The life that is to other men chance or sport, strife or hurried flight, has for them its allotted distance, is for them a measured march, a constant worship. "For the bitterness of their soul they go in procession all their years." Sorrow's subjects, they are our kings; wrestlers with death, our veterans: and to the rabble armies of society they set the step of a nobler life.

Count especially the young man blessed, who has looked into the grave before he has faced the great temptations of the world, and has not entered the race of life till he has learned his stride in the race with death. They tell us that on the outside of civilisation, where men carry their lives in their hands, a most thorough politeness and dignity are bred, in spite of the want of settled habits, by the sense of danger alone; and we know how battle and a deadly climate, pestilence or the perils of the sea have sent back to us the most careless of our youth with a self-possession and regularity of mind, that it would have been hopeless to expect them to develop amid the trivial trials of village life.

But the greatest duty of us men is not to seek nor to pray for such combats with death. It is when God has found these for us to remain true to our memories of them. The hardest duty of life is to remain true to our psalms of deliverance, as it is certainly life's greatest temptation to fall away from the sanctity of sorrow, and suffer the stately style of one who knows how near death hovers to his line of march to degenerate into the broken step of a wanton life. This was Hezekiah's temptation, and this is why the story of his fall in the thirty-ninth chapter is placed beside his vows in the thirty-eighth—to warn us how easy it is for those who have come conquerors out of a struggle with death to fall a prey to common life. He had said, "I will walk softly all my years;" but how arrogantly and rashly he carried himself when Merodach-Baladan sent the embassy to congratulate him on his recovery. It was not with the dignity of the veteran, but with a childish love of display, perhaps also with the too restless desire to secure an alliance, that he showed the envoys "his storehouse, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing which Hezekiah did

not show them in his house nor in all his dominion." In this behaviour there was neither caution nor sobriety, and we cannot doubt but that Hezekiah felt the shame of it when Isaiah sternly rebuked him and threw upon all his house the dark shadow of captivity.

It is easier to win spoils from death than to keep them untarnished by life. Shame burns warm in a soldier's heart when he sees the arms he risked life to win rusting for want of a little care. Ours will not burn less if we discover that the strength of character we brought with us out of some great tribulation has been slowly weakened by subsequent self-indulgence or vanity. How awful to have fought for character with death only to squander it upon life! It is well to keep praying, "My God, suffer me not to forget my bonds and my bitterness. In my hours of wealth and ease, and health and peace, by the memory of Thy judgments deliver me, good Lord."

II.

So far then Hezekiah is an example and warning to us all. With all our faith in Christ, none of us, in the things mentioned, may hope to excel this Old Testament believer. But notice very particularly that Hezekiah's faith and fortitude are profitable only for this life. It is when we begin to think, What of the life to come? that we perceive the infinite difference Christ has made.

We know what Hezekiah felt when his back was turned on death, and he came up to life again. But what did he feel when he faced the other way, and his back was to life? With his back to life and facing deathwards, Hezekiah saw nothing, that was worth hoping for. To him to die was to leave God behind him, to leave the face of God as surely as he was leaving the face of man. "I said, I shall not see Jah, Jah in the land of the living; I shall gaze upon man no more with the inhabitants of the world." The beyond was not to Hezekiah absolute nothingness, for he had his conceptions, the popular conceptions of his time, of a sort of existence that was passed by those who had been men upon earth. The imagination of his people figured the gloomy portals of a nether world—*Sheol*, the *Hollow* (Dante's "hollow realm"), or perhaps the *Craving*—into which death herds the shades of men, bloodless, voiceless, without love or hope or aught that makes life worth living. With such an existence beyond, to die to life here was to Hezekiah like as when "a weaver rolls up" the finished web. My life may be a pattern for others to copy, a banner for others to fight under, but for me it is finished. Death has cut it from the loom. Or it was like going into captivity. "Mine age is removed and is carried away from me into exile, like a shepherd's tent"—exile which to a Jew was the extreme of despair, implying as it did absence from God and salvation and the possibility of worship. "Sheol cannot praise Thee; death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy faithfulness."

Of this then at the best Hezekiah was sure: a respite of fifteen years—nothing beyond. Then the shadow would not return upon the dial; and as the king's eyes closed upon the dear faces of his friends, his sense of the countenance of God would die too, and his soul slip into the abyss, hopeless of God's faithfulness.

It is this awful anticlimax which makes us feel the difference Christ has made. This saint stood in almost the clearest light that revelation cast before Jesus. He was able to perceive in suffering a meaning and derive from it a strength not to be exceeded by any Christian. Yet his faith is profitable for this life alone. For him character may wrestle with death over and over again, and grow the stronger for every grapple, but death wins the last throw.

It may be said that Hezekiah's despair of the future is simply the morbid thoughts of a sick man or the exaggerated fancies of a poet. "We must not," it is urged, "define a poet's language with the strictness of a theology." True, and we must also make some allowance for a man dying prematurely in the midst of his days. But if this hymn is only poetry, it would have been as easy to poetise on the opposite possibilities across the grave. So quick an imagination as Hezekiah's could not have failed to take advantage of the slightest scintilla of glory that pierced the cloud. It must be that his eye saw none, for all his poetry droops the other way. We seek in heaven for praise in its fulness; there we know God's servants shall see Him face to face. But of this Hezekiah had not the slightest imagination; he anxiously prayed that he might recover "to strike the stringed instruments all the days of his life in the house of Jehovah. The living, the living, he praiseth thee, as I do this day; the father to the children shall make known Thy truth." But "they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy faithfulness."

Now compare all this with the Psalms of Christian hope; with the faith that fills Paul; with his ardour who says, "To me to depart is far better;" with the glory which John beholds with open face: the hosts of the redeemed praising God and walking in the light of His face, all the geography of that country laid down, and the plan of the new Jerusalem declared to the very fashion of her stones; with the audacity since of Christian art and song: the rapture of Watts' hymns and the exhilaration of Wesley's praise as they contemplate death; and with the joyful and exact anticipations of so many millions of common men as they turn their faces to the wall. In all these, in even the Book of the Revelation, there is of course a great deal of pure fancy. But imagination never bursts in anywhither till fact has preceded. And it is just because there is a great fact standing between us and Hezekiah that the pureness of our faith and the richness of our imagination of immortality differ so much from his. The fact is Jesus Christ, His resurrection and ascension. It is He who has made all the difference and brought life and immortality to light.

And we shall know the difference if we lose our faith in that fact. For "except Christ be risen from the dead" and gone before to a country which derives all its reality and light for our imagination from that Presence, which once walked with us in the flesh, there remains for us only Hezekiah's courage to make the best of a short reprieve, only Hezekiah's outlook into Hades when at last we turn our faces to the wall. But to be stronger and purer for having met with death, as he was, only that we must afterwards succumb, with our purity and our strength, to death—this is surely to be, as Paul said, "of all men the most miserable."

Better far to own the power of an endless life, which Christ has sealed to us, and translate Hezekiah's experience into the new calculus of immortality. If to have faced death as he did was to inherit dignity and peace and sense of power, what glory of kingship and queenship must sit upon those faces in the other world who have been at closer quarters still with the King of terrors, and through Christ their strength have spoiled him of his sting and victory! To have felt the worst of death and to have triumphed—this is the secret of the peaceful hearts, unfaltering looks and faces of glory, "which pass in solemn procession of worship" through all eternity before the throne of God.

We shall consider the old Testament views of a future life and resurrection more fully in chaps. xxvii. and xxx. of this volume.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HAD ISAIAH A GOSPEL FOR THE INDIVIDUAL?

THE two narratives, in which Isaiah's career culminates—that of the Deliverance of Jerusalem (xxxvi., xxxvii.) and that of the Recovery of Hezekiah (xxxviii., xxxix.)—cannot fail, coming together as they do, to suggest to thoughtful readers a striking contrast between Isaiah's treatment of the community and his treatment of the individual, between his treatment of the Church and his treatment of single members. For in the first of these narratives we are told how an illimitable future, elsewhere so gloriously described by the prophet, was secured for the Church upon earth; but the whole result of the second is the gain for a representative member of the Church of a respite of fifteen years. Nothing, as we have seen, is promised to the dying Hezekiah of a future life; no scintilla of the light of eternity sparkles either in Isaiah's promise or in Hezekiah's prayer. The net result of the incident is a reprieve of fifteen years: fifteen years of a character strengthened, indeed, by having met with death, but, it would sadly seem, only in order to become again the prey of the vanities of this world (chap. xxxix.). So meagre a result for the individual stands strangely out against the perpetual glory and peace assured to the community. And it suggests this question: Had Isaiah any real gospel for the individual? If so, what was it?

First of all, we must remember that God in His providence seldom gives to one prophet or generation more than a single main problem for solution. In Isaiah's day undoubtedly the most urgent problem—and Divine problems are ever practical, not philosophical—was the continuance of the Church upon earth. It had really got to be a matter of doubt whether a body of people possessing the knowledge of the true God, and able to transfuse and transmit it, could possibly survive among the political convulsions of the world, and in consequence of its own sin. Isaiah's problem was the reformation and survival of the Church. In accordance with this, we notice how many of his terms are collective, and how he almost never addresses the individual. It is the *people*, upon whom he calls—"the nation," "Israel," "the house of Jacob My

vineyard," "the men of Judah His pleasant plantation." To these we may add the apostrophes to the city of Jerusalem, under many personifications: "Ariel, Ariel," "inhabitant of Zion," "daughter of Zion." When Isaiah denounces sin, the sinner is either the whole community or a class in the community, very seldom an individual, though there are some instances of the latter, as Ahaz and Shebna. It is "This people hath rejected," or "The people would not." When Jerusalem collapsed, although there must have been many righteous men still within her, Isaiah said, "What aileth thee that all belonging to thee have gone up to the housetops?" (xxii. 1). His language is wholesale. When he is not attacking society, he attacks classes or groups: "the rulers," the land-grabbers, the drunkards, the sinners, the judges, the house of David, the priests and the prophets, the women. And the sins of these he describes in their social effects, or in their results upon the fate of the whole people; but he never, except in two cases, gives us their individual results. He does not make evident, like Jesus or Paul, the eternal damage a man's sin inflicts on his own soul.

Similarly when Isaiah speaks of God's grace and salvation the objects of these are again collective—"the remnant;" "the escaped" (also a collective noun); a "holy seed;" a "stock" or "stump." It is a "restored nation" whom he sees under the Messiah, the perpetuity and glory of a *city* and a *State*. What we consider to be a most personal and particularly individual matter—the forgiveness of sin—he promises, with two exceptions, only to the community: "This people that dwelleth therein hath its iniquity forgiven." We can understand all this social, collective, and wholesale character of his language only if we keep in mind his Divinely appointed work—the substance and perpetuity of a purified and secure Church of God.

Had Isaiah then no gospel for the individual? This will indeed seem impossible to us if we keep in view the following considerations:—

I. ISAIAH HIMSELF had passed through a powerfully individual experience. He had not only felt the solidarity of the people's sin—"I dwell among a people of unclean lips"—he had first felt his own particular guilt: "I am a man of unclean lips." One who suffered the private experiences which are recounted in chap. vi.; whose "own eyes" had "seen the King, Jehovah of hosts;" who had gathered on his own lips his guilt and felt the fire come from heaven's altar by an angelic messenger specially to purify him; who had further devoted himself to God's service with so thrilling a sense of his own responsibility, and had so thereby felt his solitary and individual mission—he surely was not behind the very greatest of Christian saints in the experience of guilt, of personal obligation to grace and of personal responsibility. Though the record of Isaiah's ministry contains no narratives, such as fill the ministries of Jesus and Paul, of anxious care for individuals, could he who wrote of himself that sixth chapter have failed to deal with men as Jesus dealt with Nicodemus, or Paul with the Philippian gaoler? It is not picturesque fancy, nor merely a reflection of the New Testament temper, if we realise Isaiah's intervals of relief from political labour and religious reform occupied with an attention to individual interests, which necessarily would not

obtain the permanent record of his public ministry. But whether this be so or not, the sixth chapter teaches that for Isaiah all public conscience and public labour found its necessary preparation in personal religion.

2. But, again, Isaiah had an INDIVIDUAL FOR HIS IDEAL. To him the future was not only an established State; it was equally, it was first, a glorious king. Isaiah was an Oriental. We moderns of the West place our reliance upon institutions; we go forward upon ideas. In the East it is personal influence that tells, persons who are expected, followed, and fought for. The history of the West is the history of the advance of thought, of the rise and decay of institutions, to which the greatest individuals are more or less subordinate. The history of the East is the annals of personalities; justice and energy in a ruler, not political principles, are what impress the Oriental imagination. Isaiah has carried this Oriental hope to a distinct and lofty pitch. The Hero whom he exalts on the margin of the future, as its Author, is not only a person of great majesty, but a character of considerable decision. At first only the rigorous virtues of the ruler are attributed to Him (chap. xi. 1 ff.), but afterwards the graces and influence of a much broader and sweeter humanity (xxxii. 2). Indeed, in this latter oracle we saw that Isaiah spoke not so much of his great Hero, as of what any individual might become. "A man," he says, "shall be as an hiding-place from the wind." Personal influence is the spring of social progress, the shelter and fountain force of the community. In the following verses the effect of so pure and inspiring a presence is traced in the discrimination of individual character—each man standing out for what he is—which Isaiah defines as his second requisite for social progress. In all this there is much for the individual to ponder, much to inspire him with a sense of the value and responsibility of his own character, and with the certainty that by himself he shall be judged and by himself stand or fall. "The worthless person shall be no more called princely, nor the knave said to be bountiful."

3. If any details of character are wanting in the picture of Isaiah's Hero, they are supplied by HEZEKIAH'S SELF-ANALYSIS (chap. xxxviii.). We need not repeat what we have said in the previous chapter of the king's appreciation of what is the strength of a man's character, and particularly of how character grows by grappling with death. In this matter the most experienced of Christian saints may learn from Isaiah's pupil.

Isaiah had then, without doubt, a gospel for the individual; and to this day the individual may plainly read it in his book, may truly, strongly, joyfully live by it—so deeply does it begin, so much does it help to self-knowledge and self-analysis, so lofty are the ideals and responsibilities which it presents. But is it true that Isaiah's gospel is for this life only?

Was Isaiah's silence on the immortality of the individual due wholly to the cause we have suggested in the beginning of this chapter—that God gives to each prophet his single problem, and that the problem of Isaiah was the endurance of the Church upon earth? There is no doubt that this is only partly the explanation.

The Hebrew belonged to a branch of humanity—the Semitic—which, as its history proves, was unable to develop any strong imagination of,

or practical interest in, a future life apart from foreign influence or Divine revelation. The pagan Arabs laughed at Mahommed when he preached to them of the Resurrection; and even to-day, after twelve centuries of Moslem influence, their descendants in the centre of Arabia, according to the most recent authority,* fail to form a clear conception of, or indeed to take almost any practical interest in, another world. The northern branch of the race, to which the Hebrews belonged, derived from an older civilisation a prospect of Hades, that their own fancy developed with great elaboration. This prospect, however, which we shall describe fully in connection with chaps. xiv. and xxvi., was one absolutely hostile to the interests of character in this life. It brought all men, whatever their life had been on earth, at last to a dead level of unsubstantial and hopeless existence. Good and evil, strong and weak, pious and infidel, alike became shades, joyless and hopeless, without even the power to praise God. We have seen in Hezekiah's case how such a prospect unnerved the most pious souls, and that revelation, even though represented at his bedside by an Isaiah, offered him no hope of an issue from it. The strength of character, however, which Hezekiah professes to have won in grappling with death, added to the closeness of communion with God which he enjoyed in this life, only brings out the absurdity of such a conclusion to life as the prospect of Sheol offered to the individual. If he was a pious man, if he was a man who had never felt himself deserted by God in this life, he was bound to revolt from so God-forsaken an existence after death. This was actually the line along which the Hebrew spirit went out to victory over those gloomy conceptions of death, that were yet unbroken by a risen Christ. "Thou wilt not," the saint triumphantly cried, "leave my soul in Sheol, nor wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption." It was faith in the almightiness and reasonableness of God's ways, it was conviction of personal righteousness, it was the sense that the Lord would not desert His own in death, which sustained the believer in face of that awful shadow through which no light of revelation had yet broken.

If, these, then, were the wings by which a believing soul under the Old Testament soared over the grave, Isaiah may be said to have contributed to the hope of personal immortality just in so far as he strengthened them. By enhancing as he did the value and beauty of individual character, by emphasising the indwelling of God's Spirit, he was bringing life and immortality to light, even though he spoke no word to the dying about the fact of a glorious life beyond the grave. By assisting to create in the individual that character and sense of God, which alone could assure him he would never die, but pass from the praise of the Lord in this life to a nearer enjoyment of His presence beyond, Isaiah was working along the only line by which the Spirit of God seems to have assisted the Hebrew mind to an assurance of heaven.

But further in his favourite gospel of the REASONABLENESS OF GOD—that God does not work fruitlessly, nor create and cultivate with a view to judgment and destruction—Isaiah was furnishing an argument for personal immortality, the force of which has not been exhausted. In

* Dougherty's "Arabia Deserta: Travels in Northern Arabia," 1876-1878.

a recent work on "The Destiny of Man"* the philosophic author maintains the reasonableness of the Divine methods as a ground of belief both in the continued progress of the race upon earth and in the immortality of the individual. "From the first dawning of life we see all things working together toward one mighty goal—the evolution of the most exalted and spiritual faculties which characterise humanity. Has all this work been done for nothing? Is it all ephemeral, all a bubble that bursts, a vision that fades? On such a view the riddle of the universe becomes a riddle without a meaning. The more thoroughly we comprehend the process of evolution by which things have come to be what they are, the more we are likely to feel that to deny the everlasting persistence of the spiritual element in man is to rob the whole process of its meaning. It goes far toward putting us to permanent intellectual confusion. For my own part, I believe in the immortality of the soul, not in the sense in which I accept demonstrable truths of science, but as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work."

From the same argument Isaiah drew only the former of these two conclusions. To him the certainty that God's people would survive the impending deluge of Assyria's brute force was based on his faith that the Lord is "a God of judgment," of reasonable law and method, and could not have created or fostered so spiritual a people only to destroy them. The progress of religion upon earth was certain. But does not Isaiah's method equally make for the immortality of the individual? He did not draw this conclusion, but he laid down its premises with a confidence and richness of illustration that have never been excelled.

We, therefore, answer the question we put at the beginning of the chapter thus:—Isaiah had a gospel for the individual for this life, and all the necessary premises of a gospel for the individual for the life to come.

BOOK V.

PROPHECIES NOT RELATING TO ISAIAH'S TIME.

IN the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah—the half which refers to the prophet's own career and the politics contemporary with that—we find four or five prophecies containing no reference to Isaiah himself nor to any Jewish king under whom he laboured, and painting both Israel and the foreign world in quite a different state from that in which they lay during his lifetime. These prophecies are chap. xiii., an Oracle announcing the Fall of Babylon, with its appendix, chap. xiv. 1-23, the Promise of Israel's Deliverance and an Ode upon the Fall of the Babylonian Tyrant; chaps. xxiv.-xxvii., a series of Visions of the breaking up of the universe, of restoration from exile, and even of resurrection from the dead; chap. xxxiv., the Vengeance of the Lord upon Edom; and chap. xxxv., a Song of Return from Exile.

In these prophecies Assyria is no longer the dominant world-force, nor Jerusalem the inviolate fortress of God and His people. If Assyria or Egypt is mentioned, it is but as one of the

three classical enemies of Israel; and Babylon is represented as the head and front of the hostile world. The Jews are no longer in political freedom and possession of their own land; they are either in exile or just returned from it to a depopulated country. With these altered circumstances come another temper and new doctrine. The horizon is different, and the hopes that flush in dawn upon it are not quite the same as those which we have contemplated with Isaiah in his immediate future. It is no longer the repulse of the heathen invader; the inviolateness of the sacred city; the recovery of the people from the shock of attack, and of the land from the trampling of armies. But it is the people in exile, the overthrow of the tyrant in his own home, the opening of prison doors, the laying down of a highway through the wilderness, the triumph of return, and the resumption of worship. There is, besides, a promise of the resurrection, which we have not found in the prophecies we have considered.

With such differences, it is not wonderful that many have denied the authorship of these few prophecies to Isaiah. This is a question that can be looked at calmly. It touches no dogma of the Christian faith. Especially it does not involve the other question, so often—and, we venture to say, so unjustly—started on this point, Could not the Spirit of God have inspired Isaiah to foresee all that the prophecies in question foretell, even though he lived more than a century before the people were in circumstances to understand them? Certainly, God is almighty. The question is not, Could He have done this? but one somewhat different: Did He do it? and to this an answer can be had only from the prophecies themselves. If these mark the Babylonian hostility or captivity as already upon Israel, this is a testimony of Scripture itself, which we cannot overlook, and beside which even unquestionable traces of similarity to Isaiah's style or the fact that these oracles are bound up with Isaiah's own undoubted prophecies have little weight. "Facts" of style will be regarded with suspicion by any one who knows how they are employed by both sides in such a question as this; while the certainty that the Book of Isaiah was put into its present form subsequently to his life will permit of,—and the evident purpose of Scripture to secure moral impressiveness rather than historical consecutiveness will account for,—later oracles being bound up with unquestioned utterances of Isaiah.

Only one of the prophecies in question confirms the tradition that it is by Isaiah, viz., chap. xiii., which bears the title "Oracle of Babylon which Isaiah, son of Amoz, did see"; but titles are themselves so much the report of tradition, being of a later date than the rest of the text, that it is best to argue the question apart from them.

On the other hand, Isaiah's authorship of these prophecies, or at least the possibility of his having written them, is usually defended by appealing to his promise of return from exile in chap. xi. and his threat of a Babylonish captivity in chap. xxxix. This is an argument that has not been fairly met by those who deny the Isaianic authorship of chaps. xiii.-xiv. 23, xxiv.-xxvii., and xxxv. It is a strong argument, for while, as we have seen (p. 667), there are good grounds for believing Isaiah to have been likely to make such a prediction of a Babylonish captivity as is

* By Professor Fiske.

attributed to him in chap. xxxix. 6, almost all the critics agree in leaving chap. xi. to him. But if chap. xi. is Isaiah's, then he undoubtedly spoke of an exile much more extensive than had taken place by his own day. Nevertheless, even this ability in xi. to foretell an exile so vast does not account for passages in xiii.-xiv. 23, xxiv.-xxvii., which represent the Exile either as present or as actually over. No one who reads these chapters without prejudice can fail to feel the force of such passages in leading him to decide for an exilic or post-exilic authorship (see pp. 723 ff.).

Another argument against attributing these prophecies to Isaiah is that their visions of the last things, representing as they do a judgment on the whole world, and even the destruction of the whole material universe, are incompatible with Isaiah's loftiest and final hope of an inviolate Zion at last relieved and secure, of a land freed from invasion and wondrously fertile, with all the converted world, Assyria and Egypt, gathered round it as a centre. This question, however, is seriously complicated by the fact that in his youth Isaiah did undoubtedly prophesy a shaking of the whole world and the destruction of its inhabitants, and by the probability that his old age survived into a period whose abounding sin would again make natural such wholesale predictions of judgment as we find in chap. xxiv.

Still, let the question of the eschatology be as obscure as we have shown, there remains this clear issue. In some chapters of the Book of Isaiah, which, from our knowledge of the circumstances of his times, we know must have been published while he was alive, we learn that the Jewish people has never left its land, nor lost its independence under Jehovah's anointed, and that the inviolateness of Zion and the retreat of the Assyrian invaders of Judah, without effecting the captivity of the Jews, are absolutely essential to the endurance of God's kingdom on earth. In other chapters we find that the Jews have left their land, have been long in exile (or from other passages have just returned), and that the religious essential is no more the independence of the Jewish State under a theocratic king, but only the resumption of the Temple worship. Is it possible for one man to have written both these sets of chapters? Is it possible for one age to have produced them? That is the whole question.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BABYLON AND LUCIFER.

ISAIAH xii. 12-xiv. 23.

DATE UNCERTAIN.

THIS double oracle is against the City (xiii. 2-xiv. 2) and the Tyrant (xiv. 3-23) of Babylon.

I. THE WICKED CITY (xiii. 2-xiv. 23).

The first part is a series of hurried and vanishing scenes—glimpses of ruin and deliverance caught through the smoke and turmoil of a Divine war. The drama opens with the erection of a gathering "standard upon a bare mountain" (ver. 2). He who gives the order explains it

(ver. 3), but is immediately interrupted by "Hark! a tumult on the mountains, like a great people. Hark! the surge of the kingdoms of nations gathering together. Jehovah of hosts is mustering the host of war." It is "the day of Jehovah" that is "near," the day of His war and of His judgment upon the world.

This Old Testament expression, "the day of the Lord," starts so many ideas that it is difficult to seize any one of them and say this is just what is meant. For "day" with a possessive pronoun suggests what has been appointed beforehand, or what must come round in its turn; means also opportunity and triumph, and also swift performance after long delay. All these thoughts are excited when we couple "a day" with any person's name. And therefore as with every dawn some one awakes saying, This is my day; as with every dawn comes some one's chance, some soul gets its wish, some will shows what it can do, some passion or principle issues into fact: so God also shall have His day, on which His justice and power shall find their full scope and triumph. Suddenly and simply, like any dawn that takes its turn on the round of time, the great decision and victory of Divine justice shall at last break out of the long delay of ages. "Howl ye, for the day of Jehovah is near; as destruction from the Destructive does it come." Very savage and quite universal is its punishment. "Every human heart melteth." Countless faces, white with terror, light up its darkness like flames. Sinners are "to be exterminated out of the earth; the world is to be punished for its iniquity." Heaven, the stars, sun and moon aid the horror and the darkness, heaven shivering above, the earth quaking beneath; and between, the peoples like shepherdless sheep drive to and fro through awful carnage.

From ver. 17 the mist lifts a little. The vague turmoil clears up into a siege of Babylon by the Medians, and then settles down into Babylon's ruin and abandonment to wild beasts. Finally (xiv. 1) comes the religious reason for so much convulsion: "For Jehovah will have compassion upon Jacob, and choose again Israel, and settle them upon their own ground; and the foreign sojourner shall join himself to them, and they shall associate themselves to the house of Jacob."

This prophecy evidently came to a people already in captivity—a very different circumstance of the Church of God from that in which we have seen her under Isaiah. But upon this new stage it is still the same old conquest. Assyria has fallen, but Babylon has taken her place. The old spirit of cruelty and covetousness has entered a new body; the only change is that it has become wealth and luxury instead of brute force and military glory. It is still selfishness and pride and atheism. At this, our first introduction to Babylon, it might have been proper to explain why throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation this one city should remain in fact or symbol the enemy of God and the stronghold of darkness. But we postpone what may be said of her singular reputation, till we come to the second part of the Book of Isaiah where Babylon plays a larger and more distinct role. Here her destruction is simply the most striking episode of the Divine judgment upon the whole earth. Babylon represents civilisation; she is the brow

of the world's pride and enmity to God. One distinctively Babylonian characteristic, however, must not be passed over. With a ring of irony in his voice, the prophet declares, "Behold, I stir up the Medes against thee, who regard not silver and take no pleasure in gold." The worst terror that can assail us is the terror of forces, whose character we cannot fathom, who will not stop to parley, who do not understand our language nor our bribes. It was such a power with which the resourceful and luxurious Babylon was threatened. With money the Babylonians did all they wished to do, and believed everything else to be possible. They had subsidised kings, bought over enemies, seduced the peoples of the earth. The foe whom God now sent them was impervious to this influence. From their pure highlands came down upon corrupt civilisation a simple people, whose banner was a leathern apron, whose goal was not booty nor ease but power and mastery, who came not to rob but to displace.

The lessons of the passage are two: that the people of God are something distinct from civilisation, though this be universal and absorbent as a very Babylon; and that the resources of civilisation are not even in material strength the highest in the universe, but God has in His armory weapons heedless of men's cunning, and in His armies agents impervious to men's bribes. Every civilisation needs to be told, according to its temper, one of these two things. Is it hypocritical? Then it needs to be told that civilisation is not one with the people of God. Is it arrogant? Then it needs to be told that the resources of civilisation are not the strongest forces in God's universe. Man talks of the triumph of mind over matter, of the power of culture, of the elasticity of civilisation; but God has natural forces, to which all these are as the worm beneath the hoof of the horse: and if moral need arise, He will call His brute forces into requisition. "Howl ye, for the day of Jehovah is near; as destruction from the Destructive does it come." There may be periods in man's history when, in opposition to man's unholy art and godless civilisation, God can reveal Himself only as destruction.

II. THE TYRANT (xiv. 3-23).

To the prophecy of the overthrow of Babylon there is annexed, in order to be sung by Israel in the hour of her deliverance, a *satiric ode* or *taunt-song* (Heb. *marshal*, Eng. ver. *parable*) upon the King of Babylon. A translation of this spirited poem in the form of its verse (in which, it is to be regretted, it has not been rendered by the English revisers) will be more instructive than a full commentary. But the following remarks of introduction are necessary. The word *marshal*, by which this ode is entitled, means *comparison*, *similitude*, or *parable*, and was applicable to every sentence composed of at least two members that compared or contrasted their subjects. As the great bulk of Hebrew poetry is sententious, and largely depends for rhythm upon its parallelism, *marshal* received a general application; and while another term—*shir*—more properly denotes lyric poetry, *marshal* is applied to rhythmical passages in the Old Testament of almost all tempers: to mere predictions, proverbs, orations, satires or taunt-songs, as here,

and to didactic pieces. The parallelism of the verses in our ode is too evident to need an index. But the parallel verses are next grouped into strophes. In Hebrew poetry this division is frequently effected by the use of a refrain. In our ode there is no refrain, but the strophes are easily distinguished by difference of subject-matter. Hebrew poetry does not employ rhyme, but makes use of assonance, and to a much less extent of alliteration—a form which is more frequent in Hebrew prose. In our ode there is not much either of assonance or alliteration. But, on the other hand, the ode has but to be read to break into a certain rough and swinging rhythm. This is produced by long verses rising alternate with short ones falling. Hebrew verse at no time relied for a metrical effect upon the modern device of an equal or proportionate number of syllables. The longer verses of this ode are sometimes too short, the shorter too long, variations to which a rude chant could readily adapt itself. But the alternation of long and short is sustained throughout, except for a break at ver. 10 by the introduction of the formula, "And they answered and said," which evidently ought to stand for a long and a short verse if the number of double verses in the second strophe is to be the same as it is—seven—in the first and in the third.

The scene of the poem, the Underworld and abode of the shades of the dead, is one on which some of the most splendid imagination and music of humanity has been expended. But we must not be disappointed if we do not here find the rich detail and glowing fancy of Virgil's or of Dante's vision. This simple and even rude piece of metre, liker ballad than epic, ought to excite our wonder not so much for what it has failed to imagine as for what, being at its disposal, it has resolutely stinted itself in employing. For it is evident that the author of these lines had within his reach the rich, fantastic materials of Semitic mythology, which are familiar to us in the Babylonian remains. With an austerity, that must strike every one who is acquainted with these, he uses only so much of them as to enable him to render with dramatic force his simple theme—the vanity of human arrogance.*

For this purpose he employs the idea of the Underworld which was prevalent among the northern Semitic peoples. Sheol—the *gaping* or *craving* place—which we shall have occasion to describe in detail when we come to speak of belief in the resurrection,† is the state after death that craves and swallows all living. There dwell the shades of men amid some unsubstantial reflection of their earthly state (ver. 9), and with consciousness and passion only sufficient to greet the arrival of the new-comer and express satiric wonder at his fall (ver. 9). With the arrogance of the Babylonian kings, this tyrant thought to scale the heavens to set his throne in the "mount of assembly" of the immortals, "to match the Most High."‡ But his fate is the

* "Those principles of natural philosophy which smothered the religions of the East with their rank and injurious growth are almost entirely absent from the religion of the Hebrews. Here the motive-power of development is to be found in ethical ideas, which, though not indeed alien to the life of other nations, were not the source from which their religious notions were derived."—(Lotze's "Microcosmos," Eng. Transl., ii. 466.)

† P. 727 ff.

‡ It is, however, only just to add that, as Mr. Sayce has pointed out in the Hibbert Lectures for 1887 (p. 365), the claims of Babylonian kings and heroes for a seat on the mountain of the gods were not always mere arrogance,

fate of all mortals—to go down to the weakness and emptiness of Sheol. Here, let us carefully observe, there is no trace of a judgment for reward or punishment. The new victim of death simply passes to his place among his equals. There was enough of contrast between the arrogance of a tyrant claiming Divinity and his fall into the common receptacle of mortality to point the prophet's moral without the addition of infernal torment. Do we wish to know the actual punishment of his pride and cruelty? It is visible above ground (strophe 4); not with his spirit, but with his corpse; not with himself, but with his wretched family. His corpse is unburied, his family exterminated; his name disappears from the earth.*

Thus, by the help of only a few fragments from the popular mythology, the sacred satirist achieves his purpose. His severe monotheism is remarkable in its contrast to Babylonian poems upon similar subjects. He will know none of the gods of the underworld. In place of the great goddess, whom a Babylonian would certainly have seen presiding, with her minions, over the shades, he personifies—it is a frequent figure of Hebrew poetry—the abyss itself. "Sheol shuddereth at thee." It is the same when he speaks (ver. 13) of the deep's great opposite, that "mount of assembly" of the gods, which the northern Semites believed to soar to a silver sky "in the recesses of the north" (ver. 14), upon the great range which in that direction bounded the Babylonian plain. This Hebrew knows of no gods there but One, whose are the stars, who is the Most High. Man's arrogance and cruelty are attempts upon His majesty. He inevitably overwhelms them. Death is their penalty: blood and squalor on earth, the concourse of shuddering ghosts below.

The kings of the earth set themselves
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord and against His Anointed.
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall have them in derision.

He who has heard that laughter sees no comedy in aught else. This is the one unfailing subject of Hebrew satire, and it forms the irony and the rigour of the following ode.†

The only other remarks necessary are these. In ver. 9 the Authorised Version has not attempted to reproduce the humour of the original satire, which styles them that were chief men on earth "chief-goats" of the herd, bell-wethers. The phrase "they that go down to the

but the first efforts of the Babylonian mind to emancipate itself from the gloomy conceptions of Hades and provide a worthy immortality for virtue. Still most of the kings who pray for an entrance among the gods do so on the plea that they have been successful tyrants—a considerable difference from such an assurance as that of the sixteenth Psalm.

* The popular Semitic conception of Hades contained within it neither grades of condition, according to the merits of men, nor any trace of an infernal torment in aggravation of the unsubstantial state to which all are equally reduced. This statement is true of the Old Testament till at least the Book of Daniel. Sheol is lit by no lurid fires, such as made the later Christian hell intolerable to the lost. That life is unsubstantial; that darkness and dust abound; above all, that God is not there, and that it is impossible to praise Him, is all the punishment which is given in Sheol. Extraordinary vice is punished above ground, in the name and family of the sinner. Sheol, with its monotony, is for average men; but extraordinary piety can break away from it (Ps. xvi.).

† Readers will remember a parallel to this ode in Carlyle's famous chapter on Louis the Unforgotten. No modern has rivalled Carlyle in his inheritance of this satire, except it be he whom Carlyle called "that Jew blackguard Heine."

stones of the pit" should be transferred from ver. 19 to ver. 20.

"And thou shalt lift up this proverb upon the king of Babylon, and shalt say,—

I.

Ah! stilled is the tyrant,
And stilled is the fury!
Broke hath Jehovah the rod of the wicked,
Sceptre of despots:
Stroke of (the) peoples with passion,
Stroke unremitting,
Treading in wrath (the) nations,
Trampling unceasing.
Quiet, at rest, is the whole earth,
They break into singing;
Even the pines are jubilant for thee,
Lebanon's cedars!
"Since thou liest low, cometh not up
Feller against us."

II.

Sheol from under shuddereth at thee
To meet thine arrival,
Stirring up for thee the shades,
All great-goats of earth!
Lifteth erect from their thrones
All kings of peoples.

"10. All of them answer and say to thee,—

"Thou, too, made flaccid like us,
To us hast been levelled!
Hurled to Sheol is the pride of thee,
Clang of the harps of thee;
Under thee strewn are (the) maggots
Thy coverlet worms."

III.

How art thou fallen from heaven
Daystar, sun of the dawn
(How) art thou hewn down to earth,
Hurtler at nations.
And thou, thou didst say in thine heart,
"The heavens will I scale,
Far up to the stars of God
Lift high my throne,
And sit on the mount of assembly,
Far back of the north,
I will climb on the heights of (the) cloud,
I will match the Most High!"
Ah! to Sheol thou art hurled,
Far back of the pit!

IV.

Who see thee at thee are gazing;
Upon thee they muse:
Is this the man that staggered the earth,
Shaker of kingdoms?
Setting the world like the desert,
Its cities he tore down:
Its prisoners he loosed not
(Each of them) homeward.
All kings of people, yes all,
Are lying in their state;
But thou! thou art flung from thy grave,
Like a stick that is loathsome.
Beshrouded with slain, the pierced of the sword,
Like a corpse that is trampled.
They that go down to the stones of a crypt,
Shalt not be with them in burial.
For thy land thou hast ruined,
Thy people hast slaughtered.
Shall not be mentioned for aye
Seed of the wicked!
Set for his children a shames, for
For guilt of their fathers!
They shall not rise, nor inherit (the) earth,
Nor fill the face of the world with cities.

V.

But I will arise upon them,
Sayeth Jehovah of hosts;
And I will cut off from Babel
Record and remnant,
And scion and seed,
Saith Jehovah:
Yea, I will make it the bittern's heritage,
Marshes of water!
And I will sweep it with sweeps of destruction.
Sayeth Jehovah of hosts.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE EFFECT OF SIN ON OUR MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCE.

ISAIAH xxiv.

DATE UNCERTAIN.

THE twenty-fourth of Isaiah is one of those chapters which almost convince the most persevering reader of Scripture that a consecutive reading of the Authorised Version is an impossibility. For what does he get from it but a weary and unintelligent impression of destruction, from which he gladly escapes to the nearest clear utterance of gospel or judgment? Criticism affords little help. It cannot clearly identify the chapter with any historical situation. For a moment there is a gleam of a company standing outside the convulsion, and to the west of the prophet, while the prophet himself suffers captivity.* But even this fades before we make it out; and all the rest of the chapter has too universal an application—the language is too imaginative, enigmatic, and even paradoxical—to be applied to an actual historical situation, or to its development in the immediate future. This is an ideal description, the apocalyptic vision of a last, great day of judgment upon the whole world; and perhaps the moral truths are all the more impressive that the reader is not distracted by temporary or local references.

With the very first verse the prophecy leaps far beyond all particular or national conditions: "Behold, Jehovah shall be emptying the earth and rifling it; and He shall turn it upside down and scatter its inhabitants." This is expressive and thorough; the words are those which were used for cleaning a dirty dish. To the completeness of this opening verse there is really nothing in the chapter to add. All the rest of the verses only illustrate this upturning and scouring of the material universe. For it is with the material universe that the chapter is concerned. Nothing is said of the spiritual nature of man—little, indeed, about man at all. He is simply called "the inhabitant of the earth," and the structure of society (ver. 2) is introduced only to make more complete the effect of the convulsion of the earth itself. Man cannot escape those judgments which shatter his material habitation. It is like one of Dante's visions. "Terror, and Pit and Snare upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth! And it shall come to pass that he who fleeth from the noise of the Terror shall fall into the Pit, and he who cometh up out of the midst of the Pit shall be taken in the Snare. For the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth do shake. Broken, utterly broken, is the earth; shattered, utterly shattered, the earth; staggering, very staggering, the earth; reeling, the earth reeleth like a drunken man: she swingeth to and fro like a hammock."

* Vv. 14-16, which are very perplexing. In 14 a company is introduced to us very vaguely as *those* or *yonder ones*, who are represented as seeing the bright side of the convulsion which is the subject of the chapter. *They cry aloud from the sea*; that is, *from the west* of the prophet. He is therefore in the east, and in captivity, in the centre of the convulsion. The problem is to find any actual historical situation, in which part of Israel was in the east in captivity, and part in the west free and full of reasons for praising God for the calamity, out of which their brethren saw no escape for themselves.

And so through the rest of the chapter it is the material life of man that is cursed: "the new wine, the vine, the tabrets, the harp, the song," and the merriness in men's hearts which these call forth. Nor does the chapter confine itself to the earth. The closing verses carry the effect of judgment to the heavens and far limits of the material universe. "The host of the high ones on high" (ver. 21) are not spiritual beings, the angels. They are material bodies, the stars. "Then, too, shall the moon be confounded, and the stars ashamed," when the Lord's kingdom is established and His righteousness made gloriously clear.

What awful truth is this for illustration of which we see not man, but his habitation, the world and all its surroundings, lifted up by the hand of the Lord, broken open, wiped out and shaken, while man himself, as if only to heighten the effect, staggers hopelessly like some broken insect on the quaking ruins? What judgment is this, in which not only one city or one kingdom is concerned, as in the last prophecy of which we treated, but the whole earth is convulsed, and moon and sun confounded?

The judgment is the visitation of man's sins on his material surroundings—"The earth's transgression shall be heavy upon it; and it shall rise, and not fall." The truth on which this judgment rests is that between man and his material circumstance—the earth he inhabits, the seasons which bear him company through time, and the stars to which he looks high up in heaven—there is a moral sympathy. "The earth also is profaned under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant."

The Bible gives no support to the theory that matter itself is evil. God created all things: "and God saw everything that He had made; and, behold, it was very good." When, therefore, we read in the Bible that the earth is cursed, we read that it is cursed for man's sake; when we read of its desolation, it is as the effect of man's crime. The Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt and other great physical catastrophes happened because men were stubborn or men were foul. We cannot help noticing, however, that matter was thus convulsed or destroyed, not only for the purpose of punishing the moral agent, but because of some poison which had passed from him into the unconscious instruments, stage, and circumstances of his crime. According to the Bible, there would appear to be some mysterious sympathy between man and Nature. Man not only governs Nature; he infects and informs her. As the moral life of the soul expresses itself in the physical life of the body for the latter's health or corruption, so the conduct of the human race affects the physical life of the universe to its farthest limits in space. When man is reconciled to God, the wilderness blossoms like a rose; but the guilt of man sullies, infects, and corrupts the place he inhabits and the articles he employs; and their destruction becomes necessary, not for his punishment so much as because of the infection and pollution that are in them.

The Old Testament is not contented with a general statement of this great principle, but pursues it to all sorts of particular and private applications. The curses of the Lord fell, not only on the sinner, but on his dwelling, on his property, and even on the bit of ground these

occupied. This was especially the case with regard to idolatry. When Israel put a pagan population to the sword, they were commanded to raze the city, gather its wealth together, burn all that was burnable and put the rest into the temple of the Lord as a thing *devoted* or *accursed*, which it would harm themselves to share (Deut. vii. 25, 26; xiii. 7). The very site of Jericho was cursed, and men were forbidden to build upon its horrid waste. The story of Achan illustrates the same principle.

It is just this principle which chap. xxiv. extends to the whole universe. What happened in Jericho because of its inhabitants' idolatry is now to happen to the whole earth because of man's sin. "The earth also is profane under her inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." In these words the prophet takes us away back to the covenant with Noah, which he properly emphasises as a covenant with all mankind. With a noble universalism, for which his race and their literature get too little credit, this Hebrew recognises that once all mankind were holy unto God, who had included them under His grace, that promised the fixedness and fertility of nature. But that covenant, though of grace, had its conditions for man. These had been broken. The race had grown wicked, as it was before the Flood; and therefore, in terms which vividly recall that former judgment of God—"the windows on high are opened"—the prophet foretells a new and more awful catastrophe. One word which he employs betrays how close he feels the moral sympathy to be between man and his world. "The earth," he says, "is profane." This is a word whose root meaning is "that which has fallen away" or "separated itself," which is "delinquent." Sometimes, perhaps, it has a purely moral significance, like our word "abandoned" in the common acceptance: he who has fallen far and utterly into sin, "the reckless sinner." But mostly it has rather the religious meaning of one who has fallen out of the covenant relation with God and the relevant benefits and privileges. Into this covenant not only Israel and their land, but humanity and the whole world, have been brought. Is man under covenant grace? The world is also. Does man fall? So does the world, becoming with him *profane*. The consequence of breaking the covenant oath was expressed in Hebrew by a technical word; and it is this word which, translated *curse*, is applied in ver. 6 to the earth.

The whole earth is to be broken up and dissolved. What then is to become of the people of God—the indestructible remnant? Where are they to settle? In this new deluge is there a new ark? For answer the prophet presents us with an old paradise (ver. 23). He has wrecked the universe; but he says now, "Jehovah of hosts shall dwell in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem." It would be impossible to find a better instance of the limitations of Old Testament prophecy than this return to the old dispensation after the old dispensation has been committed to the flames. At such a crisis as the conflagration of the universe for the sin of man, the hope of the New Testament looks for the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, but there is no scintilla of such a hope in this prediction. The imagination of the Hebrew seer is beaten back upon the theatre his conscience has abandoned. He knows "the

old is out of date," but for him "the new is not yet born;" and, therefore, convinced as he is that the old must pass away, he is forced to borrow from its ruins a provisional abode for God's people, a figure for the truth which grips him so firmly, that, in spite of the death of all the universe for man's sin, there must be a visibility and locality of the Divine majesty, a place where the people of God may gather to bless His holy name.

In this contrast of the power of spiritual imagination possessed respectively by the Old and New Testaments we must not, however, lose the ethical interest which the main lesson of this chapter has for the individual conscience. A breaking universe, the great day of judgment, may be too large and too far off to impress our conscience. But each of us has his own world—body, property, and environment—which is as much and as evidently affected by his own sins as our chapter represents the universe to be by the sins of the race.

To grant that the moral and physical universes are from the same hand is to affirm a sympathy and mutual reaction between them. This affirmation is confirmed by experience, and this experience is of two kinds. To the guilty man Nature seems aware, and flashes back from her larger surfaces the magnified reflection of his own self-contempt and terror. But, besides, men are also unable to escape attributing to the material instruments or surroundings of their sin a certain infection, a certain power of communicating to their imaginations and memories the desire for sin, as well as of inflicting upon them the pain and penalty of the disorder it has produced among themselves. Sin, though born, as Christ said, in the heart, has immediately a material expression; and we may follow this outwards through man's mind, body, and estate, not only to find it "hindering, disturbing, complicating all," but reinfecting with the lust and odour of sin the will which gave it birth. As sin is put forth by the will, or is cherished in the heart, so we find error cloud the mind, impurity the imagination, misery the feelings, and pain and weariness infect the flesh and bone. God, who modelled it, alone knows how far man's physical form has been degraded by the sinful thoughts and habits of which for ages it has been the tool and expression; but even our eyes may sometimes trace the despoiler, and that not only in the case of what are preferably named sins of the flesh, but even with lusts that do not require for their gratification the abuse of the body. Pride, as one might think the least fleshly of all the vices, leaves yet in time her damning signature, and will mark the strongest faces with the sad symptoms of that mental break-down, for which unrestrained pride is so often to blame. If sin thus disfigures the body, we know that sin also infects the body. The habituated flesh becomes the suggester of crime to the will which first constrained it to sin, and now wearily, but in vain, rebels against the habits of its instrument. But we recall all this about the body only to say that what is true of the body is true of the soul's greater material surroundings. With the sentence "Thou shalt surely die," God connects this other: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake."

When we pass from a man's body, the wrapping we find next nearest to his soul is his property. It has always been an instinct of the race,

that there is nothing a man may so infect with the sin of his heart as his handiwork and the gains of his toil. And that is a true instinct, for, in the first place, the making of property perpetuates a man's own habits. If he is successful in business, then every bit of wealth he gathers is a confirmation of the motives and tempers in which he conducted his business. A man deceives himself as to this, saying, Wait till I have made enough; then I will put away the meanness, the harshness, and the dishonesty with which I made it. He shall not be able. Just because he has been successful, he will continue in his habit without thinking; just because there has been no break-down to convict of folly and suggest penitence, so he becomes hardened. Property is a bridge on which our passions cross from one part of our life to another. The Germans have an ironical proverb: "The man who has stolen a hundred thousand dollars *can afford* to live honestly." The emphasis of the irony falls on the words in italics: he can afford, but never does. His property hardens his heart, and keeps him from repentance.

But the instinct of humanity has also been quick to this: that the curse of ill-gotten wealth passes like bad blood from father to child. What is the truth in this matter? A glance at history will tell us. The accumulation of property is the result of certain customs, habits, and laws. In its own powerful interest property perpetuates these down the ages, and infects the fresh air of each new generation with their temper. How often in the history of mankind has it been property gained under unjust laws or cruel monopolies which has prevented the abolition of these, and carried into gentler, freer times the pride and exclusiveness of the age, by whose rude habits it was gathered. This moral transference, which we see on so large a scale in public history, is repeated to some extent in every private bequest. A curse does not necessarily follow an estate from the sinful producer of it to his heir; but the latter is, "by the bequest itself," generally brought into so close a contact with his predecessor as to share his conscience and be in sympathy with his temper. And the case is common where an heir, though absolutely up to the date of his succession separate from him who made and has left the property, nevertheless finds himself unable to alter the methods, or to escape the temper, in which the property has been managed. In nine cases out of ten property carries conscience and transfers habit; if the guilt does not descend, the infection does.

When we pass from the effect of sin upon property to its effect upon circumstance, we pass to what we can affirm with even greater conscience. Man has the power of permanently soaking and staining his surroundings with the effect of sins in themselves momentary and transient. Sin increases terribly by the mental law of association. It is not the gin-shop and the face of wanton beauty that alone tempt men to sin. Far more subtle seductions are about every one of us. That we have the power of inflicting our character upon the scenes of our conduct is proved by some of the dreariest experiences of life. A failure in duty renders the place of it distasteful and enervating. Are we irritable and selfish at home? Then home is cer-

tain to be depressing, and little helpful to our spiritual growth. Are we selfish and niggardly in the interest we take in others? Then the congregation we go to, the suburb we dwell in, will appear insipid and unprofitable; we shall be past the possibility of gaining character or happiness from the ground where God planted us and meant us to grow. Students have been idle in their studies till every time they enter them a reflex languor comes down like stale smoke, and the room they desecrated takes its revenge on them. We have it in our power to make our workshops, our laboratories, and our studies places of magnificent inspiration, to enter which is to receive a baptism of industry and hope; and we have power to make it impossible ever to work in them again at full pitch. The pulpit, the pew, the very communion-table, come under this law. If a minister of God have made up his mind to say nothing from his accustomed place, which has not cost him toil, to feel nothing but a dependence on God and a desire for souls, then he will never set foot there but the power of the Lord shall be upon him. But there are men who would rather set foot anywhere than in their pulpit—men who out of it are full of fellowship, information, and infective health, but there they are paralysed with the curse of their idle past. How history shows us that the most sacred shelters and institutions of man become tainted with sin, and are destroyed in revolution or abandoned to decay by the intolerant conscience of younger generations! How the hidden life of each man feels his past sins possessing his home and hearth, his pew, and even his place at the Sacrament, till it is sometimes better for his soul's health to avoid these!

Such considerations give a great moral force to the doctrine of the Old Testament that man's sin has rendered necessary the destruction of his material circumstances, and that the Divine judgment includes a broken and a rifled universe.

The New Testament has borrowed this vision from the Old, but added, as we have seen, with greater distinctness, the hope of new heavens and a new earth. We have not concluded the subject, however, when we have pointed this out, for the New Testament has another gospel. The grace of God affects even the material results of sin; the Divine pardon that converts the sinner converts his circumstance also; Christ Jesus sanctifies even the flesh, and is the Physician of the body as well as the Saviour of the soul. To Him physical evil abounds only that He may show forth His glory in curing it. "Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." To Paul the "whole creation groaneth and travaileth with" the sinner "till now," the hour of the sinner's redemption. The Gospel bestows an evangelic liberty which permits the strong Christian to partake of meats offered to idols. And, finally, "all things work together for good to them that love God," for although to the converted and forgiven sinner the material pains which his sins have brought on him may continue into his new life, they are experienced by him no more as the just penalties of an angry God, but as the loving, sanctifying chastisements of his Father in heaven.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOD'S POOR.

ISAIAH xxv.-xxvii.

DATE UNCERTAIN.

WE have seen that no more than the faintest gleam of historical reflection brightens the obscurity of chap. xxiv., and that the disaster which lowers there is upon too world-wide a scale to be forced within the conditions of any single period in the fortunes of Israel. In chaps. xxv.-xxvii., which may naturally be held to be a continuation of chap. xxiv., the historical allusions are more numerous. Indeed, it might be said they are too numerous, for they contradict one another to the perplexity of the most acute critics. They imply historical circumstances for the prophecy both before and after the exile. On the one hand, the blame of idolatry in Judah (xxvii. 9), the mention of Assyria and Egypt (xxvii. 12, 13), and the absence of the name of Babylon are indicative of a pre-exilic date.* Arguments from style are always precarious; but it is striking that some critics, who deny that chaps. xxiv.-xxvii. can have come as a whole from Isaiah's time, profess to see his hand in certain passages.† Then, secondly, through these verses which point to a pre-exilic date there are woven, almost inextricably, phrases of actual exile: expressions of the sense of living on a level and in contact with the heathen (xxvi. 9, 10); a request to God's people to withdraw from the midst of a heathen public to the privacy of their chambers (20, 21); prayers and promises of deliverance from the oppressor (*passim*); hopes of the establishment of Zion, and of the repopulation of the Holy Land. And, thirdly, some verses imply that the speaker has already returned to Zion itself: he says more than once, "in this mountain;" there are hymns celebrating a deliverance actually achieved, as God "has done a marvel. For Thou hast made a citadel into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin, a castle of strangers to be no city, not to be built again." Such phrases do not read as if the prophet were creating for the lips of his people a psalm of triumph against a far future deliverance; they have in them the ring of what has already happened.

This bare statement of the allusions of the prophecy will give the ordinary reader some idea of the difficulties of Biblical criticism. What is to be made of a prophecy uttering the catchwords and breathing the experience of three distinct periods? One solution of the difficulty may be that we have here the composition of a Jew already returned from exile to a desecrated sanctuary and depopulated land, who has woven through his original utterances of complaint and hope the experience of earlier oppressions and deliverances, using even the names of earlier tyrants. In his immediate past a great city that oppressed the Jews has fallen, though, if this is Babylon, it is strange that he nowhere names it. But his intention is rather religious than historical; he seeks to give a general representation of the attitude of the world to the people of

God, and of the judgment which God brings on the world. This view of the composition is supported by either of two possible interpretations of that difficult verse, xxvii. 10: "In that day Jehovah with His sword, the hard and the great and the strong, shall perform visitation upon Leviathan, Serpent Elusive, and upon Leviathan, Serpent Tortuous; and He shall slay the Dragon that is in the sea." Cheyne treats these monsters as mythic personifications of the clouds, the darkness, and the powers of the air, so that the verse means that, just as Jehovah is supreme in the physical world, He shall be in the moral. But it is more probable that the two Leviathans mean Assyria and Babylon—the "Elusive" one, Assyria on the swift-shooting Tigris; the "Tortuous" one, Babylon on the winding Euphrates—while "the Dragon that is in the sea" or "the west" is Egypt. But if the prophet speaks of a victory over Israel's three great enemies all at once, that means that he is talking universally or ideally; and this impression is further heightened by the mythic names he gives them. Such arguments, along with the undoubted post-exilic fragments in the prophecy, point to a late date, so that even a very conservative critic, who is satisfied that Isaiah is the author, admits that "the possibility of exilic authorship does not allow itself to be denied."

If this character which we attribute to the prophecy be correct—viz., that it is a summary or ideal account of the attitude of the alien world to Israel, and of the judgment God has ready for the world—then, though itself be exilic, its place in the Book of Isaiah is intelligible. Chaps. xxiv.-xxvii. fitly crown the long list of Isaiah's oracles upon the foreign nations; they finally formulate the purposes of God towards the nations and towards Israel, whom the nations have oppressed. Our opinions must not be final or dogmatic about this matter of authorship; the obscurities are not nearly cleared up. But if it be ultimately found certain that this prophecy, which lies in the heart of the Book of Isaiah, is not by Isaiah himself, that need neither startle nor unsettle us. No doctrinal question is stirred by such a discovery, not even that of the accuracy of the Scriptures. For that a book is entitled by Isaiah's name does not necessarily mean that it is all by Isaiah; and we shall feel still less compelled to believe that these chapters are his when we find other chapters called by his name while these are not said to be by him. In truth there is a difficulty here, only because it is supposed that a book entitled by Isaiah's name must necessarily contain nothing but what is Isaiah's own. Tradition may have come to say so; but the Scripture itself, bearing as it does unmistakable marks of another age than Isaiah's, tells us that tradition is wrong: and the testimony of Scripture is surely to be preferred, especially when it betrays, as we have seen, sufficient reasons why a prophecy, though not Isaiah's, was attached to his genuine and undoubted oracles. In any case, however, as even the conservative critic whom we have quoted admits, "for the religious value" of the prophecy "the question" of the authorship "is thoroughly irrelevant."

We shall perceive this at once as we now turn to see what is the religious value of our prophecy. Chaps. xxv.-xxvii. stand in the front rank of evangelical prophecy. In their experience of religion, their characterisations of God's

* The mention of Moab (xxv. 10, 11) is also consistent with a pre-exilic date, but does not necessarily imply it.

† *E. g.*, xxv. 6-8, 10, 11; xxvii. 10, 11, 9, 12, 13.

people, their expressions of faith, their missionary hopes and hopes of immortality, they are very rich and edifying. Perhaps their most signal feature is their designation of the people of God. In this collection of prayers and hymns the people of God are not regarded as a political body. They are only once called the *nation* and spoken of in connection with a territory (xxvi. 15). Only twice are they named with the national names of Israel and Jacob (xxvii. 6, 9, 12). We miss Isaiah's promised king, his pictures of righteous government, his emphasis upon social justice and purity, his interest in the foreign politics of his State, his hopes of national grandeur and agricultural felicity. In these chapters God's people are described by adjectives signifying spiritual qualities. Their nationality is no more pleaded, only their suffering estate and their hunger and thirst after God. The ideals that are presented for the future are neither political nor social, but ecclesiastical. We saw how closely Isaiah's prophesying was connected with the history of his time. The people of this prophecy seem to have done with history, and to be interested only in worship. And along with the assurance of the continued establishment of Zion as the centre for a secure and holy people, filling a secure and fertile land,—with which, as we have seen, the undoubted visions of Isaiah content themselves, while silent as to the fate of the individuals who drop from this future through death,—we have the most abrupt and thrilling hopes expressed for the resurrection of these latter to share in the glory of the redeemed and restored community.

Among the names applied to God's people there are three which were destined to play an enormous part in the history of religion. In the English version these appear as two "poor and needy;" but in the original they are three. In chap. xxv. 4: "Thou hast been a stronghold to the poor and a stronghold to the needy," *poor* renders a Hebrew word, "dāl," literally *wavering, tottering, infirm*, then *slender or lean*, then *poor* in fortune and estate; *needy* literally renders the Hebrew "'ebhyôn," Latin *egenus*. In chap. xxvi. 6: "the foot of the poor and the steps of the needy," *needy*, renders "dāl," while *poor* renders "'ānî," a passive form—*forced, afflicted, oppressed*, then *wretched*, whether under persecution, poverty, loneliness, or exile, and so *tamed, mild, meek*. These three words, in their root ideas of *infirmity, need*, and positive *affliction*, cover among them every aspect of physical poverty and distress. Let us see how they came also to be the expression of the highest moral and evangelical virtues.

If there is one thing which distinguishes the people of the revelation from other historical nations, it is the evidence afforded by their dictionaries of the power to transmute the most afflicting experiences of life into virtuous disposition and effectual desire for God. We see this most clearly if we contrast the Hebrews' use of their words for *poor* with that of the first language which was employed to translate these words—the Greek in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. In the Greek temper there was a noble pity for the unfortunate; the earliest Greeks regarded beggars as the peculiar protégés of Heaven. Greek philosophy developed a capacity for enriching the soul in misfortune; Stoicism gave imperishable proof of how bravely

a man could hold poverty and pain to be things indifferent, and how much gain from such indifference he could bring to his soul. But in the vulgar opinion of Greece penury and sickness were always disgraceful; and Greek dictionaries mark the degradation of terms, which at first merely noted physical disadvantage, into epithets of contempt or hopelessness. It is very striking that it was not till they were employed to translate the Old Testament ideas of poverty that the Greek words for "poor" and "lowly" came to bear an honourable significance. And in the case of the Stoic, who endured poverty or pain with such indifference, was it not just this indifference that prevented him from discovering in his tribulations the rich evangelical experience which, as we shall see, fell to the quick conscience and sensitive nerves of the Hebrew?

Let us see how this conscience was developed. In the East poverty scarcely ever means physical disadvantage alone: in its train there follow higher disabilities. A poor Eastern cannot be certain of fair play in the courts of the land. He is very often a wronged man, with a fire of righteous anger burning in his breast. Again, and more important, misfortune is to the quick religious instinct of the Oriental a sign of God's estrangement. With us misfortune is so often only the cruelty, sometimes real, sometimes imagined, of the rich; the unemployed vents his wrath at the capitalist, the tramp shakes his fist after the carriage on the highway. In the East they do not forget to curse the rich, but they remember as well to humble themselves beneath the hand of God. With an unfortunate Oriental the conviction is supreme, God is angry with me; I have lost His favour. His soul eagerly longs for God.

A poor man in the East has, therefore, not only a hunger for food: he has the hotter hunger for justice, the deeper hunger for God. Poverty in itself, without extraneous teaching, develops nobler appetites. The physical, becomes the moral, pauper; poor in substance, he grows poor in spirit. It was by developing, with the aid of God's Spirit, this quick conscience and this deep desire for God, which in the East are the very soul of physical poverty, that the Jews advanced to that sense of evangelical poverty of heart, blessed by Jesus in the first of His Beatitudes as the possession of the kingdom of heaven.

Till the Exile, however, the poor were only a portion of the people. In the Exile the whole nation became poor, and henceforth "God's poor might become synonymous with God's people." This was the time when the words received their spiritual baptism. Israel felt the physical curse of poverty to its extreme of famine. The pains, privations, and terrors, which the glib tongues of our comfortable middle classes, as they sing the psalms of Israel, roll off so easily for symbols of their own spiritual experience, were felt by the captive Hebrews in all their concrete physical effects. The noble and the saintly, the gentle and the cultured, priest, soldier and citizen, woman, youth and child, were torn from home and estate, were deprived of civil standing, were imprisoned, fettered, flogged, and starved to death. We learn something of what it must have been from the words which Jeremiah addressed to Baruch, a youth of good family and fine culture: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not,

for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord; only thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest." Imagine a whole nation plunged into poverty of this degree—not born into it having known no better things, nor stunted into it with sensibility and the power of expression sapped out of them, but plunged into it, with the unimpaired culture, conscience, and memories of the flower of the people. When God's own hand sent fresh from Himself a poet's soul into "the clay biggin'" of an Ayrshire ploughman, what a revelation we received of the distress, the discipline, and the graces of poverty! But in the Jewish nation as it passed into exile there were a score of hearts with as unimpaired an appetite for life as Robert Burns; and, worse than he, they went to feel its pangs away from home. Genius, conscience, and pride drank to the dregs in a foreign land the bitter cup of the poor. The Psalms and Lamentations show us how they bore their poison. A Greek Stoic might sneer at the complaint and sobbing, the self-abasement so strangely mixed with fierce cries for vengeance. But the Jew had within him the conscience that will not allow a man to be a Stoic. He never forgot that it was for his sin he suffered, and therefore to him suffering could not be a thing indifferent. With this, his native hunger for justice reached in captivity a famine pitch; his sense of guilt was equalled by as sincere an indignation at the tyrant who held him in his brutal grasp. The feeling of estrangement from God increased to a degree that only the exile of a Jew could excite: the longing for God's house and the worship lawful only there; the longing for the relief which only the sacrifices of the Temple could bestow; the longing for God's own presence and the light of His face. "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth after Thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, as I have looked upon Thee in the sanctuary, to see Thy power and Thy glory. For Thy lovingkindness is better than life!"

"Thy lovingkindness is better than life!"—is the secret of it all. There is that which excites a deeper hunger in the soul than the hunger for life, and for the food and money that give life. This spiritual poverty is most richly bred in physical penury, it is strong enough to displace what feeds it. The physical poverty of Israel which had awakened these other hungers of the soul—hunger for forgiveness, hunger for justice, hunger for God—was absorbed by them; and when Israel came out of exile, "to be poor" meant, not so much to be indigent in this world's substance as to feel the need of pardon, the absence of righteousness, the want of God.

It is at this time, as we have seen, that Isa. xxiv.-xxvii. was written; and it is in the temper of this time that the three Hebrew words for "poor" and "needy" are used in chaps. xxv. and xxvi. The returned exiles were still politically dependent and abjectly poor. Their discipline therefore continued, and did not allow them to forget their new lessons. In fact, they developed the results of these further, till in this prophecy we find no fewer than five different aspects of spiritual poverty.

1. We have already seen how strong the sense of sin is in chap. xxiv. This *poverty of peace* is not so fully expressed in the following chapters, and indeed seems crowded out by the sense

of the "iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth" and the desire for their judgment (xxvi. 21).

2. The feeling of the *poverty of justice* is very strong in this prophecy. But it is to be satisfied; in part it has been satisfied (xxv. 1-4). "A strong city," probably Babylon, has fallen. "Moab shall be trodden down in his place, even as straw is trodden down in the water of the dunghill." The complete judgment is to come when the Lord shall destroy the two "Leviathans" and the great "Dragon of the west" (xxvii. 1). It is followed by the restoration of Israel to the state in which Isaiah (chap. v. 1) sang so sweetly of her. "A pleasant vineyard, sing ye of her. I, Jehovah, her Keeper, moment by moment do I water her; lest any make a raid upon her, night and day will I keep her." The Hebrew text then reads, "Fury is not in Me;" but probably the Septuagint version has preserved the original meaning: "I have no walls." If this be correct, then Jehovah is describing the present state of Jerusalem, the fulfilment of Isaiah's threat, chap. v. 6: "Walls I have not; let there but be briars and thorns before me! With war will I stride against them; I will burn them together." But then there breaks the softer alternative of the reconciliation of Judah's enemies: "Or else let him seize hold of My strength; let him make peace with Me—peace let him make with Me." In such a peace Israel shall spread, and his fulness become the riches of the Gentiles. "In that by-and-bye Jacob shall take root, Israel blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

Perhaps the wildest cries that rose from Israel's famine of justice were those which found expression in chap. xxxiv. This chapter is so largely a repetition of feelings we have already met with elsewhere in the Book of Isaiah, that it is necessary now only to mention its original features. The subject is, as in chap. xiii., the Lord's judgment upon all the nations; and as chap. xiii. singled out Babylon for special doom, so chap. xxxiv. singles out Edom. The reason of this distinction will be very plain to the reader of the Old Testament. From the day the twins struggled in their mother Rebekah's womb, Israel and Edom were at either open war or burned towards each other with a hate which was the more intense for wanting opportunities of gratification. It is an Eastern edition of the worst chapters in the history of England and Ireland. No bloodier massacres stained Jewish lands than those which attended their invasions of Edom, and Jewish psalms of vengeance are never more flagrant than when they touch the name of the children of Esau. The only gentle utterance of the Old Testament upon Israel's hereditary foe is a comfortless enigma. Isaiah's "Oracle for Dumah" (xxii. 11 f.), shows that even that large-hearted prophet, in face of his people's age-long resentment at Edom's total want of appreciation of Israel's spiritual superiority, could offer Edom, though for the moment submissive and inquiring, nothing but a sad, ambiguous answer. Edom and Israel, each after his fashion, exulted in the other's misfortunes: Israel by bitter satire when Edom's impregnable mountain-range was treacherously seized and overrun by his allies (Obadiah 4-9); Edom, with the harassing, pillaging habits of a highland tribe, hanging on to the skirts of Judah's great enemies, and cutting off Jewish fugitives, or selling them into slavery, or malignantly complet-

ing the ruin of Jerusalem's walls after her overthrow by the Chaldeans (Obadiah 10-14; Ezek. xxxv. 10-15; Ps. cxxxi. 7). In "the quarrel of Zion" with the nations of the world Edom had taken the wrong side,—his profane, earthly nature incapable of understanding his brother's spiritual claims, and therefore envious of him, with the brutal malice of ignorance, and spitefully glad to assist in disappointing such claims. This is what we must remember when we read the indignant verses of chap. xxxiv. Israel, conscious of his spiritual calling in the world, felt bitter resentment that his own brother should be so vulgarly hostile to his attempts to carry it out. It is not our wish to defend the temper of Israel towards Edom. The silence of Christ before the Edomite Herod and his men of war has taught the spiritual servants of God what is their proper attitude towards the malignant and obscene treatment of their claims by vulgar men. But at least let us remember that chap. xxxiv., for all its fierceness, is inspired by Israel's conviction of a spiritual destiny and service for God, and by the natural resentment that his own kith and kin should be doing their best to render these futile. That a famine of bread makes its victims delirious does not tempt us to doubt the genuineness of their need and suffering. As little ought we to doubt or to ignore the reality or the purity of those spiritual convictions, the prolonged starvation of which bred in Israel such feverish hate against his twin-brother Esau. Chap. xxxiv., with all its proud prophecy of judgment, is, therefore, also a symptom of that aspect of Israel's poverty of heart, which we have called a hunger for the Divine justice.

3. POVERTY OF THE EXILE. But as fair flowers bloom upon rough stalks, so from Israel's stern challenges of justice there break sweet prayers for home. Chap. xxxiv., the effusion of vengeance on Edom, is followed by chap. xxxv., the going forth of hope to the return from exile and the establishment of the ransomed of the Lord in Zion.* Chap. xxxv. opens with a prospect beyond the return, but after the first two verses addresses itself to the people still in a foreign captivity, speaking of their salvation (vv. 3, 4), of the miracles that will take place in themselves (vv. 5, 6) and in the desert between them and their home (vv. 6, 7), of the highway which God shall build, evident and secure (vv. 8, 9), and of the final arrival in Zion (ver. 10). In that march the usual disappointments and illusions of desert life shall disappear. The "mirage shall become a pool;" and the clump of vegetation which afar off the hasty traveller hails for a sign of water, but which on his approach he discovers to be the withered grass of a jackal's lair, shall indeed be reeds and rushes, standing green in fresh water. Out of this exuberant fertility there emerges in the prophet's thoughts a great highway, on which the poetry of the chapter gathers and reaches its climax. Have we of this nineteenth century, with our more rapid means of passage, not forgotten the poetry of the road? Are we able to appreciate either the intrinsic usefulness or the gracious

symbolism of the king's highway? How can we know it as the Bible-writers or our forefathers knew it when they made the road the main line of their allegories and parables of life? Let us listen to these verses as they strike the three great notes in the music of the road: "And an highway shall be there, and a way; yea, the Way of Holiness shall it be called, for the unclean shall not pass over it:" that is what is to distinguish this road from all other roads. But here is what it is as being a road. First, it shall be unmistakably plain: "The wayfaring man, yea fools, shall not err therein." Second, it shall be perfectly secure. "No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up thereon; they shall not be met with there." Third, it shall bring to a safe arrival and ensure a complete overtaking: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall overtake gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

4. So Israel was to come home. But to Israel home meant the Temple, and the Temple meant God. The poverty of the exile was, in the essence of it, *poverty of God, poverty of love*. The prayers which express this are very beautiful,—that trail like wounded animals to the feet of their master, and look up in His face with large eyes of pain. "And they shall say in that day, Lo, this is our God: we have waited for Him, that He should save us; this is the Lord: we have waited for Him; we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation.... Yea, in the way of Thy ordinances, O Lord, have we waited for Thee; to Thy name and to Thy Memorial was the desire of our soul. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, by my spirit within me do I seek Thee with dawn" (chaps. xxv. 9; xxvi. 8).

An Arctic explorer was once asked, whether during eight months of slow starvation which he and his comrades endured they suffered much from the pangs of hunger. No, he answered, we lost them in the sense of abandonment, in the feeling that our countrymen had forgotten us and were not coming to the rescue. It was not till we were rescued and looked in human faces that we felt how hungry we were. So is it ever with God's poor. They forget all other need, as Israel did, in their need of God. Their outward poverty is only the weeds of their heart's widowhood. "But Jehovah of hosts shall make to all the peoples in this mountain a banquet of fat things, a banquet of wines on the lees, fat things bemarrowed, wines on the lees refined."

We need only note here—for it will come up for detailed treatment in connection with the second half of Isaiah—that the centre of Israel's restored life is to be the Temple, not, as in Isaiah's day, the king: that her dispersed are to gather from all parts of the world at the sound of the Temple trumpet; and that her national life is to consist in worship (*cf.* xxvii. 13).

These then were four aspects of Israel's poverty of heart: a hunger for pardon, a hunger for justice, a hunger for home, and a hunger for God. For the returning Jews these wants were satisfied only to reveal a deeper poverty still, the complaint and comfort of which we must reserve to another chapter.

* Even at the risk of incurring Canon Cheyne's charge of "ineradicable error," I feel I must keep to the older view of chap. xxxv. which makes it refer to the return from exile. No doubt the chapter covers more than the mere return, and includes "the glorious condition of Israel after the return;" but vv. 4 and 10 are undoubtedly addressed to Jews still in exile and undelivered.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RESURRECTION.

ISAIAH xxvi. 14-19; xxv. 6-9.

GRANTED the pardon, the justice, the Temple and the God, which the returning exiles now enjoyed, the possession of these only makes more painful the shortness of life itself. This life is too shallow and too frail a vessel to hold peace and righteousness and worship and the love of God. St. Paul has said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." What avails it to have been pardoned, to have regained the Holy Land and the face of God, if the dear dead are left behind in graves of exile, and all the living must soon pass into that captivity,* from which there is no return?

It must have been thoughts like these, which led to the expression of one of the most abrupt and powerful of the few hopes of the resurrection which the Old Testament contains. This hope, which lightens chap. xxv. 7, 8, bursts through again—without logical connection with the context—in vv. 14-19 of chap. xxvi.

The English version makes ver. 14 to continue the reference to the "lords," whom in ver. 13 Israel confesses to have served instead of Jehovah. "They are dead; they shall not live: they are deceased; they shall not rise." Our translators have thus intruded into their version the verb "they are," of which the original is without a trace. In the original, "dead" and "deceased" (literally "shades") are themselves the subject of the sentence—a new subject and without logical connection with what has gone before. The literal translation of ver. 14 therefore runs: "Dead men do not live; shades do not rise: wherefore Thou visitest them and destroyest them, and perisheth all memory of them." The prophet states a fact and draws an inference. The fact is, that no one has ever returned from the dead; the inference, that it is God's own visitation or sentence which has gone forth upon them, and they have really ceased to exist. But how intolerable a thought is this in presence of the other fact that God has here on earth above gloriously enlarged and established His people (ver. 15). "Thou hast increased the nation, Jehovah; Thou hast increased the nation. Thou hast covered Thyself with glory; Thou hast expanded all the boundaries of the land." To this follows a verse (16), the sense of which is obscure, but palpable. It "feels" to mean that the contrast which the prophet has just painted between the absolute perishing of the dead and the glory of the Church above ground is the cause of great despair and groaning: "O Jehovah, in The Trouble they supplicate Thee; they pour out incantations when Thy discipline is upon them."† In face of *The Trouble* and *The Dis-*

cipline *par excellence* of God, what else can man do but betake himself to God? God sent death; in death He is the only resource. Israel's feelings in presence of The Trouble are now expressed in ver. 17: "Like as a woman with child that draweth near the time of her delivery writheth and crieth out in her pangs, so have we been before Thee, O Jehovah." Thy Church on earth is pregnant with a life, which death does not allow to come to the birth. "We have been with child; we have been in the pangs, as it were; we have brought forth wind; we make not the earth," in spite of all we have really accomplished upon it in our return, our restoration and our enjoyment of Thy presence—"we make not the earth salvation, neither are the inhabitants of the world born."*

The figures are bold. Israel achieves, through God's grace, everything but the recovery of her dead; this, which alone is worth calling salvation, remains wanting to her great record of deliverances. The living Israel is restored, but how meagre a proportion of the people it is! The graves of home and of exile do not give up their dead. These are not born again to be inhabitants of the upper world.

The figures are bold, but bolder is the hope that breaks from them. Like as when the Trumpet shall sound, ver. 19 peals forth the promise of the resurrection—peals the promise forth, in spite of all experience, unsupported by any argument, and upon the strength of its own inherent music. "Thy dead shall live! my dead bodies shall arise!" The change of the personal pronoun is singularly dramatic. Returned Israel is the speaker, first speaking to herself: "thy dead," as if upon the depopulated land, in face of all its homes in ruin, and only the sepulchres of ages standing grim and steadfast, she addressed some despairing double of herself; and secondly speaking of herself: "my dead bodies," as if all the inhabitants of these tombs, though dead, were still her own, still part of her, the living Israel, and able to arise and bless with their numbers their bereaved mother. These she now addresses: "Awake and sing, ye dwellers in the dust, for a dew of lights is Thy dew, and the land bringeth forth the dead.†"

If one has seen a place of graves in the East, he will appreciate the elements of this figure, which takes "dust" for death and "dew" for life. With our damp graveyards "mould" has become the traditional trappings of death; but where under the hot Eastern sun things do not rot into lower forms of life, but crumble into sapless powder, that will not keep a worm in life, "dust" is the natural symbol of death. When they die, men go not to feed fat the mould, but "down into the dust;" and there the foot of the living falls silent, and his voice is choked, and the light is thickened and in retreat, as if it were creeping away to die. The only creatures the visitor starts are timid, unclean bats, that flutter and whisper about him like the ghosts of

* Hezekiah's expression for death, xxxviii. 12.

† I think this must be the meaning of ver. 16, if we are to allow that it has any sympathy with vv. 14 and 15. Bredenkamp suggests that the persons meant are themselves the dead. Jehovah has glorified the Church on earth; but the dead below are still in trouble, and *pour out prayers* (Virgil's "preces fundunt," "Æneid," vi. 55), beneath this *punishment* which God causes to pass on all men (ver. 14). Bredenkamp bases this exegesis chiefly on the word for "prayer," which means *chirping* or *whispering*, a kind of voice imputed to the shades by the Hebrews and other ancient peoples. But while this word does originally mean *whispering*, it is never in Scripture applied to the dead, but, on the other hand, is a frequent

name for *divining* or *incantation*. I therefore have felt compelled to understand it as used in this passage of the living whose only resource in face of death—*God's discipline, par excellence*—is to pour out incantations. If it be objected that the prophet would scarcely parallel the ordinary incantations on behalf of the dead with supplications to Jehovah, the answer is that he is talking poetically or popularly.

* English version, *fallen*; i. e., like our expression for the birth of animals, *dropped*.

† Technical Hebrew word for the inhabitants of the underworld—the shades.

the dead. There are no flowers in an Eastern cemetery; and the withered branches and other ornaments are thickly powdered with the same dust that chokes, and silences, and darkens all.

Hence the Semitic conception of the underworld was dominated by dust. It was not water nor fire nor frost nor altogether darkness, which made the infernal prison horrible, but that upon its floor and rafters, hewn from the roots and ribs of the primeval mountains, dust lay deep and choking. Amid all the horrors he imagined for the dead, Dante did not include one more awful than the horror of dust. The picture which the northern Semites had before them when they turned their faces to the wall was of this kind.*

The house of darkness. . . .
The house men enter, but cannot depart from,
The road men go, but cannot return.
The house from whose dwellers the light is withdrawn,
The place where dust is their food, their nourishment
clay.
The light they behold not; in darkness they dwell.
They are clothed like birds, all fluttering wings.
On the door and the gateposts, the dust lieth deep.

Either, then, an Eastern sepulchre, or this its infernal double, was gaping before the prophet's eyes. What more final and hopeless than the dust and the dark of it?

But for dust there is dew, and even to graveyards the morning comes that brings dew and light together. The wonder of dew is that it is given from a clear heaven, and that it comes to sight with the dawn. If the Oriental looks up when dew is falling, he sees nothing to thank for it between him and the stars. If he sees dew in the morning, it is equal liquid and lustre; it seems to distil from the beams of the sun—"the sun, which riseth with healing under his wings." The dew is thus doubly "dew of light." But our prophet ascribes the dew of God, that is to raise the dead, neither to stars nor dawn, but, because of its Divine power, to that higher supernal glory which the Hebrews conceived to have existed before the sun, and which they styled, as they styled their God, by the plural of majesty: "A dew of lights is Thy dew.†" As, when the dawn comes, the drooping flowers of yesterday are seen erect and lustrous with the dew, every spike a crown of glory, so also shall be the resurrection of the dead. There is no shadow of a reason for limiting this promise to that to which some other passages of resurrection in the Old Testament have been limited: a corporate restoration of the holy State or Church. This is the resurrection of its individual members to a community which is already restored, the recovery by Israel of her dead men and women from their separate graves, each with his own freshness and beauty, in that glorious morning when the Sun of righteousness shall arise, with healing under His wings—"Thy dew, O Jehovah!"

Attempts are so often made to trace the hopes of resurrection, which break the prevailing silence of the Old Testament on a future life, to foreign influences experienced in the Exile, that it is well to emphasise the origin and occasion of the hopes that utter themselves so abruptly in this passage. Surely nothing could be more inextricably woven with the national fortunes of

Israel, as nothing could be more native and original to Israel's temper, than the verses just expounded. We need not deny that their residence among a people, accustomed as the Babylonians were to belief in the resurrection, may have thawed in the Jews that reserve which the Old Testament clearly shows that they exhibited towards a future life. The Babylonians themselves had received most of their suggestions of the next world from a non-Semitic race; and therefore it would not be to imagine anything alien to the ascertained methods of Providence if we were to suppose that the Hebrews, who showed what we have already called the Semitic want of interest in a future life, were intellectually tempered by their foreign associations to a readiness to receive any suggestions of immortality, which the Spirit of God might offer them through their own religious experience. That it was this last, which was the effective cause of Israel's hopes for the resurrection of her dead, our passage puts beyond doubt. Chap. xxvi. shows us that the occasion of these hopes was what is not often noticed: the returned exile's disappointment with the meagre repopulation of the holy territory. A restoration of the State or community was not enough: the heart of Israel wanted back in their numbers her dead sons and daughters.

If the occasion of these hopes was thus an event in Israel's own national history, and if the impulse to them was given by so natural an instinct of her own heart, Israel was equally indebted to herself for the convictions that the instinct was not in vain. Nothing is more clear in our passage than that Israel's first ground of hope in a future life was her simple, untaught reflection upon the power of her God. Death was *His chastening*. Death came from Him, and remained in His power. Surely He would deliver from it. This was a very old belief in Israel. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to Sheol and bringeth up." Such words, of course, might be only an extreme figure for recovery from disease, and the silence of so great a saint as Hezekiah about any other issue into life than by convalescence from mortal sickness staggers us into doubt whether an Israelite ever did think of a resurrection. But still there was Jehovah's almightiness; a man could rest his future on that, even if he had not light to think out what sort of a future it would be. So mark in our passage, how confidence is chiefly derived from the simple utterance of the name of Jehovah, and how He is hailed as "our God." It seems enough to the prophet to connect life with Him and to say merely, "Thy dew." As death is God's own discipline, so life, "Thy dew," is with Him also.

Thus in its foundation the Old Testament doctrine of the resurrection is but the conviction of the sufficiency of God Himself, a conviction which Christ turned upon Himself when He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Because I live, ye shall live also."

If any object that in this picture of a resurrection we have no real persuasion of immortality, but simply the natural, though impossible, wish of a bereaved people that their dead should to-day rise from their graves to share to-day's return and glory—a revival as special and extraordinary as that appearing of the dead in the streets of Jerusalem when the Atonement was accomplished, but by no means that general res-

* Extracted from the Assyrian "Descent of Istar to Hades" (Dr. Jeremias' German translation, p. 11, and "Records of the Past," i. 145).

† Cf. James i. 17.

urrection at the last day which is an article of the Christian faith—if any one should bring this objection, then let him be referred to the previous promise of immortality in chap. xxv. The universal and final character of the promise made there is as evident as of that for which Paul borrowed its terms in order to utter the absolute consequences of the resurrection of the Son of God: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” For the prophet, having in ver. 6 described the restoration of the people, whom exile had starved with a famine of ordinances, to “a feast in Zion of fat things and wines on the lees well refined,” intimates that as certainly as exile has been abolished, with its dearth of spiritual intercourse, so certainly shall God Himself destroy death: “And He shall swallow up in this mountain” (perhaps it is imagined, as the sun devours the morning mist on the hills) “the mask of the veil, the veil that is upon all the peoples, and the film spun upon all the nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever, and the Lord Jehovah shall wipe away tears from off all faces, and the reproach of His people shall He remove from off all the earth, for Jehovah hath spoken it. And they shall say in that day, Behold, this is our God: we have waited for Him, and He shall save us; this is Jehovah: we have waited for Him; we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” Thus over all doubts, and in spite of universal human experience, the prophet depends for immortality on God Himself. In chap. xxvi. 3 our version beautifully renders, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.” This is a confidence valid for the next life as well as for this. “Therefore trust ye in the Lord for ever.” Amen.

Almighty God, we praise Thee that, in the weakness of all our love and the darkness of all our knowledge before death, Thou hast placed assurance of eternal life in simple faith upon Thyself. Let this faith be richly ours. By Thine omnipotence, by Thy righteousness, by the love Thou hast vouchsafed, we lift ourselves and rest upon Thy word, “Because I live, **ye** shall live also.” Oh, keep us steadfast in union with Thyself, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PART II.

INTRODUCTION.

THIS volume upon Isaiah xl.-lxvi. carries on the exposition of the Book of Isaiah from the point reached by the author's previous volume in the same series. But as it accepts these twenty-seven chapters, upon their own testimony, as a separate prophecy from a century and a half later than Isaiah himself, in a style and on subjects not altogether the same as his, and as it accordingly pursues a somewhat different method of exposition from the previous volume, a few words of introduction are again necessary.

The greater part of Isaiah i.-xxxix. was addressed to a nation upon their own soil,—with their temple, their king, their statesmen, their tribunals and their markets,—responsible for the discharge of justice and social reform, for the conduct of foreign policies and the defence of the fatherland. But chaps. xl.-lxvi. came to a

people wholly in exile, and partly in servitude, with no civic life and few social responsibilities: a people in the passive state, with occasion for the exercise of almost no qualities save those of penitence and patience, of memory and hope. This difference between the two parts of the Book is summed up in their respective uses of the word *Righteousness*. In Isaiah i.-xxxix., or at least in such of these chapters as refer to Isaiah's own day, righteousness is man's moral and religious duty, in its contents of piety, purity, justice, and social service. In Isaiah xl.-lxvi. righteousness (except in a very few cases) is something which the people expect from God—their historical vindication by His restoral and reinstatement of them as His people.

It is, therefore, evident that what rendered Isaiah's own prophecies of so much charm and of so much meaning to the modern conscience—their treatment of those political and social questions which we have always with us—cannot form the chief interest of chapters xl.-lxvi. But the empty place is taken by a series of historical and religious questions of supreme importance. Into the vacuum created in Israel's life by the Exile, there comes rushing the meaning of the nation's whole history—all the conscience of their past, all the destiny with which their future is charged. It is not with the fortunes and duties of a single generation that this great prophecy has to do: it is with a people in their entire significance and promise. The standpoint of the prophet may be the Exile, but his vision ranges from Abraham to Christ. Besides the business of the hour,—the deliverance of Israel from Babylon,—the prophet addresses himself to these questions: What is Israel? What is Israel's God? How is Jehovah different from other gods? How is Israel different from other peoples? He recalls the making of the nation, God's treatment of them from the beginning, all that they and Jehovah have been to each other and to the world, and especially the meaning of this latest judgment of Exile. But the instruction and the impetus of that marvellous past he uses in order to interpret and proclaim the still more glorious future,—the ideal, which God has set before His people, and in the realisation of which their history shall culminate. It is here that the Spirit of God lifts the prophet to the highest station in prophecy—to the richest consciousness of spiritual religion—to the clearest vision of Christ.

Accordingly, to expound Isaiah xl.-lxvi. is really to write the religious history of Israel. A prophet whose vision includes both Abraham and Christ, whose subject is the whole meaning and promise of Israel, cannot be adequately interpreted within the limits of his own text or of his own time. Excursions are necessary both to the history that is behind him, and to the history that is still in front of him. This is the reason of the appearance in this volume of chapters whose titles seem at first beyond its scope—such as From Isaiah to the Fall of Jerusalem: What Israel took into Exile: One God, One People: The Servant of the Lord in the New Testament. Moreover, much of this historical matter has an interest that is only historical. If in Isaiah's own prophecies it is his generation's likeness to ourselves, which appeals to our conscience, in chaps. xl.-lxvi. of the Book called by his name it is Israel's unique meaning and office for God in the world, which we have to study. We are called to follow an experience and a dis-

cipline unshared by any other generation of men; and to interest ourselves in matters that then happened once for all, such as the victory of the One God over the idols, or His choice of a single people through whom to reveal Himself to the world. We are called to watch work, which that representative and priestly people did for humanity, rather than, as in Isaiah's own prophecies, work which has to be repeated by each new generation in its turn, and to-day also by ourselves. This is the reason why in an exposition of Isaiah xl.-lxvi., like the present volume, there should be a good deal more of historical recital, and a good deal less of practical application, than in the exposition of Isaiah i.-xxxix.

At the same time we must not suppose that there is not very much in Isaiah xl.-lxvi. with which to stir our own consciences and instruct our own lives. For, to mention no more, there is that sense of sin with which Israel entered exile, and which has made the literature of Israel's Exile the confessional of the world; there is that great unexhausted programme of the Service of God and Man, which our prophet lays down as Israel's duty and example to humanity; and there is that prophecy of the virtue and glory of vicarious suffering for sin, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ and His Cross.

I have found it necessary to devote more space to critical questions than in the previous volume. Chaps. xl.-lxv. approach more nearly to a unity than chaps. i.-xxxix.: with very few exceptions they lie in chronological order. But they are not nearly so clearly divided and grouped: their connection cannot be so briefly or so lucidly explained. The form of the prophecy is dramatic, but the scenes and the speakers are not definitely marked off. In spite of the chronological advance, which we shall be able to trace, there are no clear stages—not even, as we shall see, at those points at which most expositors divide the prophecy, the end of chap. xlix. and of chap. lviii. The prophet pursues simultaneously several lines of thought; and though the close of some of these and the rise of others may be marked to a verse, his frequent passages from one to another are often almost imperceptible. He everywhere requires a more continuous translation, a closer and more elaborate exegesis, than were necessary for Isaiah i.-xxxix.

In order to effect some general arrangement and division of Isaiah xl.-lxvi. it is necessary to keep in view that the immediate problem which the prophet had before him was twofold. It was political, and it was spiritual. There was, first of all, the deliverance of Israel from Babylon, according to the ancient promises of Jehovah: to this were attached such questions as Jehovah's omnipotence, faithfulness, and grace; the meaning of Cyrus; the condition of the Babylonian Empire. But after their political deliverance from Babylon was assured, there remained the really larger problem of Israel's spiritual readiness for the freedom and the destiny to which God was to lead them through the opened gates of their prison-house: to this were attached such questions as the original calling and mission of Israel; the mixed and paradoxical character of the people; their need of a Servant from the Lord, since they themselves had failed to be His Servant; the coming of this Servant, his methods and results.

This twofold division of the prophet's problem will not, it is true, strike his prophecy into

separate and distinct groups of chapters. He who attempts such a division simply does not understand "Second Isaiah." But it will make clear to us the different currents of the sacred argument, which flow sometimes through and through one another, and sometimes singly and in succession; and it will give us a plan for grouping the twenty-seven chapters very nearly, if not quite, in the order in which they lie.

On these principles, the following exposition is divided into Four Books. The First is called THE EXILE: it contains an argument for placing the date of the prophecy about 550 B. C., and brings the history of Israel down to that date from the time of Isaiah; it states the political and spiritual sides of the double problem to which the prophecy is God's answer; it describes what Israel took with them into exile, and what they learned and suffered there, till, after half a century, the herald voices of our prophecy broke upon their waiting ears. The Second Book, THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE, discusses the political redemption from Babylon, with the questions attached to it about God's nature and character, about Cyrus and Babylon, or all of chs. xl.-xlviii., except the passages about the Servant, which are easily detached from the rest, and refer rather to the spiritual side of Israel's great problem. The Third Book, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, expounds all the passages on that subject, both in chs. xl.-xlviii. and in chs. xlix.-liii., with the development of the subject in the New Testament, and its application to our life to-day. The Servant and his work are the solution of all the spiritual difficulties in the way of the people's Return and Restoration. To these latter and their practical details the rest of the prophecy is devoted; that is, all chs. xlix.-lxvi., except the passages on the Servant, and these chapters are treated in the Fourth Book of this volume, THE RESTORATION.

As much as possible of the merely critical discussion has been put in chapter i., or in the opening paragraphs of the other chapters, or in foot-notes. A new translation from the original (except where a few verses have been taken from the Revised English Version) has been provided for nearly the whole prophecy. Where the rhythm of the original is at all discernible, the translation has been made in it. But it must be kept in mind that this reproduction of the original rhythm is only approximate, and that in it no attempt has been made to elegance; its chief aim being to make clear the order and the emphases of the original. The translation is almost quite literal.

Having felt the want of a clear account of the prophet's use of his great key-word Righteousness, I have inserted for students, at the end of Book II., a chapter on this term. Summaries of our prophet's use of such cardinal terms as *Mishpat*, *R'ishonoth*, *The Isles*, etc., will be found in notes. For want of space I have had to exclude some sections on the Style of Isaiah, xl.-lxvi., on the Influence of Monotheism on the Imagination, and on What Isaiah xl.-lxvi. owes to Jeremiah. This debt, as we shall be able to trace, is so great that "Second Jeremiah" would be a title no less proper for the prophecy than "Second Isaiah."

I had also wished to append a chapter on Commentaries on the Book of Isaiah. No Scripture has been so nobly served by its commen-

taries. To begin with there was Calvin, and there is Calvin,—still as valuable as ever for his strong spiritual power, his sanity, his moderation, his sensitiveness to the changes and shades of the prophet's meaning. After him Vitringa, Gesenius, Hitzig, Ewald, Delitzsch, all the great names of the past in Old Testament criticism, are connected with Isaiah. In the recent years (besides Nägelsbach in Lange's "Bibelwerk") we have Cheyne's two volumes, too well known both here and in Germany to need more than mention; Bredenkamp's clear and concise exposition, the characteristic of which is an attempt—not, however, successful—to distinguish authentic prophecies of Isaiah in the disputed chapters; Orelli's handy volume (in Strack and Zöckler's compendious Commentary, and translated into English by Professor Banks in Messrs. Clarks' Foreign Theological Library), from the conservative side, but, accepting, as Delitzsch does in his last edition, the dual authorship; and this year Dillmann's great work, replacing Knoble's in the "Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch" series. I regret that I did not receive Dillmann's work till more than half of this volume was written. English students will have all they can possibly need if they can add Dillmann to Delitzsch and Cheyne, though Calvin and Ewald must never be forgotten. Professor Driver's "Isaiah: His Life and Times" is a complete handbook to the prophet. On the theology, besides the relevant portions of Schultz's "Alt-Testamentliche Theologie" (4th ed., 1889), and Duhm's "Theologie der Propheten," the student will find invaluable Professor Robertson Smith's "Prophets of Israel" for Isaiah i.-xxxix., and Professor A. B. Davidson's papers in the *Expositor* for 1884 on the theology of Isaiah xl.-lxvi. There are also Krüger's able and lucid "Essai sur la Théologie d'Isaïe xl.-lxvi." (Paris, 1882), and Guthe's "Das Zukunftsbild Jesaias," and Barth's and Giesebrecht's respective "Beiträge zur Jesaiakritik," the latter published this year.

In conclusion I have to express my thanks for the very great assistance which I have derived in the composition of the book from my friend Rev. Charles Anderson Scott, B. A., who has sought out facts, and read nearly all the proofs.

TABLE OF DATES.

- B. C.
 721. Fall of Samaria. Captivity of Northern Israel.
 701. Deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib.
 696?-641. Reign of Manasseh. Supposed time of Isaiah's death.
 630. Josiah's Reformation begun.
 629 or 628. Jeremiah called to be a prophet.
 621. The Book of Deuteronomy discovered.
 607. Fall of Nineveh and Assyria. Babylon supreme.

THE EXILE.

- 599-598. Siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. First Captivity of the Jews.
 594. Ezekiel begins to prophesy in Chaldea.
 587. Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Second Captivity of the Jews.
 Flight of many Jews with Jeremiah to Egypt.

B. C.

585. Battle of the Eclipse. Triple League: Babylon, Media, Lydia.
 561. Nebuchadnezzar dies. Evil-Merodach succeeds.
 559. Neriglissar succeeds Evil-Merodach.
 554. Nabunahid or Nabonidos usurps the throne of Babylon.
 Harder times for the Jews.
 549. Fall of Median monarchy before Cyrus.
 545. Cyrus attacks Babylonia from the north, and is repulsed. Invades Lydia, and takes Sardis and King Cræsus.
 538. Cyrus captures Babylon.
 Permission to the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, Joshua.

529. Cyrus dies. Cambyses sole king.
 522. Cambyses dies.
 521. Babylon revolts. Retaken by Darius.
 486. Xerxes succeeds Darius.
 466. Artaxerxes Longimanus.
 458. Second great return of Jews. Ezra.
 401. Revolt and defeat of Cyrus. The Anabasis.

BOOK I.

THE EXILE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DATE OF ISAIAH XL.-LXVI.

THE problem of the date of Isaiah xl.-lxvi. is this: In a book called by the name of the prophet Isaiah, who flourished between 740 and 700 B. C., the last twenty-seven chapters deal with the captivity suffered by the Jews in Babylonia from 598 to 538, and more particularly with the advent, about 550, of Cyrus, whom they name. Are we to take for granted that Isaiah himself prophetically wrote these chapters, or must we assign them to a nameless author or authors of the period of which they treat?

Till the end of the last century it was the almost universally accepted tradition, and even still is an opinion retained by many, that Isaiah was carried forward by the Spirit, out of his own age to the standpoint of one hundred and fifty years later; that he was inspired to utter the warning and comfort required by a generation so very different from his own, and was even enabled to hail by name their redeemer, Cyrus. This theory, involving as it does a phenomenon without parallel in the history of Holy Scripture, is based on these two grounds: *first*, that the chapters in question form a considerable part—nearly nine-twentieths—of the Book of Isaiah; and *second*, that portions of them are quoted in the New Testament by the prophet's name. The theory is also supported by arguments drawn from resemblances of style and vocabulary between these twenty-seven chapters and the undisputed oracles of Isaiah: but, as the opponents of the Isaian authorship also appeal to vocabulary and style, it will be better to leave this kind of evidence aside for the present, and to discuss the problem upon other and less ambiguous grounds.

The first argument, then, for the Isaian authorship of chapters xl.-lxvi. is that they form part of a book called by Isaiah's name. But, to be worth anything, this argument must rest on the following facts: that everything in a book called by a prophet's name is necessarily by that prophet, and that the compilers of the book intended to hand it down as altogether from his pen. Now there is no evidence for either of these conclusions. On the contrary, there is considerable testimony in the opposite direction. The Book of Isaiah is not one continuous prophecy. It consists of a number of separate orations, with a few intervening pieces of narrative. Some of these orations claim to be Isaiah's own: they possess such titles as "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz."* But such titles describe only the individual prophecies they head, and other portions of the book, upon other subjects and in very different styles, do not possess titles at all. It seems to me that those who maintain the Isaian authorship of the whole book have the responsibility cast upon them of explaining why some chapters in it should be distinctly said to be by Isaiah, while others should not be so entitled. Surely this difference affords us sufficient ground for understanding that the whole book is not necessarily by Isaiah, nor intentionally handed down by its compilers as the work of that prophet.†

Now, when we come to chaps. xl.-lxvi., we find that, occurring in a book which we have just seen no reason for supposing to be in every part of it by Isaiah, these chapters nowhere claim to be his. They are separated from that portion of the book, in which his undisputed oracles are placed, by a historical narrative of considerable length. And there is not anywhere upon them nor in them a title nor other statement that they are by the prophet, nor any allusion which could give the faintest support to the opinion, that they offer themselves to posterity as dating from his time. It is safe to say, that, if they had come to us by themselves, no one would have dreamt for an instant of ascribing them to Isaiah; for the alleged resemblances, which their language and style bear to his language and style, are far more than overborne by the undoubted differences, and have never been employed, even by the defenders of the Isaian authorship, except in additional and confessedly slight support of their main argument, viz., that the chapters must be Isaiah's because they are included in a book called by his name.

Let us understand, therefore, at this very outset, that in discussing the question of the authorship of "Second Isaiah," we are not discussing a question upon which the text itself makes any statement, or into which the credibility of the text enters. No claim is made by the Book of Isaiah itself for the Isaian authorship of chaps. xl.-lxvi.

* Chs. i., ii., etc. The only title that could be offered as covering the whole book is that in ch. i. ver. 1: *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.* But this manifestly cannot apply to any but the earlier chapters, of which Judah and Jerusalem are indeed the subjects.

† There are, it will be remembered, certain narratives in the Book of Isaiah which are not by the prophet. They speak of him in the third person (chs. vii., xxxvi.-xxxix.), while in other narratives (chs. vi. and viii.) he speaks of himself in the first person. Their presence is sufficient proof that the Book of Isaiah, in its extant shape, did not come from Isaiah's hands, but was compiled by others.

A second fact in Scripture, which seems at first sight to make strongly for the unity of the Book of Isaiah, is that in the New Testament, portions of the disputed chapters are quoted by Isaiah's name, just as are portions of his admitted prophecies. These citations are nine in number.* None is by our Lord Himself. They occur in the Gospels, Acts, and Paul. Now if any of these quotations were given in answer to the question, Did Isaiah write chaps. xl.-lxvi. of the book called by his name? or if the use of his name along with them were involved in the arguments which they are borrowed to illustrate (as, for instance, is the case with David's name in the quotation made by our Lord from Psalm cx.), then those who deny the unity of the Book of Isaiah would be face to face with a very serious problem indeed. But in none of the nine cases is the authorship of the Book of Isaiah in question. In none of the nine cases is there anything in the argument, for the purpose of which the quotation has been made, that depends on the quoted words being by Isaiah. For the purposes for which the Evangelists and Paul borrow the texts, these might as well be unnamed, or attributed to any other canonical writer. Nothing in them requires us to suppose that Isaiah's name is mentioned with them for any other end than that of reference, viz., to point out that they lie in the part of prophecy usually known by his name. But if there is nothing in these citations to prove that Isaiah's name is being used for any other purpose than that of reference, then it is plain—and this is all that we ask assent to at the present time—that they do not offer the authority of Scripture as a bar to our examining the evidence of the chapters in question.

It is hardly necessary to add that neither is there any other question of doctrine in our way. There is none about the nature of prophecy, for, to take an example, chap. liii., as a prophecy of Jesus Christ, is surely as great a marvel if you date it from the Exile as if you date it from the age of Isaiah. And, in particular, let us understand that no question need be started about the ability of God's Spirit to inspire a prophet to mention Cyrus by name one hundred and fifty years before Cyrus appeared. The question is not, *Could* a prophet have been so inspired?—to which question, were it put, our answer might only be, God is great!—but the question is, *Was* our prophet so inspired? does he himself offer evidence of the fact? Or, on the contrary, in naming Cyrus does he give himself out as a contemporary of Cyrus, who already saw the great Persian above the horizon? To this question only the writings under discussion can give us an answer. Let us see what they have to say.

Apart from the question of the date, no chapters in the Bible are interpreted with such complete unanimity as Isaiah xl.-xlvi. They plainly set forth certain things as having already taken place—the Exile and Captivity, the ruin of Jerusalem, and the devastation of the Holy Land. Israel is addressed as having exhausted the time of her penalty, and is proclaimed to be ready for deliverance. Some of the people are comforted as being in despair because redemption does not draw near; others are exhorted to leave the city of their bondage, as if they were growing too familiar with its idolatrous life. Cyrus

* Matt. iii. 3, viii. 17, xii. 17; Luke iii. 4, iv. 17; John i. 23, xii. 38; Acts viii. 28; Rom. x. 16-20.

is named as their deliverer, and is pointed out as already called upon his career, and as blessed with success by Jehovah. It is also promised that he will immediately add Babylon to his conquests, and so set God's people free.

Now all this is not predicted, as if from the standpoint of a previous century. It is nowhere said—as we should expect it to be said, if the prophecy had been uttered by Isaiah—that Assyria, the dominant world-power of Isaiah's day, was to disappear and Babylon to take her place; that then the Babylonians should lead the Jews into an exile which they had escaped at the hands of Assyria; and that after nearly seventy years of suffering God would raise up Cyrus as a deliverer.

There is none of this prediction, which we might fairly have expected had the prophecy been Isaiah's; because, however far Isaiah carries us into the future, he never fails to start from the circumstances of his own day. Still more significant, however—there is not even the kind of prediction that we find in Jeremiah's prophecies of the Exile, with which indeed it is most instructive to compare Isaiah xl.-lxvi. Jeremiah also spoke of exile and deliverance, but it was always with the grammar of the future. He fairly and openly predicted both; and, let us especially remember, he did so with a meagreness of description, a reserve and reticence about details, which are simply unintelligible if Isaiah xl.-lxvi. was written before his day, and by so well-known a prophet as Isaiah.

No: in the statements which our chapters make concerning the Exile and the condition of Israel under it, there is no prediction, not the slightest trace of that grammar of the future in which Jeremiah's prophecies are constantly uttered. But there is a direct appeal to the conscience of a people already long under the discipline of God; their circumstance of exile is taken for granted; there is a most vivid and delicate appreciation of their present fears and doubts, and to these the deliverer Cyrus is not only named, but introduced as an actual and notorious personage already upon the midway of his irresistible career.

These facts are more broadly based than just at first sight appears. You cannot turn their flank by the argument that Hebrew prophets were in the habit of employing in their predictions what is called "the prophetic perfect"—that is, that in the ardour of their conviction that certain things would take place they talked of these, as the flexibility of the Hebrew tenses allowed them to do, in the past or perfect as if the things had actually taken place. No such argument is possible in the case of the introduction of Cyrus. For it is not only that the prophecy, with what might be the mere ardour of vision, represents the Persian as already above the horizon and upon the flowing tide of victory; but that, in the course of a sober argument for the unique divinity of the God of Israel, which takes place throughout chaps. xli.-xlviii., Cyrus, alive and irresistible, already accredited by success, and with Babylonia at his feet, is pointed out as the unmistakable proof that former prophecies for a deliverance for Israel are at last coming to pass. Cyrus, in short, is not presented as a prediction, but as the proof that a prediction is being fulfilled. Unless he had already appeared in flesh and blood, and was on the point of striking at Babylon, with all the prestige of unbroken

victory, a great part of Isaiah xli.-xlviii. would be utterly unintelligible.

This argument is so conclusive for the date of Second Isaiah, that it may be well to state it a little more in detail, even at the risk of anticipating some of the exposition of the text.

Among the Jews at the close of the Exile there appear to have been two classes. One class was hopeless of deliverance, and to their hearts is addressed such a prophecy as chap. xl.: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people." But there was another class, of opposite temperament, who had only too strong opinions on the subject of deliverance. In bondage to the letter of Scripture and to the great precedents of their history, these Jews appear to have insisted that the Deliverer to come must be a Jew, and a descendant of David. And the bent of much of the prophet's urgency in chap. xlv. is to persuade those pedants, that the Gentile Cyrus, who had appeared to be not only the biggest man of his age, but the very likely means of Israel's redemption, was of Jehovah's own creation and calling. Does not such an argument necessarily imply that Cyrus was already present, an object of doubt and debate to earnest minds in Israel? Or are we to suppose that all this doubt and debate were foreseen, rehearsed, and answered one hundred and fifty years before the time by so famous a prophet as Isaiah, and that, in spite of his prediction and answer, the doubt and debate nevertheless took place in the minds of the very Israelites, who were most earnest students of ancient prophecy? The thing has only to be stated to be felt to be impossible.

But besides the pedants in Israel, there is apparent through these prophecies another body of men, against whom also Jehovah claims the actual Cyrus for His own. They are the priests and worshippers of the heathen idols. It is well known that the advent of Cyrus cast the Gentile religions of the time and their counsellors into confusion. The wisest priests were perplexed; the oracles of Greece and Asia Minor either were dumb when consulted about the Persian, or gave more than usually ambiguous answers. Over against this perplexity and despair of the heathen religions, our prophet confidently claims Cyrus for Jehovah's own. In a debate in chap. xli., in which he seeks to establish Jehovah's righteousness—that is, Jehovah's faithfulness to His word, and power to carry out His predictions—the prophet speaks of ancient prophecies which have come from Jehovah, and points to Cyrus as their fulfilment. It does not matter to us in the meantime what those prophecies were. They may have been certain of Jeremiah's predictions; we may be sure that they cannot have contained anything so definite as Cyrus' name, or such a proof of Divine foresight must certainly have formed part of the prophet's plea. It is enough that they could be quoted; our business is rather with the evidence which the prophet offers of their fulfilment. That evidence is Cyrus. Would it have been possible to refer the heathen to Cyrus as proof that those ancient prophecies were being fulfilled, unless Cyrus had been visible to the heathen,—unless the heathen had been beginning already to feel this Persian "from the sunrise" in all his weight of war? It is no esoteric doctrine which the prophet is unfolding to initiated Israelites about Cyrus. He is making an appeal to men of the world to face facts. Could he possibly have made such an ap-

peal unless the facts had been *there*, unless Cyrus had been within the ken of "the natural man"? Unless Cyrus and his conquests were already historically present, the argument in xli.-xlviii. is unintelligible.

If this evidence for the exilic date of Isa. xl.-xlviii.—for all these chapters hang together—required any additional support, it would find it in the fact that the prophet does not wholly treat of what is past and over, but makes some predictions as well. Cyrus is on the way of triumph, but Babylon has still to fall by his hand. Babylon has still to fall, before the exiles can go free. Now, if our prophet were predicting from the standpoint of one hundred and forty years before, why did he make this sharp distinction between two events which appeared so closely together? If he had both the advent of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon in his long perspective, why did he not use "the prophetic perfect" for both? That he speaks of the first as past and of the second as still to come, would most surely, if there had been no tradition the other way, have been accepted by all as sufficient evidence, that the advent of Cyrus was behind him and the fall of Babylon still in front of him, when he wrote these chapters.

Thus the earlier part, at least, of Isa. xl.-lxvi.—that is, chaps. xl.-xlviii.—compels us to date it between 555, Cyrus's advent, and 538, Babylon's fall. But some think that we may still further narrow the limits. In chap. xli. 25, Cyrus, whose own kingdom lay east of Babylonia, is described as invading Babylonia from the north. This, it has been thought, must refer to his union with the Medes in 549, and his threatened descent upon Mesopotamia from their quarter of the prophet's horizon.* If it be so, the possible years of our prophecy are reduced to eleven, 549-538. But even if we take the wider and more certain limit, 555 to 538, we may well say that there are very few chapters in the whole of the Old Testament whose date can be fixed so precisely as the date of chaps. xl.-xlviii.

If what has been unfolded in the preceding paragraphs is recognised as the statement of the chapters themselves, it will be felt that further evidence of an exilic date is scarcely needed. And those, who are acquainted with the controversy upon the evidence furnished by the style and language of the prophecies, will admit how far short in decisiveness it falls of the arguments offered above. But we may fairly ask whether there is anything opposed to the conclusion we have reached, either, *first*, in the local colour of the prophecies; or, *second*, in their language; or, *third*, in their thought—anything which shows that they are more likely to have been Isaiah's than of exilic origin.

1. It has often been urged against the exilic date of these prophecies, that they wear so very little local colour, and one of the greatest of critics, Ewald, has felt himself, therefore, permitted to place their home, not in Babylonia, but in Egypt, while he maintains the exilic date. But, as we shall see in surveying the condition of the exiles, it was natural for the best among them, their psalmists and prophets, to have no eyes for the colours of Babylon. They lived inwardly; they were much more the inhabitants of their own broken hearts than of that gorgeous foreign land; when their thoughts rose out of themselves it was to seek immediately the

far-away Zion. How little local colour is there in the writings of Ezekiel! Isa. xl.-lxvi. has even more to show; for indeed the absence of local colour from our prophecy has been greatly exaggerated. We shall find as we follow the exposition, break after break of Babylonian light and shadow falling across our path,—the temples, the idol-manufactories, the processions of images, the diviners and astrologers, the gods and altars especially cultivated by the characteristic mercantile spirit of the place; the shipping of that mart of nations, the crowds of her merchants; the glitter of many waters, and even that intolerable glare, which so frequently curses the skies of Mesopotamia (xlix. 10). The prophet speaks of the hills of his native land with just the same longing, that Ezekiel and a probable psalmist of the Exile * betray,—the homesickness of a highland-born man whose prison is on a flat, monotonous plain. The beasts he mentions have for the most part been recognised as familiar in Babylonia; and while the same cannot be said of the trees and plants he names, it has been observed that the passages, into which he brings them, are passages where his thoughts are fixed on the restoration to Palestine.† Besides these, there are many delicate symptoms of the presence, before the prophet, of a people in a foreign land, engaged in commerce, but without political responsibilities, each of which, taken by itself, may be insufficient to convince, but the reiterated expression of which has even betrayed commentators, who lived too early for the theory of a second Isaiah, into the involuntary admission of an exilic authorship. It will perhaps startle some to hear John Calvin quoted on behalf of the exilic date of these prophecies. But let us read and consider this statement of his: "Some regard must be had to the time when this prophecy was uttered; for since the rank of the kingdom had been obliterated, and the name of the royal family had become mean and contemptible, during the captivity in Babylon, it might seem as if through the ruin of that family the truth of God had fallen into decay; and therefore he bids them contemplate by faith the throne of David, which had been cast down.‡

2. What we have seen to be true of the local colour of our prophecy holds good also of its style and language. There is nothing in either of these to commit us to an Isaian authorship, or to make an exilic date improbable; on the contrary, the language and style, while containing no stronger nor more frequent resemblances to the language and style of Isaiah than may be accounted for by the natural influence of so great a prophet upon his successors, are signalised by differences from his undisputed oracles, too constant, too subtle, and sometimes too sharp, to make it at all probable that the whole book came from the same man. On this point it is enough to refer our readers to the recent exhaustive and very able reviews of the evidence by Canon Cheyne in the second volume of his Commentary, and by Canon Driver in the last chapter of "Isaiah: His Life and Times," and to quote the following words of so great an authority as Professor A. B. Davidson. After remarking on the difference in vocabulary of the two parts of the Book of Isaiah, he adds that it is not so much words in themselves as the

* Psalm cxxi.

† Driver's "Isaiah: His Life and Times," p. 191.

‡ Calvin on Isa. lv. 3.

* Driver's "Isaiah," pp. 137, 139.

peculiar uses and combinations of them, and especially "the peculiar articulation of sentences and the movement of the whole discourse, by which an impression is produced so unlike the impression produced by the earlier parts of the book."*

3. It is the same with the thought and doctrine of our prophecy. In this there is nothing to make the Isaian authorship probable, or an exilic date impossible. But, on the contrary, whether we regard the needs of the people or the analogies of the development of their religion, we find that, while everything suits the Exile, nearly everything is foreign both to the subjects and to the methods of Isaiah. We shall observe the items of this as we go along, but one of them may be mentioned here (it will afterwards require a chapter to itself), our prophet's use of the terms *righteous* and *righteousness*. No one, who has carefully studied the meaning which these terms bear in the authentic oracles of Isaiah, and the use to which they are put in the prophecies under discussion, can fail to find in the difference a striking corroboration of our argument—that the latter were composed by a different mind than Isaiah's, speaking to a different generation.†

To sum up this whole argument. We have seen that there is no evidence in the Book of Isaiah to prove that it was all by himself, but much testimony which points to a plurality of authors; that chaps. xl.-lxvi. nowhere assert themselves to be by Isaiah; and that there is no other well-grounded claim of Scripture or doctrine on behalf of his authorship. We have then shown that chaps. xl.-xlvi. do not only present the Exile as if nearly finished and Cyrus as if already come, while the fall of Babylon is still future; but that it is essential to one of their main arguments that Cyrus should be standing before Israel and the world, as a successful warrior, on his way to attack Babylon. That led us to date these chapters between 555 and 538. Turning then to other evidence,—the local colour they show, their language and style, and their theology,—we have found nothing which conflicts with that date, but, on the contrary, a very great deal, which much more agrees with it than with the date, or with the authorship, of Isaiah.

It will be observed, however, that the question has been limited to the earlier chapters of the twenty-seven under discussion, viz., to xl.-xlvi. Does the same conclusion hold good of xlix. to lxvi.? This can be properly discovered only as we closely follow their exposition; it is enough in the meantime to have got firm footing on the Exile. We can feel our way bit by bit from this standpoint onwards. Let us now merely anticipate the main features of the rest of the prophecy.

A new section has been marked by many as beginning with chap. xlix. This is because chap. xlviii. concludes with a refrain: "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked," which occurs again at the end of chap. lvii., and because with chap. xlviii. Babylon and Cyrus drop out of sight. But the circumstances are still those of exile, and, as Professor Davidson remarks, chap. xlix. is parallel in thought to chap. xlii., and also takes for granted the restoration of Israel in chap. xlviii., proceeding naturally

from that to the statement of Israel's world-mission. Apart from the alternation of passages dealing with the Servant of the Lord, and passages whose subject is Zion—an alternation which begins pretty early in the prophecy, and has suggested to some its composition out of two different writings*—the first real break in the sequence occurs at chap. lii. 13, where the prophecy of the sin-bearing Servant is introduced. By most critics this is held to be an insertion, for chap. liv. 1 follows naturally upon chap. lii. 12, though it is undeniable that there is also some association between chaps. lii. 13-liv., and chap. liv.† In chaps. liv.-lv. we are evidently still in exile. It is in commenting on a verse of these chapters that Calvin makes the admission of exilic origin which has been quoted above.

A number of short prophecies now follow, till the end of chap. lix. is reached. These, as we shall see, make it extremely difficult to believe in the original unity of "Second Isaiah." Some of them, it is true, lie in evident circumstance of exile; but others are undoubtedly of earlier date, reflecting the scenery of Palestine, and the habits of the people in their political independence, with Jehovah's judgment-cloud still unburst, but lowering. Such is chap. lvi. 9-lvii., which regards the Exile as still to come, quotes the natural features of Palestine, and charges the Jews with unbelieving diplomacy—a charge not possible against them when they were in captivity. But others of these short prophecies are, in the opinion of some critics, post-exilic. Cheyne assigns chap. lvi. to after the Return, when the temple was standing, and the duty of holding fasts and sabbaths could be enforced, as it was enforced by Nehemiah. I shall give, when we reach the passage, my reasons for doubting his conclusion. The chapter seems to me as likely to have been written upon the eve of the Return as after the Return had taken place.

Chap. lvii., the eighteenth of our twenty-seven chapters, closes with the same refrain as chap. xlviii., the ninth of the series: "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked." Chap. lviii. has, therefore, been regarded as beginning the third great division of the prophecy. But here again, while there is certainly an advance in the treatment of the subject, and the prophet talks less of the redemption of the Jews and more of the glory of the restoration of Zion, the point of transition is very difficult to mark. Some critics‡ regard chap. lviii. as post-exilic; but when we come to it we shall find a number of reasons for supposing it to belong, just as much as Ezekiel, to the Exile. Chap. lix. is perhaps the most difficult portion of all, because it makes the Jews responsible for civic justice in a way they could hardly be conceived to be in exile, and yet speaks, in the language of other portions of "Second Isaiah," of a deliverance that cannot well be other than the deliverance from exile. We shall find in this chapter likely marks of the fusion of two distinct addresses, making the conclusion probable that it is Israel's earlier conscience which we catch here, following her into the days of exile, and reciting her former guilt just before pardon is assured. Chaps. lx., lxi., and lxii. are certainly exilic. The inimitable prophecy, chap. lxiii. 1-6, complete

* So quoted by Driver ("Isaiah," etc., p. 200), from the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 1879, p. 339.

† See p. 786.

* Professor Briggs' "Messianic Prophecy," 339 ff.

† Ewald is very strong on this.

‡ Including Professor Cheyne, "Encyc. Britann.," article "Isaiah."

within itself, and unique in its beauty, is either a promise given just before the deliverance from a long captivity of Israel under heathen nations (ver. 4), or an exultant song of triumph immediately after such a deliverance has taken place. Chap. lxiii. 7-lxiv. implies a ruined temple (ver. 10), but bears no traces of the writer being in exile. It has been assigned to the period of the first attempts to rebuild Jerusalem after the Return. Chap. lxv. has been assigned to the same date, and its local colour interpreted as that of Palestine. But we shall find the colour to be just as probably that of Babylon, and again I do not see any certain proofs of a post-exilic date. Chap. lxvi., however, betrays more evidence of being written after the Return. It divides into two parts. In verses 1 to 4 the temple is still unbuilt, but the building would seem to be already begun. In verses 5 to 24, the arrival of the Jews in Palestine, the resumption of the life of the sacred community, and the disappointments of the returned at the first meagre results, seem to be implied. And the music of the book dies out in tones of warning, that sin still hinders the Lord's work with His people.

This rapid survey has made two things sufficiently clear. *First*, that while the bulk of chaps. xl.-lxvi. was composed in Babylonia during the Exile of the Jews, there are considerable portions which date from before the Exile, and betray a Palestinian origin; and one or two smaller pieces that seem—rather less evidently, however—to take for granted the Return from the Exile. But, *secondly*, all these pieces, which it seems necessary to assign to different epochs and authors, have been arranged so as to exhibit a certain order and progress—an order, more or less observed, of date, and a progress very apparent (as we shall see in the course of exposition) of thought and of clearness in definition. The largest portion, of whose unity we are assured and whose date we can fix, is found at the beginning. Chaps. xl.-xlviii. are certainly by one hand, and may be dated, as we have seen, between 555 and 538—the period of Cyrus' approach to take Babylon. There the interest in Cyrus ceases, and the thought of the redemption from Babylon is mainly replaced by that of the subsequent Return. Along with these lines, we shall discover a development in the prophecy's great doctrine of the Servant of Jehovah. But even this dies away, as if the experience of suffering and discipline were being replaced by that of return and restoration; and it is Zion in her glory, and the spiritual mission of the people, and the vengeance of the Lord, and the building of the temple, and a number of practical details in the life and worship of the restored community, which fill up the remainder of the book, along with a few echoes from pre-exilic times. Can we escape feeling in all this a definite design and arrangement, which fails to be absolutely perfect, probably, from the nature of the materials at the arranger's disposal?

We are, therefore, justified in coming to the provisional conclusion, that Second Isaiah is not a unity, in so far as it consists of a number of pieces by different men, whom God raised up at various times before, during, and after the Exile, to comfort and exhort amid the shifting circumstance and tempers of His people; but that it is a unity, in so far as these pieces have been gathered together by an editor very soon after the

Return from the Exile, in an order as regular both in point of time and subject as the somewhat mixed material would permit. It is in this sense that throughout this volume we shall talk of "our prophet," or "the prophet;" up to chap. xlix., at least, we shall feel that the expression is literally true; after that it is rather an editorial than an original unity which is apparent. In this question of unity the dramatic style of the prophecy forms, no doubt, the greatest difficulty. Who shall dare to determine of the many soliloquies, apostrophes, lyrics, and other pieces that are here gathered, often in want of any connection save that of dramatic grouping and a certain sympathy of temper, whether they are by the same author or have been collected from several origins? We must be content to leave the matter uncertain. One great reason, which we have not yet quoted, for supposing that the whole prophecy is not by one man, is that if it had been his name would certainly have come down with it.

Do not let it be thought that such a conclusion, as we have been led to, is merely a dogma of modern criticism. Here, if anywhere, the critic is but the patient student of Scripture, searching for the testimony of the sacred text about itself, and formulating that. If it be found that such a testimony conflicts with ecclesiastical tradition, however ancient and universal, so much the worse for tradition. In Protestant circles, at least, we have no choice. *Litera Scripta manet*. When we know that the only evidence for the Isaian authorship of chaps. xl.-lxvi. is tradition, supported by an unthinking interpretation of New Testament citations, while the whole testimony of these Scriptures themselves denies them to be Isaiah's, we cannot help making our choice, and accepting the testimony of Scripture. Do we find them any the less wonderful or Divine? Do they comfort less? Do they speak with less power to conscience? Do they testify with more uncertain voice to our Lord and Saviour? It will be the task of the following pages to show that, interpreted in connection with the history out of which they themselves say that God's Spirit drew them, these twenty-seven chapters become only more prophetic of Christ, and more comforting and instructive to men, than they were before.

But the remarkable fact is, that anciently tradition itself appears to have agreed with the results of modern scholarship. The original place of the Book of Isaiah in the Jewish canon seems to have been after both Jeremiah and Ezekiel,* a fact which goes to prove that it did not reach completion till a later date than the works of these two prophets of the Exile.

If now it be asked, 'Why should a series of prophecies written in the Exile be attached to the authentic works of Isaiah? that is a fair question, and one which the supporters of the exilic authorship have the duty laid upon them of endeavouring to answer. Fortunately they are not under the necessity of falling back, for want of other reasons, on the supposition that this attachment was due to the error of some scribe, or to the custom which ancient writers practised of filling up any part of a volume, that remained blank when one book is finished, with the writing

* According to the arrangement given in the Talmud (Baba bathra, f. 14, col. 2): "Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the Twelve." Cf. Bleek, "Introduction to Old Testament," on Isaiah; Orelli's "Isaiah," Eng. ed., p. 214.

of any other that would fit the place.* The first of these reasons is too accidental, the second too artificial, in face of the undoubted sympathy which exists among all parts of the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah himself plainly prophesied of an exile longer than his own generation experienced, and prophesied of a return from it (chap. xi). We saw no reason to dispute his claims to the predictions about Babylon in chaps. xxi. and xxxix. Isaiah's, too, more than any other prophet's, were those great and final hopes of the Old Testament—the survival of Israel and the gathering of the Gentiles to the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem. But it is for the express purpose of emphasising the immediate fulfilment of such ancient predictions, that Isa. xl.-lxvi. were published. Although our prophet has "new things to publish," his first business is to show that the "former things have come to pass," especially the Exile, the survival of a Remnant, the sending of a Deliverer, the doom of Babylon. What more natural than to attach to his utterances those prophecies, of which the events he pointed to were the vindication and fulfilment? The attachment was the more easy to arrange that the authentic prophecies had not passed from Isaiah's hand in a fixed form. They do not bear those marks of their author's own editing, which are borne by the prophecies both of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is impossible to be dogmatic on the point. But these facts—that our chapters are concerned, as no other Scriptures are, with the fulfilment of previous prophecies; that it is the prophecies of Isaiah which are the original and fullest prediction of the events they are busy with; and that the form, in which Isaiah's prophecies are handed down, did not preclude additions of this kind to them—contribute very evident reasons why Isa. xl.-lxvi., though written in the Exile, should be attached to Isa. i.-xxxix.†

Thus we present a theory of the exilic authorship of Isa. xl.-lxvi. within itself complete and consistent, suited to all parts of the evidence, and not opposed by the authority of any part of Scripture. In consequence of its conclusion, our duty, before proceeding to the exposition of the chapters, is twofold: first, to connect the time of Isaiah with the period of the Captivity, and then to sketch the condition of Israel in Exile. This we shall undertake in the next three chapters.

NOTE TO CHAPTER I.

Readers may wish to have a reference to other passages of this Part, in which the questions of the date, authorship and structure of Isaiah xl.-lxvi. are discussed. See pp. 747, 758, 767, 783, 786: Introduction to Book III.; opening paragraphs of ch. xviii. and of ch. xix., etc.

CHAPTER II.

FROM ISAIAH TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

701-587 B. C.

AT first sight, the circumstances of Judah in the last ten years of the seventh century present a strong resemblance to her fortunes in the last

*Robertson Smith, "The Old Testament in Jewish Church," 109.

†It is the theory of some, that although Isa. xl.-lxvi. dates as a whole from the Exile, there are passages in it by

ten years of the eighth. The empire of the world, to which she belongs, is again divided between Egypt and a Mesopotamian power. Syria is again the field of their doubtful battle, and the question, to which of the two shall homage be paid, still forms the politics of all her states. Judah still vacillates, intrigues, and draws down on herself the wrath of the North by her treaties with Egypt. Again there is a great prophet and statesman, whose concern is righteousness, who exposes both the immorality of his people and the folly of their policies, and who summons the "evil from the North" as God's scourge upon Israel: Isaiah has been succeeded by Jeremiah. And, as if to complete the analogy, the nation has once more passed through a puritan reformation. Josiah has, even more thoroughly than Hezekiah, effected the disestablishment of idols.

Beneath this circumstantial resemblance, however, there is one fundamental difference. The strength of Isaiah's preaching was bent, especially during the closing years of the century, to establish the inviolableness of Jerusalem. Against the threats of the Assyrian siege, and in spite of his own more formidable conscience of his people's corruption, Isaiah persisted that Zion should not be taken, and that the people, though cut down to their roots, should remain planted in the land,—the stock of an imperial nation in the latter days. This prophecy was vindicated by the marvellous relief of Jerusalem on the apparent eve of her capture in 701. But its echoes had not yet died away, when Jeremiah to his generation delivered the very opposite message. Round him the popular prophets babbled by rote Isaiah's ancient assurances about Zion. Their soft, monotonous repetitions lapped pleasantly upon the immovable self-confidence of the people. But Jeremiah called down the storm. Even while prosperity seemed to give him the lie, he predicted the speedy ruin of Temple and City, and summoned Judah's enemies against her in the name of the God on whose former word she relied for peace. The contrast between the two great prophets grows most dramatic in their conduct during the respective sieges, of which each was the central figure. Isaiah, alone steadfast in a city of despair, defying the taunts of the heathen, rekindling within the dispirited defenders, whom the enemy sought to bribe to desertion, the passions of patriotism and religion, proclaiming always, as with the voice of a trumpet, that Zion must stand inviolate; Jeremiah, on the contrary, declaring the futility of resistance, counselling each citizen to save his own life from the ruin of the state, in treaty with the enemy, and even arrested as a deserter,—these two contrasting figures and attitudes gather up the difference which the century had wrought in the fortunes of the City of God. And so, while in 701 Jerusalem triumphed in the Lord by the sudden raising of the Assyrian siege, three years after the next century was out she twice succumbed to the Assyrian's successor, and nine years later was totally destroyed.

What is the reason of this difference which a century sufficed to work? Why was the sacredness of Judah's shrine not as much an arti-

Isaiah himself, or in his style by pupils of his (Klostermann in Herzog's "Encyclopædia" and Bredenkamp in his "Commentary"). But this, while possible, is beyond proof.

cle of Jeremiah's as of Isaiah's creed,—as much an element of Divine providence in 600 as in 700 B. C.? This is not a very hard question to answer, if we keep in our regard two things,—firstly, the moral condition of the people, and, secondly, the necessities of the spiritual religion, which was identified for the time with their fortunes.

The Israel which was delivered into captivity at the word of Jeremiah was a people at once more hardened and more exhausted than the Israel, which, in spite of its sin, Isaiah's efforts had succeeded in preserving upon its own land. A century had come and gone of further grace and opportunity, but the grace had been resisted, the opportunity abused, and the people stood more guilty and more wilful than ever before God. Even clearer, however, than the deserts of the people was the need of their religion. That local and temporary victory—after all, only the relief of a mountain fortress and a tribal shrine—with which Isaiah had identified the will and honour of Almighty God, could not be the climax of the history of a spiritual religion. It was impossible for Monotheism to rest on so narrow and material a security as that. The faith, which was to overcome the world, could not be satisfied with a merely national triumph. This time must arrive—were it only by the ordinary progress of the years and unhastened by human guilt—for faith and piety to be weaned from the forms of an earthly temple, however sacred; for the individual—after all, the real unit of religion—to be rendered independent of the community and cast upon his God alone; and for this people, to whom the oracles of the living God had been entrusted, to be led out from the selfish pride of guarding these for their own honour—to be led out, were it through the breaches of their hitherto inviolate walls, and amid the smoke of all that was most sacred to them, so that in level contact with mankind they might learn to communicate their glorious trust. Therefore, while the Exile was undoubtedly the penance, which an often-spared but ever more obdurate people had to pay for their accumulated sins, it was also for the meek and the pure-hearted in Israel a step upwards even from the faith and the results of Isaiah—perhaps the most effectual step which Israel's religion ever took. Schultz has finely said: "The proper Tragedy of History—doom required by long-gathering guilt, and launched upon a generation which for itself is really turning towards good—is most strikingly consummated in the Exile." Yes: but this is only half the truth. The accomplishment of the moral tragedy is really but one incident in a religious epic—the development of a spiritual faith. Long-delaying Nemesis overtakes at last the sinners, but the shock of the blows, which beat the guilty nation into captivity, releases their religion from its material bonds. Israel on the way to Exile is on the way to become Israel after the Spirit.

With these principles to guide us, let us now, for a little, thread our way through the crowded details of the decline and fall of the Jewish state.

Isaiah's own age had foreboded the necessity of exile for Judah. There was the great precedent of Samaria, and Judah's sin was not less than her sister's. When the authorities at Jerusalem wished to put Jeremiah to death for the heresy of predicting the ruin of the sacred city, it was pointed out in his defence that a

similar prediction had been made by Micah, the contemporary of Isaiah. And how much had happened since then! The triumph of Jehovah in 701, the stronger faith and purer practice, which had followed as long as Hezekiah reigned, gave way to an idolatrous reaction under his successor Manasseh. This reaction, while it increased the guilt of the people, by no means diminished their religious fear. They carried into it the conscience of their former puritanism—diseased, we might say delirious, but not dead. Men felt their sin and feared Heaven's wrath, and rushed headlong into the gross and fanatic exercises of idolatry, in order to wipe away the one and avert the other. It availed nothing. After an absence of thirty years—the Assyrian arms returned in full strength, and Manasseh himself was carried captive across the Euphrates. But penitence revived, and for a time it appeared as if it were to be at last valid for salvation. Israel made huge strides towards their ideal life of a good conscience and outward prosperity. Josiah, the pious, came to the throne. The Book of the Law was discovered in 621, and king and people rallied to its summons with the utmost loyalty. All the nation "stood to the covenant." The single sanctuary was vindicated, the high places destroyed, the land purged of idols. There were no great military triumphs, but Assyria, so long the accepted scourge of God, gave signs of breaking up; and we can feel the vigour and self-confidence, induced by years of prosperity, in Josiah's ambition to extend his borders, and especially in his daring assault upon Necho of Egypt at Megiddo, when Necho passed north to the invasion of Assyria. Altogether, it was a people that imagined itself righteous, and counted upon a righteous God. In such days who could dream of exile?

But in 608 the ideal was shivered. Israel was threshed at Megiddo, and Josiah, the king after God's own heart, was slain on the field. And then happened, what happened at other times in Israel's history when disillusion of this kind came down. The nation fell asunder into the elements of which it was ever so strange a composition. The masses, whose conscience did not rise beyond the mere performance of the Law, nor their view of God higher than that of a Patron of the state, bound by His covenant to reward with material success the loyalty of His clients, were disappointed with the results of their service and of His providence. Being a new generation from Manasseh's time, they thought to give the strange gods another turn. The idols were brought back, and after the discredit which righteousness received at Megiddo, it would appear that social injustice and crime of many kinds dared to be very bold. Jehoahaz, who reigned for three months after Josiah, and Jehoiakim, who succeeded him, were idolaters. The loftier few, like Jeremiah, had never been deceived by the people's outward allegiance to the Temple or the Law, nor considered it valid either to atone for the past or now to fulfil the holy demands of Jehovah; and were confirmed by the disaster at Megiddo, and the consequent reaction to idolatry, in the stern and hopeless views of the people which they had always entertained. They kept reiterating a speedy captivity. Between these parties stood the formal successors of earlier prophets, so much the slaves of tradition that they had neither conscience for their people's sins nor understanding of the

world around them, but could only affirm in the strength of ancient oracles that Zion should not be destroyed. Strange is it to see how this party, building upon the promises of Jehovah through a prophet like Isaiah, should be taken advantage of by the idolaters, but scouted by Jehovah's own servants. Thus they mingle and conflict. Who indeed can distinguish all the elements of so ancient and so rich a life, as they chase, overtake, and wrestle with each other, hurrying down the rapids to the final cataract? Let us leave them for a moment, while we mark the catastrophe itself. They will be more easily distinguished in the calm below.

It was from the North that Jeremiah summoned the vengeance of God upon Judah. In his earlier threats he might have meant the Scythians; but by 605, when Nebuchadrezzar, Nabopolassar of Babylon's son, the rising general of the age, defeated Pharaoh at Carchemish, all men accepted Jeremiah's nomination for this successor of Assyria in the lordship of Western Asia. From Carchemish Nebuchadrezzar overran Syria. Jehoiakim paid tribute to him, and Judah at last felt the grip of the hand that was to drag her into exile. Jehoiakim attempted to throw it off in 602; but, after harassing him for four years by means of some allies, Nebuchadrezzar took his capital, executed him, suffered Jehoiachin, his successor, to reign only three months, took Jerusalem a second time, and carried off to Babylon the first great portion of the people. This was in 598, only ten years from the death of Josiah, and twenty-one from the discovery of the Book of the Law.

The exact numbers of this first captivity of the Jews it is impossible to determine. The annalist sets the soldiers at seven thousand, the smiths and craftsmen at one thousand; so that, making allowance for other classes whom he mentions, the grown men must alone have been over ten thousand;* but how many women went, and how many children—the most important factor for the period of the Exile with which we have to deal—it is impossible to estimate. The total number of persons can scarcely have been less than twenty-five thousand. More important, however, than their number was the quality of these exiles, and this we can easily appreciate. The royal family and the court were taken, a large number of influential persons, "the mighty men of the land," or what must have been nearly all the fighting men, with the necessary artificers; priests also went, Ezekiel among them, and probably representatives of other classes not mentioned by the annalist. That this was the virtue and flower of the nation is proved by a double witness. Not only did the citizens, for the remaining ten years of Jerusalem's life, look to these exiles for her deliverance, but Jeremiah himself counted them the sound half of Israel—"a basket of good figs," as he expressed it, beside "a basket of bad ones." They were at least under discipline, but the remnant of Jerusalem persisted in the wilfulness of the past.

For although Jeremiah remained in the city, and the house of David and a considerable popu-

lation, and although Jeremiah himself held a higher position in public esteem since the vindication of his word by the events of 598, yet he could not be blind to the unchanged character of the people, and the thorough doom which their last respite had only more evidently proved to be inevitable. Gangs of false prophets, both at home and among the exiles, might predict a speedy return. All the Jewish ability of intrigue, with the lavish promises of Egypt and frequent embassies from other nations, might work for the overthrow of Babylon. But Jeremiah and Ezekiel knew better. Across the distance which now separated them they chanted, as it were in antiphon, the alternate strophes of Judah's dirge. Jeremiah bade the exiles not to remember Zion, but "let them settle down," he said, "into the life of the land they are in, building houses, planting gardens, and begetting children, and 'seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto Jehovah for it, for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace'—the Exile shall last seventy years." And as Jeremiah in Zion blessed Babylon, so Ezekiel in Babylon cursed Zion, thundering back that Jerusalem must be utterly wasted through siege and famine, pestilence and captivity. There is no rush of hope through Ezekiel. His expectations are all distant. He lives either in memory or in cold fancy. His pictures of restoration are too elaborate to mean speedy fulfilment. They are the work of a man with time on his hands; one does not build so colossally for to-morrow. Thus reinforced from abroad, Jeremiah proclaimed Nebuchadrezzar as "the servant of Jehovah," and summoned him to work Jehovah's doom upon the city. The predicted blockade came in the ninth year of Zedekiah. The false hopes which still sustained the people, their trust in Egypt, the arrival of an Egyptian army in result of their intrigue, as well as all their piteous bravery, only afforded time for the fulfilment of the terrible details of their penalty. For nearly eighteen months the siege closed in—months of famine and pestilence, of faction and quarrel and falling away to the enemy. Then Jerusalem broke up. The besiegers gained the northern suburb and stormed the middle gate. Zedekiah and the army burst their lines only to be captured on an aimless flight at Jericho. A few weeks more, and a forlorn defence by civilians of the interior parts of the city was at last overwhelmed. The exasperated besiegers gave her up to fire—"the house of Jehovah, the king's house, and every great house"—and tore to the stones the stout walls that resisted the conflagration. As the city was levelled, so the citizens were dispersed. A great number—and among them the king's family—were put to death. The king himself was blinded, and, along with a host of his subjects, impossible for us to estimate, and with all the temple furniture, was carried to Babylon. A few peasants were left to cultivate the land; a few superior personages—perhaps such as, with Jeremiah, had favoured the Babylonians, and Jeremiah was among them—were left at Mizpah under a Jewish viceroy. It was a poor apparition of a state; but, as if the very ghost of Israel must be chased from the land, even this small community was broken up, and almost every one of its members fled to Egypt. The Exile was complete.

* The figure actually mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. 14, but, as Stade points out ("Geschichte," p. 680), vv. 14, 15 interrupt the narrative, and may have been intruded here from the account of the later captivity.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT ISRAEL TOOK INTO EXILE.

BEFORE we follow the captives along the roads that lead to exile, we may take account of the spiritual goods which they carried with them, and were to realise in their retirement. Never in all history did paupers of this world go forth more richly laden with the treasures of heaven.

1. First of all, we must emphasise and define their *monotheism*. We must emphasise it as against those who would fain persuade us that Israel's monotheism was for the most part the product of the Exile; we must analyse its contents and define its limits among the people, if we would appreciate the extent to which it spread and the peculiar temper which it assumed, as set forth in the prophecy we are about to study.

Idolatry was by no means dead in Israel at the fall of Jerusalem. On the contrary, during the last years which the nation spent within those sacred walls, that had been so miraculously preserved in the sight of the world by Jehovah, idolatry increased, and to the end remained as determined and fanatic as the people's defence of Jehovah's own temple. The Jews who fled to Egypt applied themselves to the worship of the Queen of Heaven, in spite of all the remonstrances of Jeremiah; and him they carried with them, not because they listened to him as the prophet of the One True God, but superstitiously, as if he were a pledge of the favour of one of the many gods, whom they were anxious to propitiate. And the earliest effort, upon which we shall have to follow our own prophet, is the effort to crush the worship of images among the Babylonian exiles. Yet when Israel returned from Babylon the people were wholly monotheist; when Jerusalem was rebuilt no idol came back to her.

That this great change was mainly the result of the residence in Babylon and of truths learned there, must be denied by all who remember the creed and doctrine about God, which in their literature the people carried with them into exile. The law was already written, and the whole nation had sworn to it: "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God; Jehovah is One, and thou shalt worship Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." These words, it is true, may be so strictly interpreted as to mean no more than that there was one God for Israel: other gods might exist, but Jehovah was Sole Deity for His people. It is maintained that such a view receives some support from the custom of prophets, who, while they affirmed Jehovah's supremacy, talked of other gods as if they were real existences. But argument from this habit of the prophets is precarious: such a mode of speech may have been a mere accommodation to a popular point of view. And, surely, we have only to recall what Isaiah and Jeremiah had uttered concerning Jehovah's Godhead, to be persuaded that Israel's monotheism, before the beginning of the Exile, was a far more broad and spiritual faith than the mere belief that Jehovah was the Sovereign Deity of the nation, or the satisfaction of the desires of Jewish hearts alone. Righteousness was not coincident with Israel's life and interest; righteousness was universally supreme, and it was in righteousness that Isaiah saw Jehovah ex-

alted.* There is no more prevailing witness to the unity of God than the conscience, which in this matter takes far precedence of the intellect; and it was on the testimony of conscience that the prophets based Israel's monotheism. Yet they did not omit to enlist the reason as well. Isaiah and Jeremiah delight to draw deductions from the reasonableness of Jehovah's working in nature to the reasonableness of His processes in history,—analogies which could not fail to impress both intellect and imagination with the fact that men inhabit a universe, that One is the will and mind which works in all things. But to this training of conscience and reason, the Jews, at the beginning of the Exile, felt the addition of another considerable influence. Their history lay at last complete, and their conscience was at leisure from the making of its details to survey it as a whole. That long past, seen now by undazzled eyes from under the shadow of exile, presented through all its changing fortunes a single and definite course. One was the intention of it, one its judgment from first to last. The Jew saw in it nothing but righteousness, the quality of a God, who spake the same word from the beginning, who never broke His word, and who at last had summoned to its fulfilment the greatest of the world-powers. In those historical books, which were collected and edited during the Exile, we observe each of the kings and generations of Israel, in their turn, confronted with the same high standard of fidelity to the One True God and His holy Law. The regularity and rigour, with which they are thus judged, have been condemned by some critics as an arbitrary and unfair application of the standard of a later faith to the conduct of ruder and less responsible ages. But, apart from the question of historical accuracy, we cannot fail to remark that this method of writing history is at least instinct with the Oneness of God, and the unvarying validity of His Law from generation to generation. Israel's God was the same, their conscience told them, down all their history; but now as He summoned one after another of the great world-powers to do His bidding,—Assyria, Babylon, Persia,—how universal did He prove His dominion to be! Unchanging through all time, He was surely omnipotent through all space.

This short review—in which, for the sake of getting a complete view of our subject, we have anticipated a little—has shown that Israel had enough within themselves, in the teaching of their prophets and in the lessons of their own history, to account for that consummate expression of Jehovah's Godhead, which is contained in our prophet, and to which every one allows the character of an absolute monotheism. We shall find this, it is true, to be higher and more comprehensive than anything which is said about God in pre-exilic Scriptures. The prophet argues the claims of Jehovah, not only with the ardour that is born of faith, but often with the scorn which indicates the intellect at work. It is monotheism, treated not only as a practical belief or a religious duty, but as a necessary truth of reason; not only as the secret of faith and the special experience of Israel, but also as an essential conviction of human nature, so that not to believe in One God is a thing irrational and absurd for Gentiles as well as Jews. God's infinitude in the works of creation, His universal

* See p. 642.

providence in history, are preached with greater power than ever before; and the gods of the nations are treated as things, in whose existence no reasonable person can possibly believe. In short, our great prophet of the Exile has already learned to obey the law of Deuteronomy as it was expounded by Christ. Deuteronomy says, "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." Christ added, "and with all thy mind." This was what our prophet did. He held his monotheism "with all his mind." We shall find him conscious of it, not only as a religious affection, but as a necessary intellectual conviction; which if a man has not, he is less than a man. Hence the scorn which he pours upon the idols and mythologies of his conquerors. Beside his tyrants, though in physical strength he was but a worm to them, the Jew felt that he walked, by virtue of his faith in One God, their intellectual master.

We shall see all this illustrated later on. Meantime, what we are concerned to show is, that there is enough to account for this high faith within Israel themselves—in their prophecy and in the lessons of their history. And where indeed are we to be expected to go in search of the sources of Israel's monotheism, if not to themselves? To the Babylonians? The Babylonians had nothing spiritual to teach to Israel; our prophet regards them with scorn. To the Persians, who broke across Israel's horizon with Cyrus? Our prophet's high statement of monotheism is of earlier date than the advent of Cyrus to Babylon. Nor did Cyrus, when he came, give any help to the faith, for in his public edicts he owned the gods of Babylon and the God of Israel with equal care and equal policy. It was not because Cyrus and his Persians were monotheists, that our prophet saw the sovereignty of Jehovah vindicated, but it was because Jehovah was sovereign that the prophet knew the Persians would serve His holy purposes.

2. But if in Deuteronomy the exiles carried with them the Law of the One God, they preserved in Jeremiah's writings what may be called the charter of the *individual man*. Jeremiah had found religion in Judah a public and a national affair. The individual derived his spiritual value only from being a member of the nation, and through the public exercises of the national faith. But, partly by his own religious experience, and partly by the course of events, Jeremiah was enabled to accomplish what may be justly described as the vindication of the individual. Of his own separate value before God, and of his right of access to his Maker apart from the nation, Jeremiah himself was conscious, having belonged to God before he belonged to his mother, his family, or his nation. "Before I found thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest out of the womb I consecrated thee." His whole life was but the lesson of how *one* man can be for God and all the nation on the other side. And it was in the strength of this solitary experience, that he insisted, in his famous thirty-first chapter, on the individual responsibility of man and on every man's immediate communication with God's Spirit; and that, when the ruin of the state was imminent, he advised each of his friends to "take his own life" out of it "for a prey."* But Jeremiah's doctrine of the religious

* Jer. lxxv.

value and independence of the individual had a complement. Though the prophet felt so keenly his separate responsibility and right of access to God, and his religious independence of the people, he nevertheless clung to the people with all his heart. He was not, like some other prophets, outside the doom he preached. He might have saved himself, for he had many offers from the Babylonians. But he chose to suffer with his people—he, the saint of God, with the idolaters. More than that, it may be said that Jeremiah suffered for the people. It was not they, with their dead conscience and careless mind, but he, with his tender conscience and breaking heart, who bore the reproach of their sins, the anger of the Lord, and all the agonising knowledge of his country's inevitable doom. In Jeremiah one man did suffer for the people.

In our prophecy, which is absorbed with the deliverance of the nation as a whole, there was, of course, no occasion to develop Jeremiah's remarkable suggestions about each individual soul of man. In fact, these suggestions were germs, which remained uncultivated in Israel till Christ's time. Jeremiah himself uttered them, not as demands for the moment, but as ideals that would only be realised when the New Covenant was made.* Our prophecy has nothing to say about them. But that figure, which Jeremiah's life presented, of One Individual—of One Individual standing in moral solitude over against the whole nation, and in a sense suffering for the nation, can hardly have been absent from the influences, which moulded the marvellous confession of the people in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, where they see the solitary servant of God on one side and themselves on the other, "and Jehovah made to light on him the iniquities of us all." It is true that the exiles themselves had some consciousness of suffering for others. "Our fathers," cried a voice in their midst, when Jerusalem broke up, "Our fathers have sinned, and we have borne their iniquities." But Jeremiah had been a willing sufferer for his people; and the fifty-third chapter is, as we shall see, more like his way of bearing his generation's guilt for love's sake than their way of bearing their father's guilt in the inevitable entail of sin.*

3. To these beliefs in the unity of God, the religious worth of the individual, and the virtue of his self-sacrifice, we must add some experiences of scarcely less value rising out of the *destruction of the material and political forms*—the temple, the city, the monarchy—with which the faith of Israel had been so long identified.

Without this destruction, it is safe to say, those beliefs could not have assumed their purest form. Take, for instance, the belief in the unity of God. There is no doubt that this belief was immensely helped in Israel by the abolition of all the provincial sanctuaries under Josiah, by the limitation of Divine worship to one temple and of valid sacrifice to one altar. But yet it was well that this temple should enjoy its singular rights for only thirty years and then be destroyed. For a monotheism, however lofty, which depended upon the existence of any shrine, however gloriously vindicated by Divine providence, was not a purely spiritual faith. Or, again, take the in-

* This is especially clear from ch. xxxi.

† Having read through the Book of Jeremiah once again since I wrote the above paragraph, I am more than ever impressed with the influence of his life upon Isa. xl.-lxvi.

dividual. The individual could not realise how truly he himself was the highest temple of God, and God's most pleasing sacrifice a broken and a contrite heart, till the routine of legal sacrifice was interrupted and the ancient altar torn down. Or, once more, take that high, ultimate doctrine of sacrifice, that the most inspiring thing for men, the most effectual propitiation before God, is the self-devotion and offering up of a free and reasonable soul, the righteous for the unrighteous—how could common Jews have adequately learned that truth, in days when, according to immemorial practice, the bodies of bulls and goats bled daily on the one valid altar? The city and temple, therefore, went up in flames that Israel might learn that God is a Spirit, and dwelleth not in a house made with hands; that men are His temple, and their hearts the sacrifices well-pleasing in His sight; and that beyond the bodies and blood of beasts, with their daily necessity of being offered, He was preparing for them another Sacrifice, of perpetual and universal power, in the voluntary sufferings of His own holy Servant. It was for this Servant, too, that the monarchy, as it were, abdicated, yielding up to Him all its title to represent Jehovah and to save and rule Jehovah's people.

4. Again, as we have already hinted, the fall of the state and city of Jerusalem gave scope to *Israel's missionary career*. The conviction, that that had inspired many of Isaiah's assertions of the inviolableness of Zion, was the conviction that, if Zion were overthrown and the last remnant of Israel uprooted from the land, there must necessarily follow the extinction of the only true testimony to the living God which the world contained. But by a century later that testimony was firmly secured in the hearts and consciences of the people, wheresoever they might be scattered; and what was now needed was exactly such a dispersion,—in order that Israel might become aware of the world for whom the testimony was meant, and grow expert in the methods by which it was to be proclaimed. Priesthood has its human as well as its Godward side. The latter was already sufficiently secured for Israel by Jehovah's age-long seclusion of them in their remote highlands—a people peculiar to Himself. But now the same Providence completed its purpose by casting them upon the world. They mixed with men face to face, or, still more valuably to themselves, on a level with the most downtrodden and despised of the peoples. With no advantage but the truth, they met the other religions of the world in argument, debating with them upon the principles of a common reason and the facts of a common history. They learned sympathy with the weak things of earth. They discovered that their religion could be taught. But, above all, they became conscious of martyrdom, the indispensable experience of a religion that is to prevail; and they realised the supreme influence upon men of a love which sacrifices itself. In a word, Israel, in going into exile, put on humanity with all its consequences. How real and thorough the process was, how successful in perfecting their priesthood, may be seen not only from the hopes and obligations towards all mankind, which burst in our prophecy to an urgency and splendour unmatched elsewhere in their history, but still more from the fact that when the Son of God Himself took flesh and became man, there were no words oftener upon His lips to describe His experi-

ence and commission, there are no passages which more clearly mirror His work for the world, than the words and the passages in which these Jews of the Exile, stripped to their bare humanity, relate their sufferings or exult in their destiny that should follow.

5. But with their temple in ruins, and all the world before them for the service of God, the Jews go forth to exile upon the distinct *promise of return*. The material form of their religion is suspended, not abolished. Let them feel religion in purely spiritual aspects, unassisted by sanctuary or ritual; let them look upon the world and the oneness of men; let them learn all God's scope for the truth He has entrusted to them,—and then let them gather back again and cherish their new experience and ideas for yet awhile in the old seclusion. Jehovah's discipline of them as a nation is not yet exhausted. They are no mere band of pilgrims or missionaries, with the world for their home; they are still a people, with their own bit of the earth. If we keep this in mind, it will explain certain apparent anomalies in our prophecy. In all the writings of the Exile the reader is confused by a strange mingling of the spiritual and the material, the universal and the local. The moral restoration of the people to pardon and righteousness is identified with their political restoration to Judah and Jerusalem. They have been separated from ritual in order to cultivate a more spiritual religion, but it is to this that a restoration to ritual is promised for a reward. While Jeremiah insists upon the free and immediate communication of every believer with Jehovah, Ezekiel builds a more exclusive priesthood, a more elaborate system of worship. Within our prophecy, while one voice deprecates a house for God built with hands, affirming that Jehovah dwells with every one who is of a poor and contrite spirit, other voices dwell fondly on the prospect of the new temple and exult in its material glory. This double line of feeling is not merely due to the presence in Israel of those two opposite tempers of mind, which so naturally appear in every national literature. But a special purpose of God is in it. Dispersed to obtain more spiritual ideas of God and man and the world, Israel must be gathered back again to get these by heart, to enshrine them in literature, and to transmit them to posterity, as they could alone be securely transmitted, in the memories of a nation, in the liturgies and canons of a living Church.

Therefore the Jews, though torn for their discipline from Jerusalem, continued to identify themselves more passionately than ever with their desecrated city. A prayer of the period exclaims: "Thy saints take pleasure in her stones, and her dust is dear to them."* The exiles proved this by taking her name. Their prophets addressed them as "Zion" and "Jerusalem." Scattered and leaderless groups of captives in a far-off land, they were still that City of God. She had not ceased to be; ruined and forsaken as she lay, she was yet "graven on the palms of Jehovah's hands; and her walls were continually before Him."† The exiles kept up the register of her families; they prayed towards her; they looked to return to build her bulwarks; they spent long hours of their captivity in tracing upon the dust of that foreign land the groundplan of her restored temple.

With such beliefs in God and man and sacri-

* Psalm cii. 14.

† Isa. xlix. 15.

fice, with such hopes and opportunities for their world-mission, but also with such a bias back to the material Jerusalem, did Israel pass into exile.

CHAPTER IV.

ISRAEL IN EXILE.

FROM 589 TILL ABOUT 550 B. C.

IT is remarkable how completely the sound of the march from Jerusalem to Babylon has died out of Jewish history. It was an enormous movement: twice over within ten years, ten thousand Jews, at the very least, must have trodden the highway to the Euphrates; and yet, except for a doubtful verse or two in the Psalter, they have left no echo of their passage. The sufferings of the siege before, the remorse and lamentation of the Exile after, still pierce our ears through the Book of Lamentations and the Psalms by the rivers of Babylon. We know exactly how the end was fulfilled. We see most vividly the shifting panorama of the siege,—the city in famine, under the assault, and in smoke; upon the streets the pining children, the stricken princes, the groups of men with sullen, famine-black faces, the heaps of slain, mothers feeding on the bodies of the infants whom their sapless breasts could not keep alive; by the walls the hanging and crucifixion of multitudes, with all the fashion of Chaldean cruelty, the delicate and the children stumbling under heavy loads, no survivor free from the pollution of blood. Upon the hills around, the neighbouring tribes are gathered to jeer at “the day of Jerusalem,” and to cut off her fugitives; we even see the departing captives turn, as the worm turns, to curse “those children of Edom.” But there the vision closes. Was it this hot hate which blinded them to the sights of the way, or that weariness and depression among strange scenes, that falls upon all unaccustomed caravans, and has stifled the memory of nearly every other great historical march? The roads which the exiles traversed were of immemorial use in the history of their fathers; almost every day they must have passed names which, for at least two centuries, had rung in the market-place of Jerusalem—the Way of the Sea, across Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, round Hermon, and past Damascus; between the two Lebanons, past Hamath, and past Arpad; or less probably by Tadmor-in-the-Wilderness and Rezepth,—till they reached the river on which the national ambition had lighted as the frontier of the Messianic Empire, and whose rolling greatness had so often proved the fascination and despair of a people of uncertain brooks and trickling aqueducts. Crossing the Euphrates by one of its numerous passages—either at Carchemish, if they struck the river so high, or at the more usual Thapsacus, Tiphseh, “the passage,” where Xenophon crossed with his Greeks, or at some other place—the caravans must have turned south across the Habor, on whose upper banks the captives of Northern Israel had been scattered, and then have traversed the picturesque country of Aram-Naharaim, past Circesium and Rehoboth-of-the-River, and many another ancient place mentioned in the story of the Patriarchs, till through dwindling hills they reached His—that marvellous site which travellers praise

as one of the great view-points of the world—and looked out at last upon the land of their captivity, the boundless, almost level tracts of Chaldea, the first home of the race, the traditional Garden of Eden. But of all that we are told nothing. Every eye in the huge caravans seems to have been as the eyes of the blinded king whom they carried with them,—able to weep, but not to see.

One fact, however, was too large to be missed by these sad, wayworn men; and it has left traces on their literature. In passing from home to exile, the Jews passed from the hills to the plain. They were highlanders. Jerusalem lies four thousand feet above the sea. From its roofs the skyline is mostly a line of hills. To leave the city on almost any side you have to descend. The last monuments of their fatherland, on which the emigrants’ eyes could have lingered, were the high crests of Lebanon; the first prospect of their captivity was a monotonous level. The change was the more impressive, that to the hearts of the Hebrews it could not fail to be sacramental. From the mountains came the dew to their native crofts—the dew which, of all earthly blessings, was likeliest God’s grace. For their prophets, the ancient hills had been the symbols of Jehovah’s faithfulness. In leaving their highlands, therefore, the Jews not only left the kind of country to which their habits were most adapted and all their natural affections clung; they left the chosen abode of God, the most evident types of His grace, the perpetual witnesses to His covenant. Ezekiel constantly employs the mountains to describe his fatherland. But it is far more with a sacramental longing than a mere homesickness that a psalmist of the Exile cries out, “I will lift up mine eyes to the hills: from whence cometh mine help?” or that our prophet exclaims: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth.”

By the route sketched above, it is at least seven hundred miles from Jerusalem to Babylon—a distance which, when we take into account that many of the captives walked in fetters, cannot have occupied them less than three months. We may form some conception of the aspect of the caravans from the transportations of captives which are figured on the Assyrian monuments, as in the Assyrian basement in the British Museum. From these it appears as if families were not separated, but marched together. Mules, asses, camels, ox-waggon, and the captives themselves carried goods. Children and women suckling infants were allowed to ride on the waggon. At intervals fully-armed soldiers walked in pairs.*

I.

Mesopotamia, the land “in the middle of the rivers,” Euphrates and Tigris, consists of two divisions, an upper and a lower. The dividing

* If we would construct for ourselves some more definite idea of that long march from Judah to Babylon, we might assist our imagination by the details of the only other instance on so great a scale of “exile by administrative process”—the transportation to Siberia which the Russian Government effects (it is said, on good authority) to the extent of eighteen thousand persons a year. Every week throughout the year marching parties, three to four hundred strong, leave Tomsk for Irkutsk, doing twelve to twenty miles daily in fetters, with twenty-four hours’ rest every third day, or three hundred and thirty miles in a month.—*Century Magazine*, Nov., 1888.

line crosses from near Hit or His on the Euphrates to below Samarah on the Tigris. Above this line the country is a gently undulating plain of secondary formation at some elevation above the sea. But lower Mesopotamia is absolutely flat land, an unbroken stretch of alluvial soil, scarcely higher than the Persian Gulf, upon which it steadily encroaches. Chaldea was confined to this Lower Mesopotamia, and was not larger, Rawlinson estimates, than the kingdom of Denmark.* It is the monotonous level which first impresses the traveller; but if the season be favourable, he sees this only as the theatre of vast and varied displays of colour, which all visitors vie with one another in describing: "It is like a rich carpet;" "emerald green, enamelled with flowers of every hue;" "tall wild grasses and broad extents of waving reeds;" "acres of water-lilies;" "acres of pansies." There was no such country in ancient times for wheat, barley, millet, and sesame;† tamarisks, poplars, and palms; here and there heavy jungle; with flashing streams and canals thickly athwart the whole, and all shining the more brilliantly for the interrupting patches of scurvy, nitrous soil, and the grey sandy setting of the desert with its dry scrub. The possible fertility of Chaldea is incalculable. But there are drawbacks. Bounded to the north by so high a tableland, to the south and southwest by a super-heated gulf and broad desert, Mesopotamia is the scene of violent changes of atmosphere. The languor of the flat country, the stagnancy and sultriness of the air, of which not only foreigners but the natives themselves complain, is suddenly invaded by southerly winds, of tremendous force and laden with clouds of fine sand, which render the air so dense as to be suffocating, and "produce a lurid red haze intolerable to the eyes." Thunderstorms are frequent, and there are very heavy rains. But the winds are the most tremendous. In such an atmosphere we may perhaps discover the original shapes and sounds of Ezekiel's turbulent visions—"the fiery wheels; the great cloud with a fire infolding itself; the colour of amber," with "sapphire," or lapis lazuli, breaking through; "the sound of a great rushing." Also the Mesopotamian floods are colossal. The increase of both Tigris and Euphrates is naturally more violent and irregular than that of the Nile.‡ Frequent risings of these rivers spread desolation with inconceivable rapidity, and they ebb only to leave pestilence behind them. If civilisation is to continue, there is need of vast and incessant operations on the part of man.

Thus, both by its fertility and by its violence, this climate—before the curse of God fell on those parts of the world—tended to develop a numerous and industrious race of men, whose numbers were swollen from time to time both by forced and by voluntary immigration. The population must have been very dense. The triumphal lists of Assyrian conquerors of the land, as well as the rubbish mounds which to-day cover its surface, testify to innumerable villages and towns; while the connecting canals and fortifications, by the making of them and the watch-

ing of them, must have filled even the rural districts with the hum and activity of men. Chaldea, however, did not draw all her greatness from herself. There was immense traffic with East and West, between which Babylon lay, for the greater part of antiquity, the world's central market and exchange. The city was practically a port on the Persian Gulf, by canals from which vessels reached her wharves direct from Arabia, India, and Africa. Down the Tigris and Euphrates rafts brought the produce of Armenia and the Caucasus; but of greater importance than even these rivers were the roads, which ran from Sardis to Shushan, traversed Media, penetrated Bactria and India, and may be said to have connected the Jaxartes and the Ganges with the Nile and the harbours of the Ægean Sea. These roads all crossed Chaldea and met at Babylon. Together with the rivers and ocean highways, they poured upon her markets the traffic of the whole ancient world.

It was, in short, the very centre of the world—the most populous and busy region of His earth—to which God sent His people for their exile. The monarch, who transplanted them, was the genius of Babylonia incarnate. The chief soldier of his generation, Nebuchadrezzar will live in history as one of the greatest builders of all time. But he fought as he built—that he might traffic. His ambition was to turn the trade with India from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, and he thought to effect this by the destruction of Tyre, by the transportation of Arab and Nabathean merchants to Babylon, and by the deepening and regulation of the river between Babylon and the sea.

There is no doubt that Nebuchadrezzar carried the Jews to Babylon not only for political reasons, but in order to employ them upon those large works of irrigation and the building of cities, for which his ambition required hosts of labourers. Thus the exiles were planted, neither in military prisons nor in the comparative isolation of agricultural colonies, but just where Babylonian life was most busy, where they were forced to share and contribute to it, and could not help feeling the daily infection of their captor's habits. Do not let us forget this. It will explain much in what we have to study. It will explain how the captivity, which God inflicted upon the Jews as a punishment, might become in time a new sin to them, and why, when the day of redemption arrived, so many forgot that their citizenship was in Zion, and clung to the traffic and the offices of Babylon.

The majority of the exiles appear to have been settled within the city, or, as it has been more correctly called, "the fortified district," of Babylon itself. Their mistress was thus constantly before them, at once their despair and their temptation. *Lady of Kingdoms* she lifted herself to heaven from broad wharves and ramparts, by wide flights of stairs and terraces, high walls and hanging gardens, pyramids and towers—so colossal in her buildings, so imperially lavish of space between! No wonder that upon that vast, far-spreading architecture, upon its great squares and between its high portals guarded by giant bulls, the Jew felt himself, as he expressed it, but a poor worm. If, even as they stand in our museums, captured and catalogued, one feels as if one crawled in the presence of the fragments of these striding monsters, with how much more of the feeling of the worm must the abject mem-

* For the above details, see Rawlinson's "Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World," vol. i.

† "Herodotus," Bk. I.; "Memoirs by Commander James Felix Jones, I. N.," in "Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government," No. XLIII., New Series, 1857; Ainsworth's "Euphrates Valley Expedition;" Layard's "Nineveh."

‡ Perrot and Chipiez, "Histoire de l'Art d'Antiquité," vol. ii.: "Assyrie," p. 9.

bers of that captive nation have writhed before the face of the city, which carried these monsters as the mere ornaments of her skirts, and rose above all kingdoms with her strong feet upon the poor and the meek of the earth?

Ah, the despair of it! To see *her* every day so glorious, to be forced to help *her* ceaseless growth,—and to think how Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion, lay forsaken in ruins! Yet the despair sometimes gave way to temptation. There was not an outline or horizon visible to the captive Jew, not a figure in the motley crowds in which he moved, but must have fascinated him with the genius of his conquerors. In that level land no mountain, with its witness of God, broke the skyline; but the work of man was everywhere: curbed and scattered rivers, artificial mounds, buildings of brick, gardens torn from their natural beds and hung high in air by cunning hands to please the taste of a queen; lavish wealth and force and cleverness, all at the command of one human will. The signature ran across the whole, “*I have done this, and with mine own hand have I gotten me my wealth;*” and all the nations of the earth came and acknowledged the signature, and worshipped the great city. It was fascinating merely to look on such cleverness, success, and self-confidence; and who was the poor Jew that he, too, should not be drawn with the intoxicated nations to the worship of this glory that filled his horizon? If his eyes rose higher, and from these enchantments of men sought refuge in the heavens above, were not even they also a Babylonian realm? Did not the Chaldean claim the great lights there for his patron gods? were not the movements of sun, moon, and planets the secret of his science? did not the tyrant believe that the very stars in their courses fought for him? And he was vindicated; he was successful; he did actually rule the world. There seemed to be no escape from the enchantments of this sorceress city, as the prophets called her, and it is not wonderful that so many Jews fell victims to her worldliness and idolatry.

II.

The social condition of the Jews in exile is somewhat obscure, and yet, both in connection with the date and with the exposition of some portions of “*Second Isaiah*,” it is an element of the greatest importance, of which we ought to have as definite an idea as possible.

What are the facts? By far the most significant is that which faces us at the end of the Exile. There, some sixty years after the earlier, and some fifty years after the later, of Nebuchadrezzar’s two deportations, we find the Jews a largely multiplied and still regularly organised nation, with considerable property and decided political influence. Not more than forty thousand can have gone into exile, but forty-two thousand returned, and yet left a large portion of the nation behind them. The old families and clans survived; the social ranks were respected; the rich still held slaves; and the former menials of the temple could again be gathered together. Large subscriptions were raised for the pilgrimage, and for the restoration of the temple; a great host of cattle was taken. To such a state of affairs do we see any traces leading up through the Exile itself? We do.

The first host of exiles, the captives of 598, comprised, as we have seen, the better classes of the nation, and appear to have enjoyed considerable independence. They were not scattered, like the slaves in North America, as domestic bondsmen over the surface of the land. Their condition must have much more closely resembled that of the better-treated exiles in Siberia; though of course, as we have seen, it was not a Siberia, but the centre of civilisation, to which they were banished. They remained in communities, with their own official heads, and at liberty to consult their prophets. They were sufficiently in touch with one another, and sufficiently numerous, for the enemies of Babylon to regard them as a considerable political influence, and to treat with them for a revolution against their captors. But Ezekiel’s strong condemnation of this intrigue exhibits their leaders on good terms with the government. Jeremiah bade them throw themselves into the life of the land; buy and sell, and increase their families and property. At the same time, we cannot but observe that it is only religious sins, with which Ezekiel upbraids them. When he speaks of civic duty or social charity, he either refers to their past or to the life of the remnant still in Jerusalem. There is every reason to believe, therefore, that this captivity was an honourable and an easy one. The captives may have brought some property with them; they had leisure for the pursuit of business and for the study and practice of their religion. Some of them suffered, of course, from the usual barbarity of Oriental conquerors, and were made eunuchs; some, by their learning and abstinence, rose to high positions in the court.* Probably to the end of the Exile they remained “*the good figs*,” as Jeremiah had called them. Theirs was, perhaps, the literary work of the Exile; and theirs, too, may have been the wealth which rebuilt Jerusalem.

But it was different with the second captivity, of 589. After the famine, the burning of the city, and the prolonged march, this second host of exiles must have reached Babylonia in an impoverished condition. They were a lower class of men. They had exasperated their conquerors, who, before the march began, subjected many of them to mutilation and cruel death; and it is, doubtless, echoes of their experience which we find in the more bitter complaints of our prophet. “*This is a people robbed and spoiled; all of them snared in holes, and hid in prison-houses: they are for a prey, and for a spoil. Thou*” (that is, Babylon), “*didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.*” † Nebuchadrezzar used them for his building, as Pharaoh had used their forefathers. Some of them, or of their countrymen who had reached Babylonia before them, became the domestic slaves and chattels of their conquerors. Among the contracts and bills of sale of this period we find the cases of slaves with apparently Jewish names.‡

In short, the state of the Jews in Babylonia resembled what seems to have been their fortune wherever they have settled in a foreign land. Part of them despised and abused, forced to labour or overtaxed; part left alone to cultivate literature or to gather wealth. Some treated with unusual rigour—and perhaps a few of these with

* The Book of Daniel.

† Isa. xlii. 22, xlvii. 6.

‡ “*Records of the Past*,” second series, vol. i., M. Oppert’s Translations.

reason, as dangerous to the government of the land—but some also, by the versatile genius of their race, advancing to a high place in the political confidence of their captors.

Their application to literature, to their religion, and to commerce must be specially noted.

1. Nothing is more striking in the writings of Ezekiel than the air of large leisure which invests them. Ezekiel lies passive; he broods, gazes, and builds his vision up, in a fashion like none of his terser predecessors; for he had time on his hands, not available to them in days when the history of the nation was still running. Ezekiel's style swells to a greater fulness of rhetoric; his pictures of the future are elaborated with the most minute detail. Prophets before him were speakers, but he is a writer. Many in Israel besides Ezekiel took advantage of the leisure of the Exile to the great increase and arrangement of the national literature. Some Assyriologists have lately written, as if the schools of Jewish scribes owed their origin entirely to the Exile.* But there were scribes in Israel before this. What the Exile did for these, was to provide them not only with the leisure from national business which we have noted, but with a powerful example of their craft as well. Babylonia at this time was a land full of scribes and makers of libraries. They wrote a language not very different from the Jewish, and cannot but have powerfully infected their Jewish fellows with the spirit of their toil and of their methods. To the Exile we certainly owe a large part of the historical books of the Old Testament, the arrangement of some of the prophetic writings, as well as—though the amount of this is very uncertain—part of the codification of the Law.

2. If the Exile was opportunity to the scribes, it can only have been despair to the priests. In this foreign land the nation was unclean; none of the old sacrifice or ritual was valid, and the people were reduced to the simplest elements of religion—prayer, fasting, and the reading of religious books. We shall find our prophecy noting the clamour of the exiles to God for “ordinances of righteousness”—that is, for the institution of legal and valid rites.† But the great lesson, which prophecy brings to the people of the Exile, is that pardon and restoration to God's favour are won only by waiting upon Him with all the heart. It was possible, of course, to observe some forms; to gather at intervals to inquire of the Lord, to keep the Sabbath, and to keep fasts. The first of these practices, out of which the synagogue probably took its rise, is noted by our prophet,‡ and he enforces Sabbath-keeping with words that add the blessing of prophecy to the law's ancient sanction of that institution. Four annual fasts were instituted in memory of the dark days of Jerusalem—the day of the beginning of Nebuchadrezzar's siege in the tenth month, the day of the capture in the fourth month, the day of the destruction in the fifth month, and the day of Gedaliah's murder in the tenth month. It might have been thought, that solemn anniversaries of a disaster so recent and still unrepaired would be kept with sincerity; but our prophet illustrates how soon even the most outraged feelings may grow formal, and how on their days of special humiliation, while

their captivity was still real, the exiles could oppress their own bondsmen and debtors. But there is no religious practice of this epoch more apparent through our prophecies than the reading of Scripture. Israel's hope was neither in sacrifice, nor in temple, nor in vision nor in lot, but in God's written Word; and when a new prophet arose, like the one we are about to study, he did not appeal for his authorisation, as previous prophets had done, to the fact of his call or inspiration, but it was enough for him to point to some former word of God, and cry, “See! at last the day has dawned for the fulfilment of that.” Throughout Second Isaiah this is what the anonymous prophet cares to establish—that the facts of to-day fit the promise of yesterday. We shall not understand our great prophecy unless we realise a people rising from fifty years' close study of Scripture, in strained expectation of its immediate fulfilment.

3. The third special feature of the people in exile is their application to commerce. At home the Jews had not been a commercial people.* But the opportunities of their Babylonian residence seem to have started them upon those habits, for which, through their longer exile in our era, the name of Jew has become a synonym. If that be so, Jeremiah's advice “to build and plant”† is historic, for it means no less than that the Jews should throw themselves into the life of the most trafficking nation of the time. Their increasing wealth proves how they followed this advice,—as well as perhaps such passages as Isaiah lv. 2, in which the commercial spirit is reproached for overwhelming the nobler desires of religion. The chief danger, incurred by the Jews from an intimate connection with the commerce of Babylonia, lay in the close relations of Babylonian commerce with Babylonian idolatry. The merchants of Mesopotamia had their own patron gods. In completing business contracts, a man had to swear by his idols,‡ and might have to enter their temples. In Isaiah lxx. 11, Jews are blamed for “forsaking Jehovah, and forgetting My holy mountain; preparing a table for Luck, and filling up mixed wine to Fortune.” Here it is more probable that mercantile speculation, rather than any other form of gambling, is intended.

III.

But while all this is certain and needing to be noted about the habits of the mass of the people, what little trace it has left in the best literature of the period! We have already noticed in that the great absence of local colour. The truth is that what we have been trying to describe as Jewish life in Babylon was only a surface over deeps in which the true life of the nation was at work—was volcanically at work. Throughout the Exile the true Jew lived inwardly. “Out of the depths do I cry to Thee, O Lord.” He was the inhabitant not so much of a foreign prison as of his own broken heart. “He sat by the rivers of Babylon:” but “he thought upon Zion.” Is it not a proof of what depths in human nature were being stirred, that so little comes to the surface to tell us of the external conditions of those days? There are no fossils in the strata of the earth, which have been

* Mr. St. Chad Boscawen's recent lectures, of which I have been able to see only the reports in the *Manchester Guardian*.

† Ch. lvi. 2.

‡ Ch. lvi. 13, 14.

* See p. 689 ff.

† Jer. xxix.

‡ “Records of the Past,” first series, ix. 95 seq.

cast forth from her inner fires; and if we find few traces of contemporary life in these deposits of Israel's history now before us, it is because they date from an age in which the nation was shaken and boiling to its centre.

For if we take the writings of this period—the Book of Lamentations, the Psalms of the Exile, and parts of other books—and put them together, the result is the impression of one of the strangest decompositions of human nature into its elements which the world has ever seen. Suffering and sin, recollection, remorse and revenge, fear and shame and hate—over the confusion of these the Spirit of God broods as over a second chaos, and draws each of them forth in turn upon some articulate prayer. Now it is the crimson flush of shame: “our soul is exceedingly filled with contempt.” Now it is the black rush of hate; for if we would see how hate can rage, we must go to the Psalms of the Exile, which call on the God of vengeance and curse the enemy and dash the little ones against the stones. But the deepest surge of all in that whirlpool of misery was the surge of sin. To change the figure, we see Israel's spirit writhing upward from some pain it but partly understands, crying out, “What is this that keeps God from hearing and saving me?” turning like a wounded beast from the face of its master to its sore again, understanding as no brute could the reason of its plague, till confession after confession breaks away and the penalty is accepted, and acknowledged guilt seems almost to act as an anodyne to the penalty it explains. “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? If Thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquity who shall stand?” No wonder, that with such a conscience the Jews occupied the Exile in writing the moral of their delinquent history, or that the rest of their literature which dates from that time should have remained ever since the world's confessional.

But in this awful experience, there is still another strain, as painful as the rest, but pure and very eloquent of hope—the sense of innocent suffering. We cannot tell the sources, from which this considerable feeling may have gathered during the Exile, any more than we can trace from how many of the upper folds of a valley the tiny rivulets start, which form the stream that issues from its lower end. One of these sources may have been, as we have already suggested, the experience of Jeremiah; another very probably sprang with every individual conscience in the new generation. Children come even to exiles, and although they bear the same pain with the same nerves as their fathers, they do so with a different conscience. The writings of the time dwell much on the sufferings of the children. The consciousness is apparent in them, that souls are born into the wrath of God, as well as banished there. “Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we bear their iniquities.” This experience developed with great force, till Israel felt that she suffered not under God's wrath, but for His sake; and so passed from the conscience of the felon to that of the martyr. But if we are to understand the prophecy we are about to study, we must remember how near akin these two consciences must have been in exiled Israel, and how easy it was for a prophet to speak—as our prophet does, sometimes with confusing rapidity of exchange—now in the voice of the older and more guilty generation, and

now in the voice of the younger and less deservedly punished.

Our survey of the external as well as the internal conditions of Israel in Exile is now finished. It has, I think, included every known feature of their experience in Babylonia, which could possibly illustrate our prophecy—dated, as we have felt ourselves compelled to date this, from the close of the Exile. Thus, as we have striven to trace, did Israel suffer, learn, grow, and hope for fifty years—under Nebuchadrezzar till 561, under his successor Evil-merodach till 559, under Nerigl'sar till 554, and then under the usurper Nabunahid. The last named probably oppressed the Jews more grievously than their previous tyrants, but with the aggravation of their yoke there grew evident, at the same time, the certainty of their deliverance. In 549 Cyrus overthrew the Medes, and became lord of Asia from the Indus to the Halys. From that event his conquest of Babylonia, however much delayed, could only be a matter of time.

It is at this juncture that our prophecy breaks in. Taking for granted Cyrus' sovereignty of the Medes, it still looks forward to his capture of Babylon. Let us, before advancing to its exposition, once more cast a rapid glance over the people, to whom it is addressed, and whom in their half century of waiting for it we have been endeavouring to describe.

First and most manifest, they are a People with a Conscience—a people with the most awful and most articulate conscience that ever before or since exposed a nation's history or tormented a generation with the curse of their own sin and the sin of their fathers. Behind them, ages of delinquent life, from the perusal of the record of which, with its regularly recurring moral, they have just risen: the Books of Kings appear to have been finished after the accession of Evil-merodach in 561. Behind them also nearly fifty years of sore punishment for their sins—punishment, which, as their Psalms confess, they at last understand and accept as deserved.

But, *secondly*, they are a People with a Great Hope. With their awful consciousness of guilt, they have the assurance that their punishment has its limits; that, to quote chap. xl. ver. 2, it is a “set period of service:” a former word of God having fixed it at not more than seventy years, and having promised the return of the nation thereafter to their own land.

And, *thirdly*, they are a People with a Great Opportunity. History is at last beginning to set towards the vindication of their hope: Cyrus, the master of the age, is moving rapidly, irresistibly, down upon their tyrants.

But, *fourthly*, in face of all their hope and opportunity, they are a People Disorganised, Distracted, and very Impotent—“worms and not men,” as they describe themselves. The generation of the tried and responsible leaders of the days of their independence are all dead, for “flesh is like grass;” no public institutions remain in their midst such as ever in the most hopeless periods of the past proved a rallying-point of their scattered forces. There is no king, temple, nor city; nor is there any great personality visible to draw their little groups together, marshal them, and lead them forth behind him. Their one hope is in the Word of God, for which they “wait more than they that watch for the morning;” and the one duty of their nameless

prophets is to persuade them that this Word has at last come to pass, and, in the absence of king, Messiah, priest, and great prophet, is able to lift them to the opportunity that God's hand has opened before them, and to the accomplishment of their redemption.

Upon Israel, with such a Conscience, such a Hope, such an Opportunity, and such an unaided Reliance on God's bare Word, that Word at last broke in a chorus of voices.

Of these the first, as was most meet, spoke pardon to the people's conscience and the proclamation that their set period of warfare was accomplished; the second announced that circumstances and the politics of the world, hitherto adverse, would be made easy to their return; the third bade them, in their bereavement of earthly leaders, and their own impotence, find their eternal confidence in God's Word; while the fourth lifted them, as with one heart and voice, to herald the certain return of Jehovah, at the head of His people, to His own City, and His quiet, shepherdly rule of them on their own land.

These herald voices form the prologue to our prophecy, chap. xl. 1-II, to which we will now turn.

BOOK II.

THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROLOGUE: THE FOUR HERALD VOICES.

ISAIAH xl. 1-II.

It is only Voices which we hear in this Prologue. No forms can be discerned, whether of men or angels, and it is even difficult to make out the direction from which the Voices come. Only one thing is certain—that they break the night, that they proclaim the end of a long but fixed period, during which God has punished and forsaken His people. At first, the persons addressed are the prophets, that they may speak to the people (vv. 1, 2); but afterwards Jerusalem as a whole is summoned to publish the good tidings (ver. 9). This interchange between a part of the people and the whole—this commission to prophesy, made with one breath to some of the nation for the sake of the rest, and with the next breath to the entire nation—is a habit of our prophet to which we shall soon get accustomed. How natural and characteristic it is, is proved by its appearance in these very first verses.

The beginning of the good tidings is Israel's pardon; yet it seems not to be the people's return to Palestine which is announced in consequence of this, so much as their God's return to them. "Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight a highway for our God. Behold the Lord Jehovah will come." We may, however, take "the way of Jehovah in the wilderness" to mean what it means in the sixty-eighth Psalm, —His going forth before His people and leading of them back; while the promise that He will come to "shepherd His flock" (ver. 11) is, of course, the promise that He will resume the government of Israel upon their own land. There

can be no doubt, therefore, that this chapter was meant for the people at the close of their captivity in Babylon. But do not let us miss the pathetic fact, that Israel is addressed not in her actual shape of a captive people in a foreign land, but under the name and aspect of her far-away desolate country. In these verses Israel is "Jerusalem, Zion, the cities of Judah." Such designations do not prove, as a few critics have rather pedantically supposed, that the writer of the verses lived in Judah and addressed himself to what was under his eyes. It is not the vision of a Jew at home that has determined the choice of these names, but the desire and the dream of a Jew abroad: that extraordinary passion, which, however distant might be the land of his exile, ever filled the Jew's eyes with Zion, caused him to feel the ruin and forsakenness of his Mother more than his own servitude, and swept his patriotic hopes, across his own deliverance and return, to the greater glory of her restoration.* There is nothing, therefore, to prevent us taking for granted, as we did in the previous chapter, that the speaker or speakers of these verses stood among the exiles themselves; but who they were—men or angels, prophets or scribes—is lost in the darkness out of which their music breaks.†

Nevertheless the prophecy is not anonymous. By these impersonal voices a personal revelation is made. The prophets may be nameless, but the Deity who speaks through them speaks as already known and acknowledged: "My people, saith your God."

This is a point, which, though it takes for its expression no more than these two little pronouns, we must not hurriedly pass over. All the prophecy we are about to study may be said to hang from these pronouns. They are the hinges, on which the door of this new temple of revelation swings open before the long-expectant people. And, in fact, such a conscience and sympathy as these little words express form the necessary premise of all revelation. Revelation implies a previous knowledge of God, and cannot work upon men, except there already exist in them the sense that they and God somehow belong to each other. This sense need be neither pure, nor strong, nor articulate. It may be the most selfish and cowardly of guilty fears,—Jacob's dread as he drew near Esau, whom he had treacherously supplanted,—the vaguest of ignorant desires, the Athenians' worship of the Unknown God. But, whatever it is, the angel comes to wrestle with it, the apostle is sent to declare it; revelation in some form takes it as its premise and starting-point. This previous sense of God may also be fuller than in the cases just cited. Take our Lord's own illustration. Upon the prodigal in the strange country there surged again the far-ebbed memory of his home and childhood, of his years of familiarity with a Father; and it was this tide which carried back his penitent heart within the hearing of his Father's voice, and the revelation of the love that became his new life. Now Israel, also in a far-off land, were borne upon the recollection of home and of life in the favour of their God. We have seen with what knowledge of Him and from what relations with Him they were banished.

* See p. 742.

† From the sequence of the voices, it would seem that we had in ch. xl. not a mere collection of anonymous prophecies arranged by an editor, but one complete prophecy by the author of most of Isa. xl.-lxvi. set in the dramatic form which obtains through the other chapters.

To the men of the Exile God was already a Name and an Experience, and because that Name was *The Righteous*, and that Experience was all grace and promise, these men waited for His Word more than they that wait for the morning; and when at length the Word broke from the long darkness and silence, they received it, though its bearers might be unseen and unaccredited, because they recognised and acknowledged in it Himself. He who spoke was *their God*, and they were *His people*. This conscience and sympathy was all the title or credential which the revelation required. It is, therefore, not too much to say, as we have said, that the two pronouns in chap. xl., ver. 1, are the necessary premise of the whole prophecy which that verse introduces.

With this introduction we may now take up the four herald voices of the Prologue. Whatever may have been their original relation to one another, whether or not they came to Israel by different messengers, they are arranged (as we saw at the close of the previous chapter) in manifest order and progress of thought, and they meet in due succession the experiences of Israel at the close of the Exile. For the first of them (vv. 1 and 2) gives the "subjective assurance" of the coming redemption: it is the Voice of Grace. The second (vv. 3-5) proclaims the "objective reality" of that redemption: it may be called the Voice of Providence, or—to use the name by which our prophecy loves to entitle the just and victorious providence of God—the Voice of Righteousness. The third (vv. 6-8) uncovers the pledge and earnest of the redemption: in the weakness of men this shall be the Word of God. While the fourth (vv. 9-11) is the Proclamation of Jehovah's restored kingdom, when He cometh as a shepherd to shepherd His people. To this progress and climax the music of the passage forms a perfect accompaniment. It would be difficult to find in any language lips that first more softly woo the heart, and then take to themselves so brave a trumpet of challenge and assurance. The opening is upon a few short pulses of music, which steal from heaven as gently as the first ripples of light in a cloudless dawn—

Nānāmu, nāhāmu ammi :

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people :

Dabberu 'al-lev Yerushalāim.

Speak upon the heart of Jerusalem.*

But then the trumpet-tone breaks forth, "Call unto her;" and on that high key the music stays, sweeping with the second voice across hill and dale like a company of swift horsemen, stooping with the third for a while to the elegy upon the withered grass, but then recovering itself, braced by all the strength of the Word of God, to peal from tower to tower with the fourth, upon the cry, "Behold, the Lord cometh," till it sinks almost from sound to sight, and yields us, as from the surface of still waters, that sweet reflection of the twenty-third Psalm with which the Prologue concludes.

1. Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.
Speak ye home to the heart of Jerusalem, and call unto her,
That accomplished is her warfare, that absolved is her iniquity;
That she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins.

* Every one who appreciates the music of the original will agree how incomparably Händel has interpreted it in those pulses of music with which his "Messiah" opens.

This first voice, with the music of which our hearts have been thrilled ever since we can remember, speaks twice: first in a whisper, then in a call—the whisper of the Lover and the call of the Lord. "Speak ye home to the heart of Jerusalem, and call unto her."

Now Jerusalem lay in ruins, a city through whose breached walls all the winds of heaven blew mournfully across her forsaken floors. And the "heart of Jerusalem," which was with her people in exile, was like the city—broken and defenceless. In that far-off, unsympathetic land it lay open to the alien; tyrants forced their idols upon it, the peoples tortured it with their jests.

For they that led us captive required of us songs,
And they that wasted us required of us mirth.

But observe how gently the Divine Beleaguerer approaches, how softly He bids His heralds plead by the gaps, through which the oppressor has forced his idols and his insults. Of all human language they might use, God bids His messengers take and plead with the words with which a man will plead at a maiden's heart, knowing that he has nothing but love to offer as right of entrance, and waiting until love and trust come out to welcome him. "Speak ye," says the original literally, "on to," or "up against" or "up round the heart of Jerusalem,"—a forcible expression, like the German "An das Herz," or the sweet Scottish, "It cam' up roond my heart," and perhaps best rendered into English by the phrase, "Speak home to the heart." It is the ordinary Hebrew expression for wooing. As from man to woman when he wins her, the Old Testament uses it several times. To "speak home to the heart" is to use language in which authority and argument are both ignored, and love works her own inspiration. While the haughty Babylonian planted by force his idols, while the folly and temptations of heathendom surged recklessly in, God Himself, the Creator of this broken heart, its Husband and Inhabitant of old,* stood lowly by its breaches, pleading in love the right to enter. But when entrance has been granted, see how He bids His heralds change their voice and disposition. The suppliant lover, being received, assumes possession and defence, and they, who were first bid whisper as beggars by each unguarded breach, now leap upon the walls to call from the accepted Lord of the city: "Fulfilled is thy time of service, absolved thine iniquity, received hast thou of Jehovah's hand double for all thy sins."

Now this is no mere rhetorical figure. This is the abiding attitude and aim of the Almighty towards men. God's target is our heart. His revelation, whatever of law or threat it send before, is, in its own superlative clearness and urgency, Grace. It comes to man by way of the heart; not at first by argument addressed to the intellect, nor by appeal to experience, but by the sheer strength of a love laid "on to the heart." It is, to begin with, a subjective thing. Is revelation, then, entirely a subjective assurance? Do the pardon and peace which it proclaims remain only feelings of the heart, without anything to correspond to them in real fact? By no means; for these Jews the revelation now whispered to their heart will actually take shape in providences of the most concrete kind. A

* See ch. liv., where this figure is developed with great beauty.

voice will immediately call, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," and the way will be prepared. Babylon will fall; Cyrus will let Israel go; their release will appear—most concrete of things!—in "black and white" on a Persian state-parchment. Yet, before these events happen and become part of His people's experience, God desires first to convince His people by the sheer urgency of His love. Before He displays His Providence, He will speak in the power and evidence of His Grace. Afterwards, His prophets shall appeal to outward facts; we shall find them in succeeding chapters arguing both with Israel and the heathen on grounds of reason and the facts of history. But, in the meantime, let them only feel that in His Grace they have something for the heart of men, which, striking home, shall be its own evidence and force.

Thus God adventures His Word forth by nameless and unaccredited men upon no other authority than the Grace, with which it is fraught for the heart of His people. The illustration, which this affords of the method and evidence of Divine revelation, is obvious. Let us, with all the strength of which we are capable, emphasise the fact that our prophecy—which is full of the materials for an elaborate theology, which contains the most detailed apologetic in the whole Bible, and displays the most glorious prospect of man's service and destiny—takes its source and origin from a simple revelation of Grace and the subjective assurance of this in the heart of those to whom it is addressed. This proclamation of Grace is as characteristic and dominant in Second Isaiah as we saw the proclamation of conscience in chap. i. to be characteristic of the First Isaiah.

Before we pass on, let us look for a moment at the contents of this Grace, in the three clauses of the prophet's cry: "Fulfilled is her warfare, absolved her guilt, received hath she of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins." The very grammar here is eloquent of grace. The emphasis lies on the three predicates, which ought to stand in translation, as they do in the original, at the beginning of each clause. Prominence is given, not to the warfare, nor to the guilt, nor to the sins, but to this, that "accomplished" is the warfare, "absolved" the guilt, "sufficiently expiated" the sins. It is a great *AT LAST* which these clauses peal forth; but an *At Last* whose tone is not so much inevitableness as undeserved grace. The term translated warfare means "period of military service, appointed term of conscription;" and the application is apparent when we remember that the Exile had been fixed, by the Word of God through Jeremiah, to a definite number of years. "Absolved" is the passive of a verb meaning to "pay off what is due."* But the third clause is especially gracious. It declares that Israel has suffered of punishment more than double enough to atone for her sins. This is not a way of regarding either sin or atonement, which, theologically speaking, is accurate. What of its relation to our Articles, that man cannot give satisfaction for his sins by the work of his hands or the pains of his flesh? No: it would scarcely pass some of our creeds to-day. But all the more, that it thus bursts forth from strict terms of dealing, does it reveal the generosity of Him who utters it. How full of pity God is, to take so much account of the sufferings sinners have brought

* Lev. xxvii.

upon themselves! How full of grace to reckon those sufferings "double the sins" that had earned them! It is as when we have seen gracious men make us a free gift, and in their courtesy insist that we have worked for it. It is grace masked by grace. As the height of art is to conceal art, so the height of grace is to conceal grace, which it does in this verse.

Such is the Voice of Grace. But,

2. Hark, One calling!
In the wilderness prepare the way of Jehovah!
Make straight in the desert an highway for our God!
Every valley shall be exalted,
And every mountain and hill be made low:
And the crooked grow straight,
And rough places a plain:
And the glory of Jehovah be revealed,
And see it shall all flesh together;
For the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken.

The relation of this Voice to the previous one has already been indicated. This is the witness of Providence following upon the witness of Grace. Religion is a matter in the first place between God and the heart; but religion does not, as many mock, remain an inward feeling. The secret relation between God and His people issues into substantial fact, visible to all men. History vindicates faith; Providence executes Promise; Righteousness follows Grace. So, as the first Voice was spoken "to the heart," this second is for the hands and feet and active will. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." If you, poor captives as you are, begin to act upon the grace whispered in your trembling hearts, the world will show the result. All things will come round to your side. A levelled empire, an altered world—across those your way shall lie clear to Jerusalem. You shall go forth in the sight of all men, and future generations looking back shall praise this manifest wonder of your God. "The glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and see it shall all flesh together."

On which words, how can our hearts help rising from the comfort of grace to the sense of mastery over this world, to the assurance of heaven itself? History must come round to the side of faith—as it has come round not in the case of Jewish exiles only, but wheresoever such a faith as theirs has been repeated. History must come round to the side of faith, if men will only obey the second as well as the first of these herald voices. But we are too ready to listen to the Word of the Lord, without seeking to prepare His way. We are satisfied with the personal comfort of our God; we are contented to be forgiven and—oh mockery!—left alone. But the word of God will not leave us alone, and not for comfort only is it spoken. On the back of the voice, which sets our heart right with God, comes the voice to set the world right, and no man is godly who has not heard both. Are we timid and afraid that facts will not correspond to our faith? Nay, but as God reigneth they shall, if only we put to our hands and make them; "all flesh shall see it," if we will but "prepare the way of the Lord."

Have we only ancient proofs of this? On the contrary, God has done like wonders within the lives of those of us who are yet young. During our generation, a people has appealed from the convictions of her heart to the arbitrament of history, and appealed not in vain. When the citizens of the Northern States of the American Republic, not content as they might have been with their protests against slavery, rose to vin-

dicare these by the sword, they faced, humanly speaking, a risk as great as that to which Jew was ever called by the word of God. Their own brethren were against them; the world stood aloof. But even so, unaided by united patriotism and as much dismayed as encouraged by the opinions of civilisation, they rose to the issue on the strength of conscience and their hearts. They rose and they conquered. Slavery was abolished. What had been but the conviction of a few men became the surprise, the admiration, the consent of the whole world. "The glory of the Lord was revealed, and all flesh saw it together."

3. But the shadow of death falls on everything, even on the way of the Lord. By 550 B. C.—that is, after thirty-eight years of exile—nearly all the strong men of Israel's days of independence must have been taken away. Death had been busy with the exiles for more than a generation. There was no longer any human representative of Jehovah to rally the people's trust; the monarchy, each possible Messiah who in turn held it, the priesthood, and the prophethood—whose great personalities so often took the place of Israel's official leaders—had all alike disappeared. It was little wonder, then, that a nation accustomed to be led, not by ideas like us Westerns, but by personages, who were to it the embodiment of Jehovah's will and guidance, should have been cast into despair by the call, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." What sort of a call was this for a people whose strong men were like things uprooted and withered! How could one be, with any heart, a herald of the Lord to such a people!

Hark one saying "Call."*
And I said:

"What can I call?"

All flesh is grass,
And all its beauty like a wild-flower!
Withers grass, fades flower,
When the breath of Jehovah blows on it.
Surely grass is the people."

Back comes a voice like the east wind's for pitilessness to the flowers, but of the east wind's own strength and clearness, to proclaim Israel's everlasting hope.

Withers grass, fades flower,
But the word of our God endureth for ever.

Everything human may perish; the day may be past of the great prophets, of the priests—of the King in his beauty, who was vicegerent of God. But the people have God's word; when all their leaders have fallen, and every visible authority for God is taken away, this shall be their rally and their confidence.

All this is too like the actual experience of Israel in Exile not to be the true interpretation of this third, stern Voice. Their political and religious institutions, which had so often proved the initiative of a new movement, or served as a bridge to carry the nation across disaster to a larger future, were not in existence. Nor does any Moses, as in Egypt of old, rise to visibleness from among his obscure people, impose his authority upon them, marshal them, and lead them out behind him to freedom. But what we see is a scattered and a leaderless people, stirred in their shadow, as a ripe cornfield is stirred by the breeze before dawn—stirred in their shadow by

* The technical word to preach or proclaim.

the ancient promises of God, and everywhere breaking out at the touch of these into psalms and prophecies of hope. We see them expectant of redemption, we see them resolved to return, we see them carried across the desert to Zion, and from first to last it is the word of God that is their inspiration and assurance.

They, who formerly had rallied round the Ark or the Temple, or who had risen to the hope of a glorious Messiah, do not now speak of all these, but their "hope," they tell us, "is in His word;" it is the instrument of their salvation, and their destiny is to be its evangelists.

4. To this high destiny the fourth Voice now summons them, by a vivid figure

Up on a high mountain, get thee up,
Heraldess of good news, O Zion!
Lift up with strength thy voice,
Heraldess of good news, Jerusalem!
Lift up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah:—
Behold, your God.
Behold, my Lord Jehovah, with power He cometh,
And His arm rules for Him.
Behold, His reward with Him,
And His recompense before Him.
As a shepherd His flock He shepherds;
With His right arm gathers the lambs,
And in His bosom bears them.
Ewe-mothers He tenderly leads.

The title which I have somewhat awkwardly translated "heraldess"—but in English there is really no better word for it—is the feminine participle of a verb meaning to "thrill," or "give joy, by means of good news." It is used generally to tell such happy news as the birth of a child, but mostly in the special sense of carrying tidings of victory or peace home from the field to the people. The feminine participle would seem from Psalm lxxviii., "the women who publish victory to the great host," to have been the usual term for the members of those female choirs, who, like Miriam and her maidens, celebrated a triumph in face of the army, or came forth from the city to hail the returning conqueror, as the daughters of Jerusalem hailed Saul and David. As such a chorister, Zion is now summoned to proclaim Jehovah's arrival at the gates of the cities of Judah.

The verses from "Behold, your God," to the end of the Prologue are the song of the heraldess. Do not their mingled martial and pastoral strains exactly suit the case of the Return? For this is an expedition, on which the nation's champion has gone forth, not to lead His enemies captives to His gates, but that He may gather His people home. Not mailed men, in the pride of a victory they have helped to win, march in behind Him,—“armour and tumult and the garment rolled in blood,”—but a herd of mixed and feeble folk, with babes and women, in need of carriage and gentle leading, wander wearily back. And, therefore, in the mouth of the heraldess the figure changes from a warrior-king to the Good Shepherd. "With His right arm He gathers the lambs, and in His bosom bears them. Ewe-mothers He gently leads." How true a picture, and how much it recalls! Fifty years before, the exiles left their home (as we can see to this day upon Assyrian sculptures) in closely-driven companies, fettered, and with the urgency upon them of grim soldiers, who marched at intervals in their ranks to keep up the pace, and who tossed the weaklings impatiently aside. But now, see the slow and loosely-gathered bands wander back, just as quickly as the weakest feel strength to travel, and without any force or any

guidance save that of their Almighty, Unseen Shepherd.

We are now able to appreciate the dramatic unity of this Prologue. How perfectly it gathers into its four Voices the whole course of Israel's redemption: the first assurance of Grace whispered to the heart, co-operation with Providence, confidence in God's bare Word, the full Return, and the Restoration of the City.

But its climax is undoubtedly the honour it lays upon the whole people to be publishers of the good news of God. Of this it speaks with trumpet tones. All Jerusalem must be a herald-people. And how could Israel help owning the constraint and inspiration to so high an office, after so heartfelt an experience of grace, so evident a redemption, so glorious a proof of the power of the Word of God? To have the heart thus filled with grace, to have the will enlisted in so Divine a work, to have known the almightiness of the Divine Word when everything else failed—after such an experience, who would not be able to preach the good news of God, to foretell, as our prophet bids Israel foretell, the coming of the Kingdom and Presence of God—the day when the Lord's flock shall be perfect and none wanting, when society, though still weary and weak and mortal, shall have no stragglers nor outcasts nor reprobates.

O God, so fill us with Thy grace and enlist us in Thy work, so manifest the might of Thy word to us, that the ideal of Thy perfect kingdom may shine as bright and near to us as to Thy prophet of old, and that we may become its inspired preachers and ever labour in its hope. Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

GOD: A SACRAMENT.

ISAIAH xl. 12-31.

SUCH are the Four Voices which herald the day of Israel's redemption. They are scarcely silent, before the Sun Himself uprises, and horizon after horizon of His empire is displayed to the eyes of His starved and waiting people. From the prologue of the prophecy, in chap. xl. 1-11, we advance to the presentation, in chaps. xl. 12-xli., of its primary and governing truth—the sovereignty and omnipotence of God, the God of Israel.

We may well call this truth the sun of the new day which Israel is about to enter. For as it is the sun which makes the day, and not the day which reveals the sun; so it is God, supreme and almighty, who interprets, predicts, and controls His people's history, and not their history, which, in its gradual evolution, is to make God's sovereignty and omnipotence manifest to their experience. Let us clearly understand this. The prophecy, which we are about to follow, is an argument not so much from history to God as from God to history. Israel already have their God; and it is because He is what He is, and what they ought to know Him to be,* that they are bidden believe that their future shall take a certain course. The prophet begins with God, and everything follows from God. All that in these chapters lends light or force, all that inter-

prets the history of to-day and fills to-morrow with hope, fact, and promise alike, the captivity of Israel, the appearance of Cyrus, the fall of Babylon, Israel's redemption, the extension of their mission to the ends of the earth, the conversion of the Gentiles, the equipment, discipline, and triumph of the Servant Himself,—we may even say the expanded geography of our prophet, the countries which for the first time emerge from the distant west within the vision of a Hebrew seer,—all are due to that primary truth about God with which we are now presented. It is God's sovereignty which brings such far-off things into the interest of Israel; it is God's omnipotence which renders such impossible things practicable. And as with the subjects, so with the style of the following chapters. The prophet's style is throughout the effect of his perfect and brilliant monotheism. It is the thought of God which everywhere kindles his imagination. His most splendid passages are those in which he soars to some lofty vision of the Divine glory in creation or history; while his frequent sarcasm and ridicule owe their effectiveness to the sudden scorn with which, from such a view, scattering epigrams the while, he sweeps down upon the heathen's poor images, or Israel's grudging thoughts of his God. The breadth and the force of his imagination, the sweep of his rhetoric, the intensity of his scorn, may all be traced to his sense of God's sovereignty, and are the signs to us of how absolutely he was possessed by this as his main and governing truth.

This, then, being the sun of Israel's coming day, we may call what we find in chap. xl. 11-xli. the sunrise—the full revelation and uprising on our sight of this original gospel of the prophet. It is addressed to two classes of men; in chap. xl. 12-31 to Israel, but in chap. xli. (for the greater part, at least) to the Gentiles. In dealing with these two classes the prophet makes a great difference. To Israel he presents their God, as it were, in sacrament; but to the Gentiles he urges God's claims in challenge and argument. It is to the past that he summons Israel, and to what they ought to know already about their God; it is to the future, to history yet unmade, that he proposes to the Gentiles they should together appeal, in order to see whether his God or their gods are the true Deity. In this chapter we shall deal with the first of these—God in sacrament.

The fact is familiar to all, that the Old Testament nowhere feels the necessity of proving the existence of God. That would have been a proof unintelligible to those to whom its prophets addressed themselves. In the time when the Old Testament came to him, man as little doubted the existence of God as he doubted his own life. But as life sometimes burned low, needing replenishment, so faith would grow despondent and morbid, needing to be led away from objects which only starved it, or produced, as idolatry did, the veriest delirium of a religion. A man had to get his faith lifted from the thoughts of his own mind and the works of his own hand, to be borne upon and nourished by the works of God,—to kindle with the sunrise, to broaden out by the sight of the firmament, to deepen as he faced the spaces of night,—and win calmness and strength to think life into order as he looked forth upon the marshalled hosts of heaven, hav-

* See xl. 21, *Have ye not known?*

ing all the time no doubt that the God who created and guided these was his God. Therefore, when psalmist or prophet calls Israel to lift their eyes to the hills, or to behold how the heavens declare the glory of God, or to listen to that unbroken tradition, which day passes to day and night to night, of the knowledge of the Creator, it is not proofs to doubting minds which he offers: it is spiritual nourishment to hungry souls. These are not arguments—they are sacraments. When we Christians go to the Lord's Supper, we go not to have the Lord proved to us, but to feed upon a life and a love of whose existence we are past all doubt. Our sacrament fills all the mouths by which needy faith is fed—such as outward sight, and imagination, and memory, and wonder, and love. Now very much what the Lord's Supper is to us for fellowship with God and feeding upon Him, that were the glory of the heavens, and the everlasting hills, and the depth of the sea, and the vision of the stars to the Hebrews. They were the sacraments of God. By them faith was fed, and the spirit of man entered into the enjoyment of God, whose existence indeed he had never doubted, but whom he had lost, forgotten, or misunderstood.

Now it is as such a minister of sacrament to God's starved and disheartened people that our prophet appears in chap. xl. 12-31.

There were three elements in Israel's starvation. Firstly, for nearly fifty years they had been deprived of the accustomed ordinances of religion. Temple and altar had perished; the common praise and the national religious fellowship were impossible; the traditional symbols of the faith lay far out of sight; there was at best only a precarious ministry of the Word. But, in the second place, this famine of the Word and of Sacraments was aggravated by the fact that history had gone against the people. To the baser minds among them, always ready to grant their allegiance to success, this could only mean that the gods of the heathen had triumphed over Jehovah. It is little wonder that such experience, assisted by the presentation, at every turn in their ways, of idols and a splendid idol-worship, the fashion and delight of the populations through whom they were mixed, should have tempted many Jews to feed their starved hearts at the shrines of their conquerors' gods. But the result could only be the further atrophy of their religious nature. It has been held as a reason for the worship of idols that they excite the affection and imagination of the worshipper. They do no such thing: they starve and they stunt these. The image reacts upon the imagination, infects it with its own narrowness and poverty, till man's noblest creative faculty becomes the slave of its own poor toy. But, thirdly, if the loftier spirits in Israel refused to believe that Jehovah, exalted in righteousness, could be less than the brutal deities whom Babylon vaunted over Him, they were flung back upon the sorrowful conviction that their God had cast them off; that He had retreated from the patronage of so unworthy a people into the veiled depths of His own nature. Then upon that heaven, from which no answer came to those who were once its favourites, they cast we can scarcely tell what reflection of their own weary and spiritless estate. As, standing over a city by night, you will see the majestic darkness above stained and distorted into shapes of pain or wrath by the upcast of the city's broken, murky lights, so many of the

nobler exiles saw upon the blank, unanswering heaven a horrible mirage of their own trouble and fear. Their weariness said, He is weary; the ruin of their national life reflected itself as the frustration of His purposes; their accusing conscience saw the darkness of His counsel relieved only by streaks of wrath.

But none of these tendencies in Israel went so far as to deny that there was a God, or even to doubt His existence. This, as we have said, was nowhere yet the temptation of mankind. When the Jew lapsed from that true faith, which we have seen his nation carry into exile, he fell into one of the two tempers just described—devotion to false gods in the shape of idols, or despondency consequent upon false notions of the true God. It is against these tempers, one after another, that chap. xl. 12-31 is directed. And so we understand why, though the prophet is here declaring the basis and spring of all his subsequent prophecy, he does not adopt the method of abstract argument. He is not treating with men who have had no true knowledge of God in the past, or whose intellect questions God's reality. He is treating with men who have a national heritage of truth about God, but they have forgotten it; who have hearts full of religious affection, but it has been betrayed; who have a devout imagination, but it has been starved; who have hopes, but they are faint unto death. He will recall to them their heritage, rally their shrinking convictions by the courage of his own faith, feed their hunger after righteousness* by a new hope set to noble music, and display to the imagination that has been stunted by so long looking upon the face of idols the wide horizons of Divine glory in earth and heaven.

His style corresponds to his purpose. He does not syllogise; he exhorts, recalls, and convicts by assertion. The passage is a series of questions, rallies, and promises. "Have ye not known? have ye not heard?" is his chief note. Instead of arranging facts in history or nature as in themselves a proof for God, he mentions them only by way of provoking inward recollections. His sharp questions are as hooks to draw from his hearers' hearts their timid and starved convictions, that he may nourish these upon the sacramental glories of nature and of history.

Such a purpose and style trust little to method, and it would be useless to search for any strict division of strophes in the passage.† The following, however, is a manifest division of subject, according to the two tempers to which the prophet had to appeal. Verses 12 to 25, and perhaps 26, are addressed to the idolatrous Jews. But in 26 there is a transition to the despair of the nobler hearts in Israel, who, though they continued to believe in the One True God, imagined that He had abandoned them; and to such vv. 27 to 31 are undoubtedly addressed. The different treatment accorded to the two classes is striking. The former of these the prophet does not call by any title of the people of God; with the latter he pleads by a dear

* That is in the sense, in which our prophet uses the word, of salvation. See ch. xiv.

† Some intention of division undoubtedly appears. Notice the double refrain, *To whom will ye liken*, etc., of vv. 18 and 25; and then at equal distance from either occurrence of this challenge the appeal, *Dost thou not know*, etc., vv. 21 and 28. But though these signs of a strict division appear, the rest is submerged by the strong flood of feeling which rushes too deep and rapid for any hard-and-fast embankments.

double name that he may win them through every recollection of their gracious past, *Jacob* and *Israel* (ver. 27). Challenge and sarcasm are his style with the idolaters, his language clashing out in bursts too loud and rapid sometimes for the grammar, as in ver. 24; but with the despondent his way is gentle persuasiveness, with music that swells and brightens steadily, passing without a break from the minor key of pleading to the major of glorious promise.

I. AGAINST THE IDOLATERS. A couple of sarcastic sentences upon idols and their manufacture (vv. 19, 20) stand between two majestic declarations of God's glory in nature and in history (vv. 12-17 and 21-24). It is an appeal from the worshippers' images to their imagination. "Who hath measured in his hollow hand the waters, and heaven ruled off with a span? Or caught in a tierce the dust of the earth, and weighed in scales mountains, and hills in a balance? Who hath directed the spirit of Jehovah, and as man of His counsel hath helped Him to know? With whom took He counsel, that such an one informed Him and taught Him in the orthodox path, and taught Him knowledge and helped Him to know the way of intelligence?" The term translated "orthodox path" is literally "path of ordinance or judgment, the regular path," and is doubtless to be taken along with its parallel, "way of intelligence," as a conventional phrase of education, which the prophet employed to make his sarcasm the stronger. "Lo nations! as a drop from a bucket, and like dust in a balance, are they reckoned. Lo the Isles! * as a trifle He lifteth. And Lebanon is by no means enough for burning, nor its brute-life enough for an offering. All the nations are as nothing before Him, as spent and as waste are they reckoned for Him."

When he has thus soared enough, as on an archangel's wings, he swoops with one rapid question down from the height of his imagination upon the images.

"To whom then will ye liken God, and what likeness will ye range by Him?"

"The image! A smith cast it, and a smelter plates it with gold, and smelts silver chains. He that is straitened for an offering—he chooseth a tree that does not rot, seeks to him a cunning carver to set up an image that will not totter." †

The image shrivels up in face of that imagination; the idol is abolished by laughter. There is here, and for almost the first time in history, the same intellectual intolerance of images, the same burning sense of the unreasonableness of their worship, which has marked all monotheists, and turned even the meekest of their kind into fierce scorers and satirists—Elijah, Mohammed, Luther, and Knox. ‡ We hear this laughter from them all. Sometimes it may sound truculent or even brutal, but let us remember what is behind it. When we hear it condemned—as, in the interests of art and imagination, its puritan

outbursts have often been condemned—as a barbarian incapacity to sympathise with the æsthetic instincts of man, or to appreciate the influence of a beautiful and elevating cult, we can reply that it was the imagination itself which often inspired both the laughter at, and the breaking of, images, and that, because the iconoclast had a loftier vision of God than the image-maker, he has, on the whole, more really furthered the progress of art than the artist whose works he has destroyed. It is certain, for instance, that no one would exchange the beauties of the prophecy now before us, with its sublime imaginations of God, for all the beauty of all the idols of Babylonia which it consigned to destruction. And we dare to say the same of two other epochs, when the uncompromising zeal of monotheists crushed to the dust the fruits of centuries of Christian art. The Koran is not often appealed to as a model of poetry, but it contains passages whose imagination of God, broad as the horizon of the desert of its birth, and swift and clear as the desert dawn, may be regarded as infinitely more than compensation—from a purely artistic point of view—for the countless works of Christian ritual and imagery which it inspired the rude cavalry of the desert to trample beneath the hoofs of their horses. And again, if we are to blame the reformers of Western Christendom for the cruelty with which they lifted their hammers against the carved work of the sanctuary, do not let us forget how much of the spirit of the best modern art is to be traced to their more spiritual and lofty conceptions of God. No one will question how much Milton's imagination owed to his Protestantism, or how much Carlyle's dramatic genius was the result of his Puritan faith. But it is to the spirit of the Reformation, as it liberated the worshipper's soul from bondage to artificial and ecclesiastical symbols of the Deity, that we may also ascribe a large part of the force of that movement towards Nature and the imagination of God in His creation which inspired, for example, Wordsworth's poetry, and those visual sacraments of rainbow, storm, and dawn to which Browning so often lifts our souls from their dissatisfaction with ritual or with argument.

From his sarcasm on the idols our prophet returns to his task of drawing forth Israel's memory and imagination. "Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? He that is enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its dwellers are before Him as grasshoppers; who stretcheth as a fine veil the heavens, and spreadeth them like a dwelling tent" (that is, as easily as if they were not even a pavilion or marquee, but only a humble dwelling tent). "He who bringeth great men to nothing, the judges of the earth He maketh as waste. Yea, they were not planted; yea, they were not sown; yea, their root had not struck in the earth, but (immediately) He blew upon them and they withered, and a whirlwind like stubble carried them away. To whom, then, will ye liken Me, that I may match with him? saith the Holy One." But this time it is not necessary to suggest the idols; they were dissolved by that previous burst of laughter. Therefore, the prophet turns to the other class in Israel with whom he has to deal.

* See p. 757.

† If an idol leant over or fell that was the very worst of omens; cf. the case of Dagon.

‡ When John Knox was a prisoner in France, "the officers brought to him a painted board, which they called Our Lady, and commanded him to kiss it. They violently thrust it into his face, and put it betwixt his hands, who, seeing the extremity, took the idol, and advisedly looking about, he cast it into the river, and said, 'Let Our Lady now save herself; she is light enough; let her learn to swim!' After that was no Scotsman urged with that idolatry."—KNOX, "History of the Reformation."

2. TO THE DESPAIRERS OF THE LORD. From history we pass back to nature in ver. 26, which forms a transition, the language growing steadier from the impetuosity of the address to the idolaters to the serene music of the second part. Enough rebuke has the prophet made. As he now lifts his people's vision to the stars, it is not to shame their idols, but to feed their hearts. "Lift up on high your eyes and see! Who hath created these? Who leads forth by number their host, and all of them calleth by name, by abundance of might, for He is powerful in strength, not one is amissing." Under such a night, that veils the confusion of earth only to bring forth all the majesty and order of heaven, we feel a moment's pause. Then as the expanding eyes of the exiles gaze upon the infinite power above, the prophet goes on. "Why then sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel? Hidden is my way from Jehovah, and from my God my right hath passed."

Why does the prophet point his people to the stars? Because he is among Israel on that vast Babylonian plain, from whose crowded and confused populations, struggling upon one monotonous level, there is no escape for the heart but to the stars. Think of that plain when Nebuchadrezzar was its tyrant; of the countless families of men torn from their far homes and crushed through one another upon its surface; of the ancient liberties that were trampled in that servitude, of the languages that were stifled in that Babel, of the many patriotisms set to sigh themselves out into the tyrant's mud and mortar! Ah heaven! was there a God in thee, that one man could thus crush nations in his vat, as men crushed shell-fish in those days, to dye his imperial purple? Was there any Providence above, that he could tear peoples from the lands and seas, where their various gifts and offices for humanity had been developed, and press them to his selfish and monotonous servitude? In that medley of nations, all upon one level of captivity, Israel was just as lost as the most insignificant tribe; her history severed, her worship impossible, her very language threatened with decay. No wonder, that from the stifling crowd and desperate flatness of it all she cried, "Hidden is my way from Jehovah, and from my God my right hath passed."

But from the flatness and the crowd the stars are visible; and it was upon the stars that the prophet bade his people feed their hearts. There were order and unfailing guidance; "for the greatness of His might not one is missing." And He is your God. Just as visible as those countless stars are, one by one, in the dark heavens, to your eyes looking up, so your lives and fortunes are to His eyes looking down on this Babel of peoples. "He gathereth the outcasts of Israel. . . . He telleth the number of the stars."* And so the prophet goes on earnestly to plead: "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? that an everlasting God is Jehovah, Creator of the ends of the earth. He fainteth not, neither is weary. There is no searching of His understanding. Giver to the weary of strength! And upon him that is of no might, he lavisheth power. Even youths may faint and be weary, and young men utterly fall; but they who hope in Jehovah shall renew strength, put forth pinions like eagles, run and not weary, walk and not faint." Listen,

* Psalm cxlvii.

ears, not for the sake of yourselves only, though the music is incomparably sweet! Listen for the sake of the starved hearts below, to whom you carry the sacraments of hope, whom you lift to feed upon the clear symbols of God's omnipotence and unfailing grace.

This chapter began with the assurance to the heart of Israel of their God's will to redeem and restore them. It closes with bidding the people take hope in God. Let us again emphasise—for we cannot do so too often, if we are to keep ourselves from certain errors of to-day on the subject of Revelation—the nature of this prophecy. It is not a reading-off of history; it is a call from God. No deed has yet been done pointing towards the certainty of Israel's redemption; it is not from facts writ large on the life of their day, that the prophet bids the captives read their Divine discharge. That discharge he brings from God; he bids them find the promise and the warrant of it in their God's character, in their own convictions of what that character is. In order to revive those convictions, he does, it is true, appeal to certain facts, but these facts are not the facts of contemporary history which might reveal to any clear eye, that the current and the drift of politics was setting towards the redemption of Israel. They are facts of nature and facts of general providence, which, as we have said, like sacraments evidence God's power to the pious heart, feed it with the assurance of His grace, and bid it hope in His word, though history should seem to be working quite the other way.

This instance of the method of revelation does not justify two opinions, which prevail at the present day regarding prophecy. In the first place, it proves to us that those are wrong who, too much infected by the modern temper to judge accurately writers so unsophisticated, describe prophecy as if it were merely a philosophy of history, by which the prophets deduced from their observation of the course of events their idea of God and their forecast of His purposes. The prophets had indeed to do with history; they argued from it, and they appealed to it. The history that was past was full of God's condescension to men, and shone like Nature's self with sacramental signs of His power and will: the history that was future was to be His supreme tribunal, and to afford the vindication of the word they claimed to have brought from Him. But still all this—their trust in history and their use of it—was something secondary in the prophetic method. With them God Himself was first; they came forth from His presence, as they describe it, with the knowledge of His will gained through the communion of their spirits with His Spirit. If they then appealed to past history, it was to illustrate their message; or to future, it was for vindication of this. But God Himself was the source and Author of it; and therefore, before they had facts beneath their eyes to corroborate their promises, they appealed to the people, like our prophet in chap. xl., to "wait on Jehovah." The day might not yet have dawned so as to let them read the signs of the times. But in the darkness they "hoped in Jehovah," and borrowed for their starved hearts from the stars above, or other sacrament, some assurance of His unfailing power.

Jehovah, then, was the source of the prophet's word: His character was its pledge. The proph-

ets were not mere readers from history, but speakers from God.

But the testimony of our chapter to all this enables us also to arrest an opinion about Revelation which has too hurriedly run off with some Christians, and to qualify it. In the inevitable recoil from the scholastic view of revelation as wholly a series of laws and dogmas and predictions, a number of writers on the subject have of late defined Revelation as a chain of historical acts, through which God uttered His character and will to men. According to this view, Revelation is God manifesting Himself in history, and the Bible is the record of this historical process. Now, while it is true that the Bible is, to a large extent, the annals and interpretation of the great and small events of a nation's history—of its separation from the rest of mankind, its miraculous deliverances, its growth, its defeats and humiliations, its reforms and its institutions: in all of which God manifested His character and will—yet the Bible also records a revelation which preceded these historical deeds; a revelation the theatre of which was not the national experience, but the consciousness of the individual; which was recognised and welcomed by choice souls in the secret of their own spiritual life, before it was realised and observed in outward fact; which was uttered by the prophet's voice and accepted by the people's trust in the dark and the stillness, before the day of the Lord had dawned or there was light to see His purposes at work. In a word, God's revelation to men was very often made clear in their subjective consciousness, before it became manifest in the history about them.

And, for ourselves, let us remember that to this day true religion is as independent of facts as it was with the prophet. True religion is a conviction of the character of God, and a resting upon that alone for salvation. We need nothing more to begin with; and everything else, in our experience and fortune, helps us only in so far as it makes that primary conviction more clear and certain. Darkness may be over us, and we lonely and starved beneath it. We may be destitute of experience to support our faith; we may be able to discover nothing in life about us making in the direction of our hopes. Still, "let us wait on the Lord." It is by bare trust in Him that we "renew our strength, put forth wings like eagles, run and not weary, walk and not faint."

Put forth wings—run—walk! Is the order correct? Hope swerves from the edge of so descending a promise, which seems only to repeat the falling course of nature—that droop, we all know, from short ambitions, through temporary impulsiveness to the old commonplace and routine. Soaring, running, walking—and is not the next stage, a cynic might ask, standing still?

On the contrary, it is a natural and a true climax, rising from the easier to the more difficult, from the ideal to the real, from dream to duty, from what can only be the rare occasions of life to what must be life's usual and abiding experience. History followed this course. Did the prophet, as he promised, think of what should really prove to be the fortune of his people during the next few years?—the great flight of hope, on which we see them rising in their psalms of redemption as on the wings of an eagle; the zeal and liberality of preparation for departure from Babylon; the first rush at the Return; and then

the long tramp, day after day, with the slow caravan at the pace of its most heavily-laden beasts of burden, when "they shall walk and not faint" should indeed seem to them the sweetest part of their God's promise.

Or was it the far longer perspective of Israel's history that bade the prophet follow this descending scale? The spirit of prophecy was with himself to soar higher than ever before, reaching by truly eagle-flight to a vision of the immediate consummation of Israel's glory: the Isles waiting for Jehovah, the Holy City radiant in His rising, and open with all her gates to the thronging nations; the true religion flashing from Zion across the world, and the wealth of the world pouring back upon Zion. And some have wondered, and some scoff, that after this vision there should follow centuries of imperceptible progress—five-and-a-half centuries of preparation for the coming of the Promised Servant; and then—Israel, indeed gone forth over the world, but only in small groups, living upon the grudging and fitful tolerance of the great centres of Gentile civilisation. The prophet surely anticipates all this, when he places the *walking* after the *soaring* and the *running*. When he says at last, and most impressively, of his people's fortunes, that they "shall walk and not faint," he has perhaps just those long centuries in view, when, instead of a nation of enthusiasts taking humanity by storm, we see small bands of pioneers pushing their way from city to city by the slow methods of ancient travel,—Damascus, Antioch, Tarsus, Iconium, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth and Rome,—everywhere that Paul and the missionaries of the Cross found a pulpit and a congregation ready for the Gospel; toiling from day to day at their own trades, serving the alien for wages, here and there founding a synagogue, now and then completing a version of their Scriptures, oftentimes achieving martyrdom, but ever living a pure and a testifying life in face of the heathen, with the passion of these prophecies at their hearts. It was certainly for such centuries and such men that the word was written, "they shall walk and not faint." This persistence under persecution, this monotonous drilling of themselves in school and synagogue, this slow progress without prize or praise along the common highways of the world and by the world's ordinary means of livelihood, was a greater proof of indomitableness than even the rapture which filled their hearts on the golden eve of the return, under the full diapason of prophecy.

And so must it ever be. First the ideal, and then the rush at it with passionate eyes, and then the daily trudge onward, when its splendour has faded from the view, but is all the more closely wrapped round the heart. For glorious as it is to rise to some great consummation on wings of dream and song, glorious as it is, also, to bend that impetus a little lower and take some practical crisis of life by storm, an even greater proof of our religion and of the help our God can give us is the lifelong tramp of earth's common surface, without fresh wings of dream, or the excitement of rivalry, or the attraction of reward, but with the head cool, and the face forward, and every footfall upon firm ground. Let hope rejoice in a promise, which does not go off into the air, but leaves us upon solid earth; and let us hold to a religion which, while it exults in being the secret of enthusiasm and the inspiration of

heroism, is daring and Divine enough to find its climax in the commonplace.

CHAPTER VII.

GOD: AN ARGUMENT FROM HISTORY.

ISAIAH xli.

HAVING revealed Himself to His own people in chap. xl., Jehovah now turns in chap. xli. to the heathen, but, naturally, with a very different kind of address. Displaying His power to His people in certain sacraments, both of nature and history, He had urged them to "wait upon Him" alone for the salvation, of which there were as yet no signs in the times. But with the heathen it is evidently to these signs of the times, that He can best appeal. Contemporary history, facts open to every man's memory and reason, is the common ground on which Jehovah and the other gods can meet. Chap. xli. is, therefore, the natural complement to chap. xl. In chap. xl. we have the element in revelation that precedes history: in chap. xli. we have history itself explained as a part of revelation.

Chap. xli. is loosely cast in the same form of a Trial-at-Law which we found in chap. i. To use a Scotticism, which exactly translates the Hebrew of ver. 1, Jehovah goes "to the law" with the idols. His summons to the Trial is given in ver. 1; the ground of the Trial is advanced in vv. 2-7. Then comes a digression, vv. 8-20, in which the Lord turns from controversy with the heathen to comfort His people. In vv. 21-29 Jehovah's plea is resumed, and in the silence of the defendants—a silence, which, as we shall presently see by calling in the witness of a Greek historian, was actual fact—the argument is summed up and the verdict given for the sole divinity of Israel's God.

The main interest of the Trial lies, of course, in its appeal to contemporary history, and to the central figure Cyrus, although it is to be noted that the prophet as yet refrains from mentioning the hero by name. This appeal to contemporary history lays upon us the duty of briefly indicating, how the course of that history was tending outside Babylon,—outside Babylon, as yet, but fraught with fate both to Babylon and to her captives.

Nebuchadnezzar, although he had virtually succeeded to the throne of the Assyrian, had not been able to repeat from Babylon that almost universal empire, which his predecessors had swayed from Nineveh. Egypt, it is true, was again as thoroughly driven from Asia as in the time of Sargon: to the south the Babylonian supremacy was as unquestioned as ever the Assyrian had been. But to the north Nebuchadnezzar met with an almost equal rival, who had helped him in the overthrow of Nineveh, and had fallen heir to the Assyrian supremacy in that quarter. This was Kaxares, an Aryan, one of the pioneers of that Aryan invasion from the East, which, though still tardy and sparse, was to be the leading force in Western Asia for the next century. This Kaxares had united under his control a number of Median tribes,* a people of Turanian stock. With

* Media simply means "the country." It is supposed that of the six Median tribes only one was Aryan, holding the rest, which were Turanian, under its influence.

these, when Nineveh fell, he established to the north of Nebuchadnezzar's power the empire of Media, with its western boundary at the river Halys, in Asia Minor, and its capital at Ecbatana under Mount Elwand. It is said that the river Indus formed his frontier to the east. West of the Halys, the Mede's progress was stopped by the Lydian Empire, under King Alyattes, whose capital was Sardis, and whose other border was practically the coast of the Ægean. In 585, or two years after the destruction of Jerusalem, Alyattes and Kaxares met in battle on the Halys. But the terrors of an eclipse took the heart to fight out of both their armies, and, Nebuchadnezzar intervening, the three monarchs struck a treaty among themselves, and strengthened it by intermarriage. Western Asia now virtually consisted of the confederate powers, Babylonia, Media, and Lydia.*

Let us realise how far this has brought us. When we stood with Isaiah in Jerusalem, our western horizon lay across the middle of Asia Minor in the longitude of Cyprus.† It now rests upon the Ægean; we are almost within sight of Europe. Straight from Babylon to Sardis runs a road, with a regular service of couriers. The court of Sardis holds domestic and political intercourse with the courts of Babylon and Ecbatana; but the court of Sardis also lords it over the Asiatic Greeks, worships at Greek shrines, will shortly be visited by Solon and strike an alliance with Sparta. In the time of the Jewish exile there were without doubt many Greeks in Babylon; men may have spoken there with Daniel, who had spoken at Sardis with Solon.

This extended horizon makes clear to us what our prophet has in his view, when in this forty-first chapter he summons "Isles" to the bar of Jehovah: "Be silent before me, O Isles, and let Peoples renew their strength,"—a vision and appeal which frequently recur in our prophecy. "Listen, O Isles, and hearken, O Peoples from afar" (xlix. 1); "Isles shall wait for His law" (xlii. 4); "Let them give glory to Jehovah, and publish His praise in the Isles" (xlii. 12); "Unto me Isles shall hope" (li. 5); "Surely Isles shall wait for me, ships of Tarshish first."‡ The name is generally taken by scholars—according to the derivation in the note below—to have originally meant "habitable land," and so "land" as opposed to water. In some passages of the Old Testament it is undoubtedly used to describe a land either washed, or surrounded, by the sea.§

But by our prophet's use of the word it is not necessarily "maritime provinces" that are meant. He makes *isles* parallel to the well-known terms "nations, peoples, Gentiles," and

* There were, besides, a few small independent powers in Asia Minor, such as Cilicia, whose prince also intervened at the Battle of the Eclipse; and the Ionian cities in the west. But all these, with perhaps the exception of Lycia, were brought into subjection to Lydia by Cræsus, son of Alyattes.

† P. 639.

‡ Other passages are: xli. 5, *Isles saw and feared, the ends of the earth trembled*; xlii. 10, *The sea and its fulness, Isles and their dwellers*; lix. 18, *He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies: to the Isles He will repay recompense*; lxvi. 19, *The nations, Tarshish, Pul, Lud, drawers of the bow, Tubal, Javan, the Isles afar off that have not heard my fame*. The Hebrew is יָם, and is supposed to be from a root יָמָה, *to inhabit*, which sense, however, never attaches to the verb in Hebrew, but is borrowed from the cognate Arabic word.

§ Of the Philistine coast, Isa. xx. 6; of the Tyrian coast, Isa. xxiii. 2, 6; of Greece, Ezek. xxvii. 7; of Crete, Jer. xlvii. 4; of the islands of the sea, Isa. xi. 11 and Esther x. i.

in one passage he opposes it, as dry soil, to water.* Hence many translators take it in its original sense of "countries or lands." This bare rendering, however, does not do justice to the sense of "remoteness," which the prophet generally attaches to the word, nor to his occasional association of it with visions of the sea. Indeed, as one reads most of his uses of it, one is quite sure that the island-meaning of the word lingers on in his imagination; and that the feeling possesses him, which has haunted the poetry of all ages, to describe as "coasts" or "isles" any land or lighting-place of thought which is far and dim and vague; which floats across the horizon, or emerges from the distance, as strips and promontories of land rise from the sea to him who has reached some new point of view. I have therefore decided to keep the rendering familiar to the English reader, "isles," though, perhaps, "coasts" would be better. If, as is probable, our prophet's thoughts are always towards the new lands of the west as he uses the word, it is doubly suitable; those countries were both maritime and remote; they rose both from the distance and from the sea.

"The sprinkled isles,
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea
And laugh their pride, where the light wave lisps,
Greece."

But if Babylonia lay thus open to Lydia, and through Lydia to the "isles" and "coasts" of Greece, it was different with her northern frontier. What strikes us here is the immense series of fortifications, which Nebuchadrezzar, in spite of his alliance with Astyages, cast up between his country and Media. Where the Tigris and Euphrates most nearly approach one another, about seventy miles to the north of Babylon, Nebuchadrezzar connected their waters by four canals above which he built a strong bulwark, called by the Greeks the Median wall. This may have been over sixty miles long; Xenophon tells us it was twenty feet broad by one hundred high.† At Sippara this line of defence was completed by the creation of a great bason of water to flood the rivers and canals on the approach of an enemy, and of a large fortress to protect the bason. Alas for the vanity of human purposes! It is said to have been this very bason which caused the easy fall of Babylon. By turning the Euphrates into it, the enemy entered the capital through the emptied river-bed.

The triple alliance—Lydia, Media, Babylonia—stood firm after its founders passed away. In 555, Cræsus and Astyages, who had succeeded their fathers at Sardis and Ecbatana respectively, and Nabunahid, who had usurped the throne at Babylon, were still at peace, and contented with the partition of 585. But outside them and to the east, in a narrow nook of land at the head of the Persian Gulf, the man was already crowned, who was destined to bring Western Asia again under one sceptre. This was Kurush or Cyrus II. of Anzan, but known to history as Cyrus the Great or Cyrus the Persian. Cyrus was a prince of the Akhæmenian house of Persia, and therefore, like the Mede, an Aryan, but independent of his Persian cousins, and ruling in his own right the little kingdom of Anzan or Anshan, which, with its capital of Susan, lay on the rivers

Choaspes and Eulæus, between the head of the Persian Gulf and the Zagros Mountains.*

Cyrus the Great is one of those mortals whom the muse of history, as if despairing to do justice to him by herself, has called in her sisters to aid her in describing to posterity. Early legend and later and more elaborate romance; the schoolmaster, the historian, the tragedian, and the prophet, all vie in presenting to us this hero "le plus sympathique de l'antiquité" †—this king on whom we see so deeply stamped the double signature of God, character and success. We shall afterwards have a better opportunity to speak of his character. Here we are only concerned to trace his rapid path of conquest.

He sprang, then, from Anshan, the immediate neighbour of Babylonia to the east. This is the direction indicated in the second verse of this forty-first chapter: "Who hath raised up one from the east?" But the twenty-fifth verse veers round with him to the north: "I have raised up one from the north, and he is come." This was actually the curve, from east to north, which his career almost immediately took.

For in 549 Astyages, king of Media, attacked Cyrus, ‡ king of Anshan; which means that Cyrus was already a considerable and an aggressive prince. Probably he had united by this time the two domains of his house, Persia and Anshan, under his own sceptre, and secured as his lieutenant Hystaspes, his cousin, the lineal king of Persia. The Mede, looking south and east from Ecbatana, saw a solid front opposed to him, and resolved to crush it before it grew more formidable. But the Aryans among the Medes, dissatisfied with so indolent a leader as Astyages, revolted to Cyrus, and so the latter, with characteristic good fortune, easily became lord of Media. A lenient lord he made. He spared Astyages, and ranked the Aryan Medes second only to the Persians. But it took him till 546 to complete his conquest. When he had done so he stood master of Asia from the Halys to perhaps as far east as the Indus. He replaced the Medes in the threefold power of Western Asia, and thus looked down on Babylon, as v. 25 says, "from the north" (xli. 25).

In 545, Cyrus advanced upon Babylonia, and struck at the northern line of fortifications at Sippara. He was opposed by an army under Belshazzar, Bel-shar-uzzur, the son of Nabunahid, and probably by his mother's side grandson of Nebuchadrezzar. Army or fortifications seem to have been too much for Cyrus, and there is no further mention of his name in the Babylonian annals till the year 538. It has been suggested that Cyrus was aware of the discontent of the people with their ruler Nabunahid, and, with that genius which distinguished his whole career for availing himself of the internal poli-

* There were two branches of the Persian royal family after Teispes, the son of Akhæmenes, the founder. Teispes annexed Anshan on the level land between the northeast corner of the Persian Gulf and the mountains of Persia. Teispes' eldest son, Cyrus I., became king of Anshan; his other, Ariaramnes, king of Persia. These were succeeded by their sons, Kambyzes I. and Arsames. Kambyzes I. was the father of Cyrus II., the great Cyrus, who rejoining Persia to Anshan, to the exclusion of his second cousin, Hystaspes. Cyrus the Great was succeeded by his son, Kambyzes II., with whom the Anshan line closed, and the power was transferred to Darius, son of Hystaspes. Cf. Ragozin's "Media," in the "Story of the Nations" series.

† Halévy, "Cyrus et le Retour de l'Exil," "Études Juives," I.

‡ Inscription of Nabunahid.

* xlii. 15: Eng. version, *I will turn rivers into islands.*
† *Anabasis* 2, 4.

tics of his foes, he may have been content to wait till the Babylonian dissatisfaction had grown riper, perhaps in the meantime fostering it by his own emissaries.

In any case, the attention of Cyrus was now urgently demanded on the western boundary of his empire, where Lydia was preparing to invade him. Cræsus, king of Lydia, fresh from the subjection of the Ionian Greeks, and possessing an army and a treasure second to none in the world, had lately asked of Solon, whether he was not the most fortunate of men; and Solon had answered, to count no man happy till his death. The applicability of this advice to himself Cræsus must have felt with a start, when, almost immediately after it, the news came that his brother-in-law Astyages had fallen before an unknown power, which was moving up rapidly from the east, and already touched the Lydian frontier at the Halys. Cræsus was thrown into alarm. He eagerly desired to know Heaven's will about this Persian and himself, who now stood face to face. But, in that heathen world, with its thousand shrines to different gods, who knew the will of Heaven? In a fashion only possible to the richest man in the world, Cræsus resolved to discover, by sending a test-question, on a matter of fact within his own knowledge, to every oracle of repute: to the oracles of the Greeks at Miletus, Delphi, Abæ; to that of Trophonius; to the sanctuary of Amphiaraus at Thebes; to Dodona; and even to the far-off temple of Ammon in Libya. The oracles of Delphi and Amphiaraus alone sent an answer which in the least suggested the truth. "To the gods of Delphi and Amphiaraus, Cræsus, therefore, offered great sacrifices,—three thousand victims of every kind; and on a great pile of wood he burned couches plated with gold and silver, golden goblets, purple robes and garments, in the hope that he would thereby gain the favour of the god yet more. . . . And as the sacrifice left behind an enormous mass of molten gold, Cræsus caused bricks to be made, six palms in length, three in breadth and one in depth; in all there were 117 bricks. . . . In addition there was a golden lion which weighed ten talents. When these were finished, Cræsus sent them to Delphi; and he added two very large mixing bowls, one of gold, weighing eight talents and a half and twelve minæ, and one of silver (the work of Theodorus of Samos, as the Delphians say, and I believe it, for it is the work of no ordinary artificer), four silver jars, and two vessels for holy water, one of gold, the other of silver, circular casts of silver, a golden statue of a woman three cubits high, and the necklace and girdles of his queen."* We can understand, that for all this Cræsus got the best advice consistent with the ignorance and caution of the priests whom he consulted. The oracles told him that if he went against Cyrus he would destroy a great empire; but he forgot to ask, whether it was his own or his rival's. When he inquired a second time, if his reign should be long, they replied: "When a mule became king of the Medes," then he might fly from his throne; but again he forgot to consider that there might be mules among men as among beasts.† At the same time, the oracles

tempered their ambiguous prophecies with some advice of undoubted sense, for when he asked them who were the most powerful among the Greeks, they replied the Spartans, and to Sparta he sent messengers with presents to conclude an alliance. "The Lacedæmonians were filled with joy; they knew the oracle which had been given Cræsus, and made him a friend and ally, as they had previously received many kindnesses at his hands."*

This glimpse into the preparations of Cræsus, whose embassies compassed the whole civilised world, and whose wealth got him all that politics or religion could, enables us to realise the political and religious excitement into which Cyprus' advent threw that generation. The oracles in doubt and ambiguous; the priests, the idol-manufacturers, and the crowd of artisans, who worked in every city at the furniture of the temple, in a state of unexampled activity, with bustle perhaps most like the bustle of our government dockyards on the eve of war: hammering new idols together, preparing costly oblations, overhauling the whole religious "ordnance," that the gods might be propitiated and the stars secured to fight in their courses against the Persian; rival politicians practising conciliation, and bolstering up one another with costly presents to stand against this strange and fatal force, which indifferently threatened them all. What a commentary Herodotus' story furnishes upon the verses of this chapter, in which Jehovah contrasts the idols with Himself. It may actually have been Cræsus and the Greeks whom the prophet had in his mind when he wrote vv. 5-7: "The isles have seen, and they fear; the ends of the earth tremble: they draw near and they come. They help every man his neighbour, and to his brother each sayeth, Be strong. So carver encourageth smelter, smother with hammer, smiter on anvil; one saith of soldering, It is good: and he fasteneth it with nails lest it totter." The irony is severe, but true to the facts as Herodotus relates them. The statesmen hoped to keep back Cyrus by sending sobbing messages to one another, Be of good courage; the priests "by making a particularly good and strong set of gods."†

While the imbecility of the idolatries was thus manifest, and the great religious centres of heathendom were reduced to utter doubt that veiled itself in ambiguity and waited to see how things would issue, there was one religion in the world, whose oracles gave no uncertain sound, whose God stepped boldly forth to claim Cyrus for His own. In the dust of Babylonia lay the scattered members of a nation captive and exiled, a people civilly dead and religiously degraded; yet it was the faith of this worm of a people which welcomed and understood Cyrus, it was the God of this people who claimed to be his author. The forty-first chapter looks dreary and ancient to the uninstructed eye, but let our imagination realise all these things: the ambiguous priests, oracles that would not speak out, religions that had no articulate counsel nor comfort in face of the conqueror who was crushing up the world before him, but only sobs, solder, and nails; and our heart will leap as we hear how God forces them all into judgment before Him, and makes His plea as loud and clear as mortal ear may hear. Clatter of idols, and murmur of muffled oracles, filling all

* Herodotus, Book I.

† Herodotus explains this by his legend of Cyrus' birth, according to which Cyrus was a hybrid—half Persian, half Mede.

* Herodotus, Book I.

† Sir Edward Strachey.

the world; and then, hark how the voice of Jehovah crashes His oracle across it all!

"Keep silence towards Me, O Isles, and let the peoples renew their strength: let them approach; then let them speak: to the Law let us come.

"Who hath stirred up from the sunrise Righteousness, calleth it to his foot? He giveth to his face peoples, and kings He makes him to trample; giveth them as dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow. He pursues them, and passes to peace a road that he comes not with his feet. Who has wrought it and done it? Summoner of generations from the source,* I Jehovah the First, and with the Last; I am He."

Cræsus would have got a clear answer here, but it is probable that he had never heard of the Hebrews or of their God.

After this follows the satiric picture of the heathen world, which has already been quoted. And then, after an interval during which Jehovah turns to His own people (vv. 8-20),—for whatever be His business or His controversy, the Lord is mindful of His own,—He directs His speech specially against the third class of the leaders of heathendom. He has laughed the foolish statesmen and imagemakers out of court (vv. 5-7); He now challenges, in ver. 21, the oracles and their priests.

We have seen what these were, which this vast heathen world—heathen but human, convinced as we are that at the back of the world's life there are a secret, a counsel, and a governor, and anxious as we are to find them—had to resort to. Timid waiters upon time, whom not even the lavish wealth of a Cræsus could tempt from their ambiguity; prophets speechless in face of history; oracles of meaning as dark and shifty as their steamy caves at Delphi, of tune as variable as the whispering oak of Dodona; wily-tongued Greeks, masters of ambiguous phrase, at Miletus, Abæ, and Thebes; Egyptian mystics in the far-off temple of "Lybic Hammon,"—these are what the prophet sees standing at the bar of history, where God is Challenger.

"Bring here your case, saith Jehovah; apply your strong grounds, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring out and declare unto us what things are going to happen; the first things † announce what they are, that we may set our heart on them, and know the issue of them; or the things that are coming, let us hear them. Announce the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods. Yea, do good or do evil, that we may stare and see it together. Lo! ye are nothing, and your work is of nought; an abomination is he who chooseth you."

Which great challenge just means, Come and be tested by facts. Here is history needing an explanation, and running no one knows whither. Prove your divinity by interpreting or guiding it. Cease your ambiguities, and give us something we can set our minds to work upon. Or do something, effect something in history, be it good or be it evil,—only let it be patent to our senses. For the test of godhead is not ingenuity or mysteriousness, but plain deeds, which the senses can perceive, and plain words, which

the reason and conscience can judge. The insistence upon the senses and mental faculties of man is remarkable: "Make us hear them, that we may know, stare, see all together, set our mind to them."

But as we have learned from Herodotus, there was nobody in the world to answer such a challenge. Therefore Jehovah Himself answers it. He gives His explanation of history, and claims its events for His doing.

"I have stirred up from the north, and he hath come; from the rising of the sun one who calleth upon My Name: and he shall trample satraps like mortar, and as the potter treadeth out clay."

"Who hath announced on-ahead * that we may know, and beforehand that we may say, 'Right!' Yea, there is none that announced, yea, there is none that published, yea, there is none that heareth your words. But a prediction" (or predictor, literally a thing or man on-ahead—r'ishôn corresponding to the me-r'osh of ver. 26) "a prediction to Zion, 'Behold, behold them,' and to Jerusalem a herald of good news—I am giving." The language here comes forth in jerks, and is very difficult to render. "But I look and there is no man even among these, and no counsellor, that I might ask them and they return word. Lo, all of them vanity! and nothingness their works; wind and waste their molten images."

Let us look a little more closely at the power of Prediction, on which Jehovah maintains His unique and sovereign Deity against the idols.

Jehovah challenges the idols to face present events, and to give a clear, unambiguous forecast of their issue. It is a debatable question, whether He does not also ask them to produce previous predictions of events happening at the time at which He speaks. This latter demand is one that He makes in subsequent chapters; it is part of His prophet's argument in chs. xlv.-xlvii., that Jehovah intimated the advent of Cyrus by His servants in Israel long before the present time. Whether He makes this same demand for previous predictions in ch. xli. depends on how we render a clause of ver. 22, "declare ye the former things." Some scholars take *former things* in the sense, in which it is used later on in this prophecy, of *previous predictions*. This is very doubtful. I have explained in a note, why I think them wrong; but even if they are right, and Jehovah be really asking the idols to produce former predictions of Cyrus' career, the demand is so cursory, it proves so small an item in His plea, and we shall afterwards find so many clearer statements of it, that we do better to ignore it now and confine ourselves to emphasising the other challenge, about which there is no doubt,—the challenge to take present events and predict their issue.† Cræsus

* This seems to me more likely to be the meaning of the prophet, than the absolute *from the beginning*. It suits its parallel *beforehand*, and it is more in line with the general demand of the chapter for anticipation of events. It is literally from the head, "da capo," cf. *supra*.

† ראשונת r'ishonôth is a relative term, meaning *head things, things ahead, first things, prior things*, whether in rank or time. Here of course the time meaning is undoubted. But *ahead of what? prior to what?*—this is the difficulty. Ewald, Hitzig, A. B. Davidson, Driver, etc., take it as prior to the standpoint of the speaker; things that happened or were uttered previous to him,—a sense in which the word is used in subsequent chapters. But Delitzsch, Hahn, Cheyne, etc., take it to be things prior to other things that will happen in the later future,

* Lit. *from the head*, "da capo." I am not sure, however, that it does not rather mean *beforehand*, like our "on ahead."

† See *infra*.

had asked the oracles for a forecast of the future. This is exactly what Jehovah demands in ver. 22, "declare unto us what things are going to happen;" in ver. 23, "declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods;" in ver. 26 (spoken from the standpoint of the subsequent fulfilment of the prediction), who declared it on-ahead that we may know, and beforehand that we may now say, 'Right!' Yea, there is none that declared, yea, there is none that published, yea, there is none that heareth your words. But a prediction unto Zion, 'Behold, behold them,' and to Jerusalem a herald of good news—I give." *I give* is emphatically placed at the end,—“I Jehovah alone, through My prophets in Israel, give such a prediction and publisher of good news.”

We scarcely require to remind ourselves, that this great challenge and plea are not mere rhetoric or idle boasting. Every word in them we have seen to be true to fact. The heathen religions were, as they are here represented, helpless before Cyrus, and dumb about the issue of the great movements which the Persian had started. On the other hand, Jehovah had uttered to His people all the meaning of the new stir and turmoil in history. We have heard Him do so in ch. xl. There He “gives a herald of good news to Jerusalem,”—tells them of their approaching deliverance, explains His redemptive purposes, proclaims a gospel. In addition, He has in this chapter accepted Cyrus for His own creation and as part of His purpose, and has promised him victory.

The God of Israel, then, is God, because He alone by His prophets claims facts as they stand for His own deeds, and announces what shall become of them.

Do not let us, however, fall into the easy but vulgar error of supposing, that Jehovah claims to be God simply because He can predict. It is indeed prediction, which He demands from the heathen: for prediction is a minimum of godhead, and in asking it He condescends to the heathen's own ideas of what a god should

be able to do. When Cræsus, the heathen who of all that time spent most upon religion, sought to decide which of the gods was worthiest to be consulted about the future and propitiated in face of Cyrus, what test did he apply to them? As we have seen, he tested them by their ability to predict a matter of fact: the god who told him what he, Cræsus, should be doing on a certain day was to be his god. It is evident, that, to Cræsus, divinity meant to be able to divine. But the God, who reveals Himself to Israel, is infinitely greater than this. He is not merely a Being with a far sight into the future; He is not only Omniscience. In the chapter preceding this one His power of prediction is not once expressed; it is lost in the two glories by which alone the prophet seeks to commend His Godhead to Israel,—the glory of His power and the glory of His faithfulness. Jehovah is Omnipotence, Creator of heaven and earth; He leads forth the stars by “the greatness of His might;” Supreme Director of history, it is He “who bringeth princes to nothing.” But Jehovah is also unfailing character: “the word of the Lord standeth for ever;” it is foolishness to say of Him that He has forgotten His people, or that “their right has passed” from Him; He disapproves none who wait upon Him. Such is the God, who steps down from ch. xl. into the controversy with the heathen in ch. xli. If in the latter He chiefly makes His claim to godhead to rest upon specimens of prediction, it is simply, as we have said, that He may meet the gods of the heathen before a bar and upon a principle, which their worshippers recognise as practical and decisive. What were single predictions, here and there, upon the infinite volume of His working, who by His power could gather all things to serve His own purpose, and in His faithfulness remained true to that purpose from everlasting to everlasting! The unity of history under One Will—this is a far more adequate idea of godhead than the mere power to foretell single events in history. And it is even to this truth that Jehovah seeks to raise the unaccustomed thoughts of the heathen. Past the rude wonder, which is all that fulfilled predictions of fact can excite, He lifts their religious sense to Himself and His purpose, as the one secret and motive of all history. He not only claims Cyrus and Cyrus' career as His own work, but He speaks of Himself as “summoner of the generations from aforehand; I Jehovah, the First, and with the Last; I am He.” It is a consummate expression of godhead, which lifts us far above the thought of Him as a mere divining power.

Now, it is well for us—were it only for the great historic interest of the thing, though it will also further our argument—to take record here that, although this conception of the unity of life under One Purpose and Will was still utterly foreign, and perhaps even unintelligible, to the heathen world, which the prophecy has in view, the first serious attempt in that world to reach such a conception was contemporary with the forty-first chapter of Isaiah. It is as miners feel, when tunnelling from opposite sides of a mountain, they begin to hear the noise of each other's picks through the dwindling rock. We, who have come down the history of Israel towards the great consummation of religion in Christianity, may here cease for a moment our labours, to listen to the faint sound from the

early events, as opposed to הַבְּאוֹת of the next clause, which they take to mean subsequent things, *things that are to come* afterwards. I think Dr. Davidson's reasons (see *Expositor*, second series, vol. vii., p. 256) are quite conclusive against this view of Delitzsch, that in this clause the idols are being asked to predict events in the near future. It is difficult, as he says, to see why the idols should be given a choice between the earlier and the later future: nor does the הַבְּאוֹת of the contrasted clause at all suggest a later future; it simply means *things coming*, a term which is as applicable to the near as to the far future. Nevertheless, I am not persuaded that Dr. Davidson's own view of *r'ishonôth* is the correct one. The rest of the context (see above) is occupied with predictions of the future only. And *r'ishonôth* does not necessarily mean previous predictions, although used in this sense in the subsequent chapters. It simply means, as we have seen, *head things, things ahead, things beforehand* or *fountain-things, origins, causes*. That we are to understand it here in some such general and absolute sense is suggested, I think, by the word אַחֲרֵיתָן which follows it, *their result* or *issue*, and is confirmed by ראשון, *r'ishôn* (masc. singular) of ver. 27, which is undoubtedly used in a general sense, meaning *something or somebody on ahead*, an anticipator, predictor, *forerunner* (as Cheyne gives it), or as I have rendered it above, neuter, a *prediction*. If *r'ishôn* in ver. 27 means a thing or a man given beforehand, then *r'ishonôth* in ver. 22 may also mean things given beforehand, predictions made now, or at least things selected and announced as causes now, whose issue, אַחֲרֵיתָן, may be recognised in the future. In a word, *r'ishonôth* would mean things not necessarily *previous* to the speech in which they were allowed, but simply things *previous* to certain results, or anticipating certain events, either as their prediction or as their cause.

other side of the wall, still separating Israel from Greece, of a witness to God and an argument against idolatry similar to those with which we have been working. Who is not moved by learning, that, in the very years when Jewish prophecy reached its most perfect statement of monotheism, pouring its scorn upon the idols and their worshippers, and in the very *Isles* on which its hopes and influence were set, the first Greek should be already singing, who used his song to satirise the mythologies of his people, and to celebrate the unity of God? Among the Ionians, whom Cyrus' invasion of Lydia and of the Ægean coast in 544 drove across the seas, was Xenophanes of Colophon.* After some wanderings he settled at Elea in South Italy, and became the founder of the Eleatic school, the first philosophic attempt of the Greek mind to grasp the unity of Being. How far Xenophanes himself succeeded in this attempt is a matter of controversy. The few fragments of his poetry which are extant do not reveal him as a philosophical monotheist, so much as a prophet of "One greatest God." His language (like that of the earlier Hebrew prophets in praising Jehovah) apparently implies the real existence of lesser divinities:—

"One God, 'mongst both gods and men He is greatest,
Neither in shape is He like unto mortals nor thought."†

Xenophanes scorns the anthropomorphism of his countrymen, and the lawless deeds which their poets had attributed to the gods:—

"Mortals think the gods can be born, have their feelings, voice, and form; but, could horses or oxen draw like men, they too would make their gods after their own image."‡

"All things did Homer and Hesiod lay on the gods,
Such as with mortals are full of blame and disgrace,
To steal and debauch and outwit one another."§

Our prophet, to whose eyes Gentile religiousness was wholly of the gross Cræsus kind, little suspected that he had an ally, with such kindred tempers of faith and scorn, among the very peoples to whom he yearns to convey his truth. But ages after, when Israel and Greece had both issued into Christianity, the service of Xenophanes to the common truth was recounted by two Church writers—by Clement of Alexandria in his "Stromata," and by Eusebius the historian in his "Præparatio Evangelica."

We find, then, that monotheism had reached its most absolute expression in Israel in the same decade in which the first efforts towards the conception of the unity of Being were just starting in Greece. But there is something more to be stated. In spite of the splendid progress, which it pursued from such beginnings, Greek philosophy never reached the height on which, with Second Isaiah, Hebrew prophecy already rests; and the reason has to do with two points on which we are now engaged,—the omnipotence and the righteousness of God.

Professor Pfleiderer remarks: "Even in the idealistic philosophy of the Greeks . . . matter remains, however sublimated, an irrational something, with which the Divine power can never come to terms. It was only in the conscious-

ness, which the prophets of Israel had of God, that the thought of the Divine omnipotence fully prevailed."* We cannot overvalue such high and impartial testimony to the uniqueness of the Hebrew doctrine of God, but it needs to be supplemented. To the prophets' sense of the Divine omnipotence, we must add their unrivalled consciousness of the Divine character. To them Jehovah is not only the Holy, the incomparable God, almighty and sublime. He is also the true, consistent God. He has a great purpose, which He has revealed of old to His people, and to which he remains for ever faithful. To express this the Hebrews had one word,—the word we translate *righteous*. We should often miss our prophet's meaning, if by *righteousness* we understood some of the qualities to which the term is often applied by us: if, for instance, we used it in the general sense of morality, or if we gave it the technical meaning, which it bears in Christian theology, of justification from guilt. We shall afterwards devote a chapter to the exposition of its meaning in Second Isaiah, but let us here look at its use in ch. xli. In ver. 26, it is applied to the person whose prediction turns out to be correct: men are to say of him "*right*" or "*righteous*." Here it is evident that the Hebrew—*ssaddiq*—is used in its simplest meaning, like the Latin *rectus*, and our "*right*" of what has been shown to be in accordance with truth or fact. In ver. 2, again, though the syntax is obscure, it seems to have the general sense of "good faith with the ability to ensure success." Righteousness is here associated with Cyrus, because he has not been called for nothing but in good faith for a purpose which will be carried through. Jehovah's righteousness, then, will be His truthness, His good faith, His consistency; and indeed this is the sense which it must evidently bear in ver. 10. Take it with the context: "But thou, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham who loved Me, whom I took hold of from the ends of the earth and its corners, I called thee and said unto thee, Thou art My servant. I have chosen thee, and will not cast thee away. Fear not, for I am with thee. Look not round in despair, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." Here *righteousness* evidently means that Jehovah will act in *good faith* to the people He has called, that He will act *consistently* with His anciently revealed purpose towards them. Hitherto Israel has had nothing but the memory that God called them, and the conscience that He chose them. Now Jehovah will vindicate this conscience in outward fact. He will carry through His calling of His people, and perform His promise. How He will do this, He proceeds to relate. Israel's enemies shall become as nothing (vv. 11-12). Israel himself, though a poor worm of a people, shall be changed to the utmost conceivable opposite of a worm—even "a sharp threshing instrument having teeth"—a people who shall leave their mark on the world. They shall overcome all difficulties and "rejoice in Jehovah." Their redemption shall be accomplished in a series of evident facts. "The poor and the needy are seeking water, and there is none, their tongue faileth for thirst;

* Ueberweg, "History of Philosophy," English translation, i. 51.

† Quoted by Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata," Bk. V., ch. iv., and by Eusebius, "Præp. Evang." xiii. 13.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ Quoted by Ueberweg, as above.

* Pfleiderer, "Philosophy of Religion: Contents of the Religious Consciousness," ch. i. (Eng. trans., vol. iii. p. 291).

I, Jehovah, will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." And this shall be done on such a scale, that all the world will wonder and be convinced, vv. 18-19: "I will open on the bare heights rivers, and in the midst of the plains fountains. I will make the desert a pool of water, and the dry ground water-springs. I will plant in the wilderness cedars and acacias and myrtles and olive-trees; I will plant in the desert pines, planes and sherbins together." Do not let us spoil the meaning of this passage by taking these verses literally, or even as illustrative of the kind of restoration which Israel was to enjoy. This vast figure of a well-watered and planted desert the prophet uses rather to illustrate the scale on which the Restoration will take place: its evident extent and splendour. "That they may see and know and consider and understand together, that Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it." The whole passage, then, tells us what God means by His righteousness. It is His fidelity to His calling of Israel, and to His purpose with His people. It is the quality by which He cannot forsake His own, but carries through and completes His promises to them; by which He vindicates and justifies, in facts so large that they are evident to all mankind, His ancient word by His prophets.*

This lengthened exposition will not have been in vain, if it has made clear to us, that Hebrew monotheism owed its unique quality to the emphasis, which the prophets laid upon the two truths of the Power and the Character of God. There was One Supreme Being infinite in might, and with one purpose running down the ages, which He had plainly revealed, and to which He remained constant. The people, who knew this, did not need to wait for the fulfilment of certain test-predictions before trusting Him as the One God. Test-predictions and their fulfilment might be needful for the heathen, from whose minds the idea of One Supreme Being with such a character had vanished; the heathen might need to be convinced by instances of Jehovah's omniscience, for omniscience was the most Divine attribute of which they had conceived. But Israel's faith rested upon glories in the Divine nature of which omniscience was the mere consequence. Israel knew God was Almighty and All-true, and that was enough.

NOTE UPON JEHOVAH'S CLAIM TO CYRUS.

In ver. 25 a phrase is used of Cyrus which is very obscure, and to which, considering its vagueness even upon the most definite construction, far too much importance has been attached. The meaning of the words, the tenses, the syntax—perhaps even the original text itself—of this verse are uncertain. The English revisers give, *I have raised up one from the north and he is come; from the rising of the sun one that calleth upon My Name.* This is probably the true syntax.† But in what tense is the verb to call, and what does calling upon My name mean? In the Old Testament the phrase is used in two senses,—to invoke or adore, and to proclaim or celebrate the name of a person.‡ As long as scholars understood that Cyrus was a monotheist, there was a temptation to choose the former of these meanings, and to find in the verse Jehovah's claim upon the Persian, as a worshipper of Himself, the One True God. But this interpretation received a shock from the discovery of a proclamation of Cyrus after his entry into Babylon, in which he invokes the names of Babylonian deities, and calls himself their

"servant."* Of course his doing so in the year 538 does not necessarily discredit a description of him as a monotheist eight years before.—Between 548 and 546—the probable date of ch. xli.—a prophet might in all good faith have hailed as a worshipper of Jehovah a Persian who still stood in the *rising of the sun*,—who had not yet issued from the east and its radiant repute of a religion purer than the Babylonian; although eight years afterwards, from motives of policy, the same king acknowledged the gods of his new subjects. This may be; but there is a more natural way out of the difficulty. Is it fair to lay upon the expression, *calleth on My name*, so precise a meaning as that of a strict monotheism? Some have turned to the other use of the verb, and, taking it in the future tense, have translated, *who shall proclaim or celebrate My name*,—which Cyrus surely did, when, in the name of Jehovah, he drew up the edict for the return of the Jews to Palestine.‡ But do we need to put even this amount of meaning upon the phrase? In itself it is vague, but it also stands parallel to another vague phrase: *I have raised up one from the north, and he is come; from the sunrising one who calleth on My name.* Taken in apposition to the phrase *he is come, calleth on My name* may mean no more than that, answering to the instigation of Jehovah, and owning His impulse, Cyrus by his career proclaimed or celebrated Jehovah's name. In any case, we have said enough to show that, in our comparative ignorance of what Cyrus' faith was, and in face of the elastic use of the phrase *to call on the name of*, it is quite unwarrantable to maintain that the prophet must have meant a strict monotheist, and therefore absurd to draw the inference that the prophet was incorrect. A way has been attempted out of the difficulty by slightly altering the text, and so obtaining the version, *I have raised up one from the north and he is come: from the sunrise I call him by name.*§ This is a change which is in harmony with ch. xlv. 3, 4, but has otherwise no evidence in its favour.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PASSION OF GOD.

ISAIAH xlii. 13-17.

At the beginning of chap. xlii. we reach one of those distinct stages, the frequent appearance of which in our prophecy assures us, that, for all its mingling and recurrent style, the prophecy is a unity with a distinct, if somewhat involved, progress of thought. For while chaps. xl. and xli. establish the sovereignty and declare the character of the One True God before His people and the heathen, chap. xlii. takes what is naturally the next step, of publishing to both these classes His Divine will. This purpose of God is set forth in the first seven verses of the chapter. It is identified with a human Figure, who is to be God's agent upon earth, and who is styled "the Servant of Jehovah." Next to Jehovah Himself, the Servant of Jehovah is by far the most important personage within our prophet's gaze. He is named, described, commissioned, and encouraged over and over again throughout the prophecy; his character and indispensable work are hung upon with a frequency and a fondness almost equal to the steadfast faith, which the prophet reposes in Jehovah Himself. Were we following our prophecy chapter by chapter, now would be the time to put the question, Who is this Servant, who is suddenly introduced to us? and to look ahead for the various and even conflicting answers, which rise from the subsequent chapters. But we agreed, for clearness' sake,§ to take all the passages about the Servant, which are easily detached from the rest of the prophecy, and treat by themselves, and to continue in the meantime our prophet's main theme of the power and Righteousness of God as shown forth

* Translation of the Cyrus-cylinder in, "Cyrus et le Retour del'Exil," by Halévy, "Revue des Etudes Juives," No. 1, 1880.

† Ezra i. 2; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23.

‡ יקרא בשמי for אקרא בשמי.

§ See Introduction.

* See further on the subject the chapter on the Righteousness of Israel and of God, chapter xiv. of this Book.

† And that which runs: . . . *he is come, from the rising of the sun he calleth upon My name* (Bredenkamp) is wrong.

‡ The former of these in ch. lxiv. 7; the latter in xlv. 5.

in the deliverance of His people from Babylon. Accordingly, at present we pass over xlii. 1-9, keeping this firmly in mind, however, that God has appointed for His work upon earth, including as it does, the ingathering of His people and the conversion of the Gentiles, a Servant,—a human figure of lofty character and unfailing perseverance, who makes God's work of redemption his own, puts his heart into it, and is upheld by God's hand. God, let us understand, has committed His cause upon earth to a human agent.

God's commission of His Servant is hailed by a hymn. Earth answers the proclamation of the "new things" which the Almighty has declared (ver. 9) by "a new song" (vv. 10-13). But this song does not sing of the Servant; its subject is Jehovah Himself.

Sing to Jehovah a new song,
His praise from the end of the earth;
Ye that go down to the sea, and its fulness,
Isles, and their dwellers!
Let be loud,—the wilderness and its townships,
Villages that Kedar inhabits!
Let them ring out,—the dwellers of Sela!
From the top of the hills let them shout!
Let them give to Jehovah the glory,
And publish His praise in the Isles!
Jehovah as hero goes forth,
As a man of war stirs up zeal,
Shouts the alarm and battle cry,
Against his foes proves Himself hero.

The terms of the last four lines are military. Most of them will be found in the historical books, in descriptions of the onset of Israel's battles with the heathen. But it is no human warrior to whom they are here applied. They who sing have forgotten the Servant. Their hearts are warm only with this, that Jehovah Himself will come down to earth to give the alarm, and to bear the brunt of the battle. And to such a hope He now responds, speaking also of Himself and not of the Servant. His words are very intense, and glow and strain with inward travail.

I have long time kept my peace,
Am dumb and hold myself in:
Like a woman in travail I gasp,
Pant and palpitate together.

Remember it is God who speaks these words of Himself, and then think what they mean of unsharable thought and pain, of solitary yearning and effort. But from the pain comes forth at last the power.

I waste mountains and hills,
And all their herb I parch;
And I have set rivers for islands,
And marshes I parch.

Yet it is not the passion of a mere physical effort that is in God; not mere excitement of war that thrills Him. But the suffering of men is upon Him, and He has taken their redemption to heart. He had said to His Servant (vv. 6, 7): "I give thee . . . to open the blind eyes, to bring out from prison the bound, from the house of bondage the dwellers in darkness." But here He himself puts on the sympathy and strain of that work.

And I will make the blind to walk in a way they know not,
By paths they know not I will guide them;
Turn darkness before them to light,
And serrated land to level.
These are the things that I do, and do not remit them.
They fall backwards, with shame are they shamed,
That put trust in a Carving,
That do say to a Cast, Ye are our Gods.*

* So the grammar of the original.

Now this pair of passages, in one of which God lays the work of redemption upon His human agent, and in another Himself puts on its passion and travail, are only one instance of a duality that runs through the whole of the Old Testament. As we repeatedly saw in the prophecies of Isaiah himself,* there is a double promise of the future through the Old Testament:—*first*, that God will achieve the salvation of Israel by an extraordinary human personality, who is figured now as a king, now as a Prophet, and now as a Priest; but, *second* also, that God Himself, in undeputed, unshared power, will come visibly to deliver His people and to reign over them. These two lines of prophecy run parallel, and even entangled through the Old Testament, but within its bounds no attempt is made to reconcile them. They pass from it still separate, to find their synthesis, as we all know, in One of whom each is the incomplete prophecy. While considering the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah, which run upon the first of these two lines, we pointed out, that, though standing in historical connection with Christ, they were not prophecies of His divinity. Lofty and expansive as were the titles they attributed to the Messiah, these titles did not imply more than an earthly ruler of extraordinary power and dignity. But we added that in the other and concurrent line of prophecy, and especially in those well-developed stages of it which appear in Isa. xl.-lxvi., we should find the true Old Testament promise of the Deity in human form and tabernacling among men. We urged that, if the divinity of Christ was to be seen in the Old Testament, we should more naturally find it in the line of promise, which speaks of God Himself descending to battle and to suffer by the side of men, than in the line that lifts a human ruler almost to the right hand of God. We have now come to a passage, which gives us the opportunity of testing this connection, which we have alleged between the so-called anthropomorphism of the Old Testament, and the Incarnation, which is the glory of the New.

When God presents Himself in the Old Testament as His people's Saviour, it is not always as Isaiah mostly saw Him, in awful power and majesty—a "King high and lifted up," or as "coming from far, burning and thick-rising smoke, and overflowing streams; causing the peal of His voice to be heard, and the lighting down of His arm to be seen, in the fury of anger and devouring fire—bursting and torrent and hailstones.†" But in a large number of passages, of which the one before us and the famous first six verses of ch. lxiii. are perhaps the most forcible, the Almighty is clothed with human passion and agony. He is described as loving, hating, showing zeal or jealousy, fear, repentance, and scorn. He bides His time, suddenly awakes to effort, and makes that effort in weakness, pain, and struggle, so extreme that He likens Himself not only to a solitary man in the ardour of battle, but to a woman in her unsharable hour of travail. To use a technical word, the prophets in their descriptions of God do not hesitate to be anthropopathic—imparting to Deity the passions of men.

In order to appreciate the full effect of this habit of the Jewish religion, we must contrast it with some principles of that religion, with

* Pp. 653, 699.

† Isa. xxxi.

which at first it seems impossible to reconcile it.

No religion more necessarily implies the spirituality of God than does the Jewish. It is true that in the pages of the Old Testament, you will nowhere find this formally expressed. No Jewish prophet ever said in so many words what Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "God is Spirit." In our own prophecy, *spirit* is frequently used, not to define the nature of God, but to express His power and the effectiveness of His will. But the Jewish Scriptures insist throughout upon the sublimity of God, or, to use their own term, His holiness. He is the Most High, Creator, Lord,—the Force and Wisdom that are behind nature and history. It is a sin to make any image of Him; it is an error to liken Him to man. "I am God and not man, the Holy One."* We have seen how absolutely the Divine omnipotence and sublimity are expressed by our own prophet, and we shall find Him again speaking thus: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."† But perhaps the doctrine of our prophet which most effectively sets forth God's loftiness and spirituality is his doctrine of God's word. God has but to speak and a thing is created or a deed done. He calls and the agent He needs is there; He sets His word upon him and the work is as good as finished. "My word that goeth forth out of My mouth, it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."‡ Omnipotence could not farther go. It would seem that all man needed from God was a word,—the giving of a command, that a thing must be.

Yet it is precisely in our prophecy that we find the most extreme ascriptions to the Deity of personal effort, weakness, and pain. The same chapters which celebrate God's sublimity and holiness, which reveal the eternal counsels of God working to their inevitable ends in time, which also insist, as this very chapter does, that for the performance of works of mercy and morality God brings to bear the slow creative forces that are in nature, or which again (as in other chapters) attribute all to the power of His simple word,—these same Scriptures suddenly change their style and, after the most human manner, clothe the Deity in the travail and passion of flesh. Why is it, that instead of aspiring still higher from those sublime conceptions of God to some consummate expression of His unity, as for instance in Islam, or of His spirituality, as in certain modern philosophies, prophecy dashes thus thunderously down upon our hearts with the message, scattered in countless, broken words, that all this omnipotence and all this sublimity are expended and realised for men only in passion and in pain?

It is no answer, which is given by many in our day, that after all the prophets were but frail men, unable to stay upon the high flight to which they sometimes soared, and obliged to sacrifice their logic to the fondness of their hearts and the general habit of man to make his god after his own image. No easy sneer like that can solve so profound a moral paradox.

* Hosea xi. 9.

† Ch. lv. 8, 9.

‡ *Ibid.*, ver. 11.

We must seek the solution otherwise, and earnest minds will probably find it along one or other of the two following paths.

1. The highest moral ideal is not, and never can be, the righteousness that is regnant, but that which is militant and agonising. It is the deficiency of many religions, that while representing God as the Judge and almighty executor of righteousness, they have not revealed Him as its advocate and champion as well. Christ gave us a very plain lesson upon this. As He clearly showed, when He refused the offer of all the kingdoms of the world, the highest perfection is not to be omnipotence upon the side of virtue, but to be there as patience, sympathy, and love. To will righteousness, and to rule life from above in favour of righteousness, is indeed Divine; but if these were the highest attributes of divinity, and if they exhausted the Divine interest in our race, then man himself, with his conscience to sacrifice himself on behalf of justice or of truth,—man himself, with his instinct to make the sins of others his burden, and their purity his agonising endeavour, would indeed be higher than his God. Had Jehovah been nothing but the righteous Judge of all the earth, then His witnesses and martyrs, and His prophets who took to themselves the conscience and reproach of their people's sins, would have been as much more admirable than Himself, as the soldier who serves his country on the battle-field or lays down his life for his people is more deserving of their gratitude and more certain of their devotion, than the king who equips him, sends him forth—and himself stays at home.

The God of the Old Testament is not such a God. In the moral warfare to which He has predestined His creatures, He Himself descends to participate. He is not abstract—that is, withdrawn—Holiness, nor mere sovereign Justice enthroned in heaven. He is One who "arises and comes down" for the salvation of men, who makes virtue His Cause and righteousness His Passion. He is no whit behind the chiefest of His servants. No seraph burns as God burns with ardour for justice; no angel of the presence flies more swiftly than Himself to the front rank of the failing battle. The human Servant, who is pictured in our prophecy, is more absolutely identified with suffering and agonising men than any angel could be; but even he does not stand more closely by their side, nor suffer more on their behalf, than the God who sends him forth. "For the Lord stirreth up jealousy like a man of war; in all His people's affliction He is afflicted; against His enemies He beareth Himself as a hero." So much from the side of righteousness.

2. But take the equally Divine attribute of love. When a religion affirms that God is love, it gives immense hostages. What is love without pity and compassion and sympathy? and what are these but self-imposed weakness and pain? Christ has told of the greatest love. "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" and the cost and sacrifice in which He thus outmatched man is one that the prophets before He came did not hesitate to impute to God. As far as human language is adequate for such a task, they picture God's love for men as costing Him so much. He painfully pleads for His people's loyalty; He travails in pain for their new birth and growth

in holiness; in all their afflictions He is afflicted, and He meets their stubbornness, not with the swift sentence of outraged holiness, but with longsuffering and patience, if so in the end He may win them. But the pain, that is thus essentially inseparable from love, reaches its acme when the beloved are not only in danger but in sin, when not only the future of their holiness is uncertain, but their guilty past bars the way to any future at all. We saw how Jeremiah's love thus took upon itself the conscience and reproach of Israel's sin; how much distress and anguish, how much sympathy and self-sacrificing labour, and at last how much hopeless endurance of the common calamity, that sin cost the noble prophet, though he might so easily have escaped it all. Now even thus does God deal with His people's sins; not only setting them in the light of His awful countenance, but taking them upon His heart; making them not only the object of His hate, but the anguish and the effort of His love. Jeremiah was a weak mortal, and God is the Omnipotent. Therefore, the issue of His agony shall be what His servant's never could effect, the redemption of Israel from sin; but in sympathy and in travail the Deity, though omnipotent, is no whit behind the man.

We have said enough to prove our case, that the true Old Testament prophecy of the nature and work of Jesus Christ is found not so much in the long promise of the exalted human ruler, for whom Israel's eyes looked, as in the assurance of God's own descent to battle with His people's foes and to bear their sins. In this God, omnipotent, yet in His zeal and love capable of passion, who before the Incarnation was afflicted in all His people's affliction, and before the Cross made their sin His burden and their salvation His agony, we see the love that was in Jesus Christ. For Jesus, too, is absolute holiness, yet not far off. He, too, is righteousness militant at our side, militant and victorious. He, too, has made our greatest suffering and shame His own problem and endeavour. He is anxious for us just where conscience bids us be most anxious about ourselves. He helps us because He feels when we feel our helplessness the most. Never before or since in humanity has righteousness been perfectly victorious as in Him. Never before or since, in the whole range of being, has any one felt as He did all the sin of man with all the conscience of God. He claims to forgive, as God forgives; to be able to save, as we know only God can save. And the proof of these claims, apart from the experience of their fulfilment in our own lives, is that the same infinite love was in Him, the same agony and willingness to sacrifice Himself for men, which we have seen made evident in the Passion of God.

CHAPTER IX.

FOUR POINTS OF A TRUE RELIGION.

ISAIAH xliii.-xlviii.

WE have now surveyed the governing truths of Isa. xl.-xlviii.: the One God, omnipotent and righteous; the One People, His servants and witnesses to the world; the nothingness of all

other gods and idols before Him; the vanity and ignorance of their diviners, compared with His power, who, because He has a purpose working through all history, and is both faithful to it and almighty to bring it to pass, can inspire His prophets to declare beforehand the facts that shall be. He has brought His people into captivity for a set time, the end of which is now near. Cyrus the Persian, already upon the horizon, and threatening Babylon, is to be their deliverer. But whomever He raises up on Israel's behalf, God is always Himself their foremost champion. Not only is His word upon them, but His heart is among them. He bears the brunt of their battle, and their deliverance, political and spiritual, is His own travail and agony. Whomever else He summons on the stage, He remains the true hero of the drama.

Now, chs. xliii.-xlviii. are simply the elaboration and more urgent offer of all these truths, under the sense of the rapid approach of Cyrus upon Babylon. They declare again God's unity, omnipotence, and righteousness, they confirm His forgiveness of His people, they repeat the laughter at the idols, they give us nearer views of Cyrus, they answer the doubts that many orthodox Israelites felt about this Gentile Messiah; chs. xlv. and xlvii. describe Babylon as if on the eve of her fall, and ch. xlviii., after Jehovah more urgently than ever presses upon reluctant Israel to show the results of her discipline in Babylon, closes with a call to leave the accursed city, as if the way were at last open. This call has been taken as the mark of a definite division of our prophecy. But too much must not be put upon it. It is indeed the first call to depart from Babylon; but it is not the last. And although ch. xlix., and the chapters following, speak more of Zion's Restoration and less of the Captivity, yet ch. xlix. is closely connected with ch. xlviii., and we do not finally leave Babylon behind till ch. lli. 12. Nevertheless, in the meantime ch. xlviii. will form a convenient point on which to keep our eyes.

Cyrus, when we last saw him, was upon the banks of the Halys, 546 B. C., startling Cræsus and the Lydian Empire into extraordinary efforts, both of a religious and political kind, to avert his attack. He had just come from an unsuccessful attempt upon the northern frontier of Babylon, and at first it appeared as if he were to find no better fortune on the western border of Lydia. In spite of his superior numbers, the Lydian army kept the ground on which he met them in battle. But Cræsus, thinking that the war was over for the season, fell back soon afterwards on Sardis, and Cyrus, following him up by forced marches, surprised him under the walls of the city, routed the famous Lydian cavalry by the novel terror of his camels, and after a siege of fourteen days sent a few soldiers to scale a side of the citadel too steep to be guarded by the defenders; and so Sardis, its king and its empire, lay at his feet. This Lydian campaign of Cyrus, which is related by Herodotus, is worth noting here for the light it throws on the character of the man, whom according to our prophecy, God chose to be His chief instrument in that generation. If his turning back from Babylonia, eight years before he was granted an easy entrance to her capital, shows how patiently Cyrus could wait upon fortune, his quick march upon Sardis is the brilliant evidence that when fortune showed the

way, she found this Persian an obedient and punctual follower. The Lydian campaign forms as good an illustration as we shall find of these texts of our prophet: "He pursueth them, he passeth in safety; by a way he (almost) treads not with his feet. He cometh upon satraps as on mortar, and as the potter treadeth upon clay (xli. 3, 25). I have holden his right hand to bring down before him nations, and the loins of kings will I loosen," (poor ungirt Cræsus, for instance, relaxing so foolishly after his victory!) "to open before him doors, and gates shall not be shut" (so was Sardis unready for him), "I go before thee, and will level the ridges; doors of brass I will shiver, and bolts of iron cut in sunder. And I will give to thee treasures of darkness, hidden riches of secret places" (xlv. 1-3). Some have found in this an allusion to the immense hoards of Cræsus, which fell to Cyrus with Sardis.

With Lydia, the rest of Asia Minor, including the cities of the Greeks, who held the coast of the Ægean, was bound to come into the Persian's hands. But the process of subjection turned out to be a long one. The Greeks got no help from Greece. Sparta sent to Cyrus an embassy with a threat, but the Persian laughed at it and it came to nothing. Indeed, Sparta's message was only a temptation to this irresistible warrior to carry his fortunate arms into Europe. His own presence, however, was required in the East, and his lieutenants found the thorough subjection of Asia Minor a task requiring several years. It cannot have well been concluded before 540, and while it was in progress we understand why Cyrus did not again attack Babylonia. Meantime, he was occupied with lesser tribes to the north of Media.

Cyrus' second campaign against Babylonia opened in 539. This time he avoided the northern wall from which he had been repulsed in 546. Attacking Babylonia from the east, he crossed the Tigris, beat the Babylonian king into Borsippa, laid siege to that fortress and marched on Babylon, which was held by the king's son, Belshazzar, Bil-sar-ussur. All the world knows the supreme generalship by which Cyrus is said to have captured Babylon without assaulting the walls, from whose impregnable height their defenders showered ridicule upon him; how he made himself master of Nebuchadrezzar's great bason at Sepharvaim, and turned the Euphrates into it; and how, before the Babylonians had time to notice the dwindling of the waters in their midst, his soldiers waded down the river bed, and by the river gates surprised the careless citizens upon a night of festival. But recent research makes it more probable that her inhabitants themselves surrendered Babylon to Cyrus.

Now it was during the course of the events just sketched, but before their culmination in the fall of Babylon, that chaps. xliii.-xlvi. were composed. That, at least, is what they themselves suggest. In three passages, which deal with Cyrus or with Babylon, some of the verbs are in the past, some in the future. Those in the past tense describe the calling and full career of Cyrus or the beginning of preparations against Babylon. Those in the future tense promise Babylon's fall or Cyrus' completion of the liberation of the Jews. Thus, in chap. xliii. 14 it is written: "For your sakes I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down as fugitives all of them, and the Chaldeans in the ships of their rejoic-

ing." Surely these words announce that Babylon's fate was already on the way to her, but not yet arrived. Again, in the verses which deal with Cyrus himself, xlv. 1-6, which we have partly quoted, the Persian is already "grasped by his right hand by God, and called;" but his career is not over, for God promises to do various things for him. The third passage is ver. 13 of the same chapter, where Jehovah says, "I have stirred him up in righteousness, and" changing to the future tense, "all his ways will I level; he shall build My city, and My captivity shall he send away." What could be more precise than the tenor of all these passages? If people would only take our prophet at his word; if with all their belief in the inspiration of the text of Scripture, they would only pay attention to its grammar, which surely, on their own theory, is also thoroughly sacred, then there would be to-day no question about the date of Isa. xl.-xlvi. As plainly as grammar can enable it to do, this prophecy speaks of Cyrus' campaign against Babylon as already begun, but of its completion as still future. Chap. xlviii., it is true, assumes events as still farther developed, but we will come to it afterwards.

During Cyrus' preparations, then, for invading Babylonia, and in prospect of her certain fall, chaps. xliii.-xlvi. repeat with greater detail and impetuosity the truths, which we have already gathered from chaps. xl.-xlii.

1. And first of these comes naturally the omnipotence, righteousness, and personal urgency of Jehovah Himself. Everything is again assured by His power and purpose; everything starts from His initiative. To illustrate this we could quote from almost every verse in the chapters under consideration. "I, I Jehovah, and there is none beside Me a Saviour. I am God"—El. "Also from to-day on I am He.* I will work, and who shall let it? I am Jehovah. I, I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions. I First, and I Last; and beside Me there is no God"—Elohim. "Is there a God," Eloah, "beside Me? yea, there is no Rock; I know not any. I Jehovah, Maker of all things. I am Jehovah, and there is none else; beside Me there is no God. I am Jehovah, and there is none else. Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of peace and Creator of evil, I am Jehovah, Maker of all these. I am Jehovah, and there is none else, God," Elohim, "beside Me. God-Righteous," El Ssaddiq, "and a Saviour: there is none except Me. Face Me, and be saved all ends of the earth; for I am God," El, "and there is none else. Only in Jehovah—of Me shall they say—are righteousnesses and strength. I am God," El, "and there is none else; God," Elohim, "and there is none like Me. I am He; I am First, yea, I am Last. I, I have spoken. I have declared it."

It is of advantage to gather together so many passages—and they might have been increased—from chaps. xliii.-xlvi. They let us see at a glance what a part the first personal pronoun plays in the Divine revelation. Beneath every religious truth is the unity of God. Behind every great movement is the personal initiative and urgency of God. And revelation is, in its essence, not the mere publication of truths about God, but the personal presence and communication to men of God Himself. Three words are

* From to-day on, Ez. xlviii. 35; but others take it *Also to-day I am He.*

used for Deity—El, Eloah, Elohim—exhausting the Divine terminology. But besides these, there is a formula which puts the point even more sharply: "I am He." It was the habit of the Hebrew nation, and indeed of all Semitic peoples, who shared their reverent unwillingness to name the Deity, to speak of Him simply by the third personal pronoun. The Book of Job is full of instances of the habit, and it also appears in many proper names, as Eli-hu, "My God-is-He," Abi-hu, "My-Father-is-He." Renan adduces the practice as evidence that the Semites were "naturally monotheistic,"*—as evidence for what was never the case! But if there was no original Semitic monotheism for this practice to prove, we may yet take the practice as evidence for the personality of the Hebrew God. The God of the prophets is not the *it*, which Mr. Matthew Arnold so strangely thought he had identified in their writings, and which, in philosophic language, that unsophisticated Orientals would never have understood, he so cumbrously named "a tendency not ourselves that makes for righteousness." Not anything like this is the God, who here urges His self-consciousness upon men. He says, "I am He,"—the unseen Power, who was too awful and too dark to be named, but about whom, when in their terror and ignorance His worshippers sought to describe Him, they assumed that He was a Person, and called Him, as they would have called one of themselves, by a personal pronoun. By the mouth of His prophet this vague and awful *He* declares Himself as *I, I, I*,—no mere tendency, but a living Heart and urgent Will, personal character and force of initiative, from which all tendencies move and take their direction and strength. "I am He."

History is strewn with the errors of those who have sought from God something else than Himself. All the degradation, even of the highest religions, has sprung from this, that their votaries forgot that religion was a communion with God Himself, a life in the power of His character and will, and employed it as the mere communication either of material benefits or of intellectual ideas. It has been the mistake of millions to see in revelation nothing but the telling of fortunes, the recovery of lost things, decision in quarrels, direction in war, or the bestowal of some personal favour. Such are like the person, of whom St. Luke tells us, who saw nothing in Christ but the recoverer of a bad debt: "Master, speak unto my brother that he divide the inheritance with me;" and their superstition is as far from true faith as the prodigal's old heart, when he said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth unto me," was from the other heart, when, in his poverty and woe, he cast himself utterly upon his Father: "I will arise and go to my Father." But no less a mistake do those make, who seek from God not Himself, but only intellectual information. The first Reformers did well, who brought the common soul to the personal grace of God; but many of their successors, in a controversy, whose dust obscured the sun

and allowed them to see but the length of their own weapons, used Scripture chiefly as a store of proofs for separate doctrines of the faith, and forgot that God Himself was there at all. And though in these days we seek from the Bible many desirable things, such as history, philosophy, morals, formulas of assurance of salvation, the forgiveness of sins, maxims for conduct, yet all these will avail us little, until we have found behind them the living Character, the Will, the Grace, the Urgency, the Almighty Power, by trust in whom and communion with whom alone they are added unto us.

Now the deity, who claims in these chapters to be the One, Sovereign God, was the deity of a little tribe. "I am Jehovah, I Jehovah am God, I Jehovah am He." We cannot too much impress ourselves with the historical wonder of this. In a world, which contained Babylon and Egypt with their large empires, Lydia with all her wealth, and the Medes with all their force; which was already feeling the possibilities of the great Greek life, and had the Persians, the masters of the future, upon its threshold,—it was the god of none of these, but of the obscurest tribe of their bondsmen, who claimed the Divine Sovereignty for Himself; it was the pride of none of these, but the faith of the most despised and, at its heart, most mournful religion of the time, which offered an explanation of history, claimed the future, and was assured that the biggest forces of the world were working for its ends. "Thus saith Jehovah, King of Israel, and his Redeemer Jehovah of Hosts, I First, and I Last; and beside Me there is no God. Is there a God beside Me? yea, there is no Rock; I know not any."

By itself this were a cheap claim, and might have been made by any idol among them, were it not for the additional proofs by which it is supported. We may summarise these additional proofs as threefold: Laughter, Gospel, and Control of History,—three marvels in the experience of exiles. People, mournfullest and most despised, their mouths were to be filled with the laughter of Truth's scorn upon the idols of their conquerors. Men, most tormented by conscience and filled with the sense of sin, they were to hear the gospel of forgiveness. Nation, against whom all fact seemed to be working, their God told them, alone of all nations of the world, that He controlled for their sake the facts of to-day and the issues of to-morrow.

2. A burst of laughter comes very weirdly out of the Exile. But we have already seen the intellectual right to scorn which these crushed captives had. They were monotheists and their enemies were image worshippers. Monotheism, even in its rudest forms, raises men intellectually,—it is difficult to say by how many degrees. Indeed, degrees do not measure the mental difference between an idolater and him who serves with his mind, as well as with all his heart and it not for the additional proofs by which it is a difference that is absolute. Israel in captivity was conscious of this, and therefore, although the souls of those sad men were filled beyond any in the world with the heaviness of sorrow and the humility of guilt, their proud faces carried a scorn they had every right to wear, as the servants of the One God. See how this scorn breaks forth in the following passage. Its text is corrupt, and its rhythm, at this distance from the voices that utter it, is hardly perceptible; but thoroughly evident is its tone of intellectual

* Renan's theory of the "natural monotheism" of the Semites was first published in his "Histoire des Langues Semitiques" some forty years ago. Nearly every Semitic scholar of repute found some occasion or other to refute it. But with Renan's charming genius for neglecting all facts that disturb an artistic arrangement of his subject, the overwhelming evidence against the natural monotheism of the Semite has been ignored by him, and he repeats his theory unmodified in his "Histoire du Peuple d'Israel," i. 31, published 1888.

superiority, and the scorn of it gushes forth in impetuous, unequal verse, the force of which the smoothness and dignity of our Authorised Version has unfortunately disguised.

1.

Formers of an idol are all of them waste,
And their darlings are utterly worthless!
And their confessors*—they! they see not and know not
Enough to feel shame.
Who has fashioned a god, or an image has cast?
'Tis to be utterly worthless.
Lo! all that depend on't are shamed,
And the gravers are less than men:
Let all of them gather *and* stand.
They quake and are shamed in the lump.

2.

Iron-graver—he takes † a chisel,
And works with hot coals,
And with hammers he moulds;
And has done it with the arm of his strength.
—Anon hungers, and strength goes;
Drinks no water, and wearies!

3.

Wood-graver—he draws a line,
Marks it with pencil,
Makes it with planes,
And with compasses marks it.
So has made it the build of a man,
To a grace that is human—
To inhabit a house, cutting it cedars.‡

4.

Or one takes an ilex or oak,
And picks for himself from the trees of the wood;
One has planted a pine, and the rain makes it big,
And 'tis there for a man to burn.
And one has taken of it, and been warmed;
Yea, kindles and bakes bread,—
Yea, works out a god, and has worshipped it!
Has made it an idol, and bows down before it!
Part of it burns he with fire,
Upon part eats flesh,
Roasts roast and is full;
Yea, warms him and saith,
"Aha, I am warm, have seen fire!"
And the rest of it—to a god he has made—to his image!
He bows to it, worships it, prays to it,
And says, "Save me, for my god art thou!"

5.

They know not and deem not!
For He hath bedaubed, past seeing, their eyes
Past thinking, their hearts.
And none takes to heart,
Neither has knowledge nor sense to say,
"Part of it burned I in fire—
Yea, have baked bread on its coals,
Do roast flesh that I eat,—
And the rest o't, to a Disgust should I make it?
The trunk of a tree should I worship?"
Herder of ashes,§ a duped heart has sent him astray,
That he cannot deliver his soul, neither say,
"Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Is not the prevailing note in these verses surprise at the mental condition of an idol-worshipper? "They see not and know not" enough "to feel shame. None takes it to heart, neither has knowledge nor sense to say, Part of it I have burned in fire . . . and the rest, should I make it a god?" This intellectual confidence, breaking out into scorn, is the second great token of truth, which distinguishes the religion of this poor slave of a people.

* Literally *witnesses*—*i. e.*, of the idols.

† This word is wanting in the text, which is corrupt here. Some supply the word "sharpeneth," imagining that חדר has fallen away from the beginning of the verse, through confusion with the יחר which ends the previous verse; or they bring יחר itself, changing it to חדר. But evidently חרש ברזל begins the verse; cf. the parallel חרש עצים which begins ver. 13.

‡ Here, again, the text is uncertain. With some critics I have borrowed for this verse the first three words of the following verse.

§ Perhaps *feeder on ashes*.

3. The third token is its moral character. The intellectual truth of a religion would go for little, had the religion nothing to say to man's moral sense—did it not concern itself with his sins, had it no redemption for his guilt. Now, the chapters before us are full of judgment and mercy. If they have scorn for the idols, they have doom for sin, and grace for the sinner. They are no mere political manifesto for the occasion, declaring how Israel shall be liberated from Babylon. They are a gospel for sinners in all time. By this they farther accredit themselves as a universal religion.

God is omnipotent, yet He can do nothing for Israel till Israel put away their sins. Those sins, and not the people's captivity, are the Deity's chief concern. Sin has been at the bottom of their whole adversity. This is brought out with all the versatility of conscience itself. Israel and their God have been at variance; their sin has been, what conscience feels the most, a sin against love. "Yet not upon Me hast thou called, O Jacob; how hast thou been wearied with Me, O Israel. . . . I have not made thee to slave with offerings, nor wearied thee with incense . . . but thou hast made Me to slave with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities" (xliii. 22-24). So God sets their sins, where men most see the blackness of their guilt, in the face of His love. And now He challenges conscience. "Put Me in remembrance; let us come to judgment together; indict, that thou mayest be justified" (ver. 26). But it had been agelong and original sin. "Thy father, the first had sinned; yea, thy representative men"—literally "interpreters, mediators—had transgressed against Me. Therefore did I profane consecrated princes, and gave Jacob to the ban, and Israel to reviling" (vv. 27, 28). The Exile itself was but an episode in a tragedy, which began far back with Israel's history. And so chap. xlviii. repeats: "I knew that thou dost deal very treacherously, and Transgressor-from-the-womb do they call thee" (ver. 8). And then there comes the sad note of what might have been. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as the river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (ver. 18). As broad Euphrates thou shouldst have lavishly rolled, and flashed to the sun like a summer sea. But now, hear what is left. "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked" (ver. 22).

Ah, it is no dusty stretch of ancient history, no long-extinct volcano upon the far waste of Asian politics, to which we are led by the writings of the Exile. But they treat of man's perennial trouble; and conscience, that never dies, speaks through their old-fashioned letters and figures with words we feel like swords. And therefore, still, whether they be psalms or prophecies, they stand like some ancient minster in the modern world,—where, on each new soiled day, till time ends, the heavy heart of man may be helped to read itself, and lift up its guilt for mercy.

They are the confessional of the world, but they are also its gospel, and the altar where forgiveness is sealed. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of Me. I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; turn unto Me, for I have

redeemed thee. Israel shall be saved by Jehovah with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." * Now, when we remember who the God is, who thus speaks,—not merely One who flings the word of pardon from the sublime height of His holiness, but, as we saw, speaks it from the midst of all His own passion and struggle under His people's sins,—then with what assurance does His word come home to the heart. What honour and obligation to righteousness does the pardon of such a God put upon our hearts. One understands why Ambrose sent Augustine, after his conversion, first to these prophecies.

4. The fourth token, which these chapters offer for the religion of Jehovah, is the claim they make for it to interpret and to control history. There are two verbs, which are frequently repeated throughout the chapters, and which are given together in chap. xliii. 12: "I have published and I have saved." These are the two acts by which Jehovah proves His solitary divinity over against the idols.

The "publishing," of course, is the same prediction, of which chap. xli. spoke. It is "publishing" in former times things happening now; it is "publishing" now things that are still to happen. "And who, like Me, calls out and publishes it, and sets it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and that shall come, let them publish. Tremble not, nor fear: did I not long ago cause thee to hear? and I published, and ye are My witnesses. Is there a God beside Me? nay, there is no Rock; I know none" (xliv. 7, 8).

The two go together, the doing of wonderful and saving acts for His people and the publishing of them before they come to pass. Israel's past is full of such acts. Chap. xliii. instances the delivery from Egypt (vv. 16, 17), but immediately proceeds (vv. 18, 19): "Remember ye not the former things"—here our old friend *ri'shonôth* occurs again, but this time means simply "previous events"—"neither consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; even now it springs forth. Shall ye not know it? Yea, I will set in the wilderness a way, in the desert rivers." And of this new event of the Return, and of others which will follow from it, like the building of Jerusalem, the chapters insist over and over again, that they are the work of Jehovah, who is therefore a Saviour God. But what better proof can be given, that these saving facts are indeed His own and part of His counsel, than that He foretold them by His messengers and prophets to Israel,—of which previous "publication" His people are the witnesses. "Who among the peoples can publish thus, and let us hear predictions?—again *ri'shonôth*, "things ahead—let them bring their witnesses, that they may be justified, and let them hear and say, Truth. Ye are my witnesses, saith Jehovah," to Israel (xliii. 9, 10). "I have published, and I have saved, and I have shewed, and there was no strange god among you; therefore"—because Jehovah was notoriously the only God who had to do with them during all this prediction and fulfilment of prediction—"ye are witnesses for Me, saith Jehovah, that I am God" (*id.* ver. 12). The meaning of all this is plain. Jehovah is God alone, because He is directly effective in history for the salvation of His people, and because He has published be-

forehand what He will do. The great instance of this, which the prophecy adduces, is the present movement towards the liberation of the people, of which movement Cyrus is the most conspicuous factor. Of this xlv. 19 ff. says: "Not in secret have I spoken, in a place of the land of darkness. I have not said to the seed of Jacob, In vanity seek ye Me. I Jehovah am a speaker of righteousness,* a publisher of things that are straight. Be gathered and come in; draw together, ye survivors of the nations: they have no knowledge that carry about the log of their image, and are suppliants to a god that cannot save. Publish, and bring it here; nay, let them advise together; who made this to be heard,"—that is, "who published this,—of ancient time?" Who "published this of old? I Jehovah, and there is none God beside Me: a God righteous,"—that is, consistent, true to His published word,—and a Saviour, there is none beside Me." Here we have joined together the same ideas as in xliii. 12. There "I have declared and saved" is equivalent to "a God righteous and a Saviour" here. "Only in Jehovah are righteousnesses," that is, fidelity to His anciently published purposes; "and strength," that is, capacity to carry these purposes out in history. God is righteous because, according to another verse in the same prophecy (xlv. 26), "He confirmeth the word of His servant, and the advice of His messengers He fulfilleth."

Now the question has been asked, To what predictions does the prophecy allude as being fulfilled in those days when Cyrus was so evidently advancing to the overthrow of Babylon? Before answering this question it is well to note, that, for the most part, the prophet speaks in general terms. He gives no hint to justify that unfounded belief, to which so many think it necessary to cling, that Cyrus was actually named by a prophet of Jehovah years before he appeared. Had such a prediction existed, we can have no doubt that our prophet would now have appealed to it. No: he evidently refers only to those numerous and notorious predictions by Isaiah, and by Jeremiah, of the return of Israel from exile after a certain and fixed period. Those were now coming to pass.

But from this new day Jehovah also predicts for the days to come, and He does this very particularly, xlv. 26. "Who is saying of Jerusalem, She shall be inhabited; and of the cities of Judah, They shall be built; and of her waste places, I will raise them up. Who saith to the deep, Be dry, and thy rivers I will dry up. Who saith of Koresh, My Shepherd, and all My pleasure he shall fulfil: even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built, and the Temple shall be founded."

Thus, backward and forward, yesterday, to-day and for ever, Jehovah's hand is upon history. He controls it: it is the fulfilment of His ancient purpose. By predictions made long ago and fulfilled to-day, by the readiness to predict to-day what will happen to-morrow, He is surely God and God alone. Singular fact, that in that day of great empires, confident in their resources, and with the future so near their grasp, it should be the God of a little people, cut off from their history, servile and seemingly spent, who should take the big things of earth—Egypt, Ethiopia, Seba—and speak of them as counters to be given in exchange for His people; who should speak of such a people as the chief heirs of the future,

* Chs. xliii. 25; xlv. 21, 22; xlv. 17.

* See ch. xiv. of this Book.

the indispensable ministers of mankind. The claim has two Divine features. It is unique, and history has vindicated it. It is unique: no other religion, in that or in any other time, has so rationally explained past history or laid out the ages to come upon the lines of a purpose so definite, so rational, so beneficent—a purpose so worthy of the One God and Creator of all. And it has been vindicated: Israel returned to their own land, resumed the development of their calling, and, after the centuries came and went, fulfilled the promise that they should be the religious teachers of mankind. The long delay of this fulfilment surely but testifies the more to the Divine foresight of the promise; to the patience, which nature, as well as history, reveals to be, as much as omnipotence, a mark of Deity.

These, then, are the four points, upon which the religion of Israel offers itself. *First*, it is the force of the character and grace of a personal God; *second*, it speaks with a high intellectual confidence, whereof its scorn is here the chief mark; *third*, it is intensely moral, making man's sin its chief concern; and *fourth*, it claims the control of history, and history has justified the claim.

CHAPTER X.

CYRUS.

ISAIAH xli. 2, 25; xlv. 28-xlv. 13; xlv. 11; xlviii. 14, 15.

CYRUS, the Persian, is the only man outside the covenant and people of Israel, who is yet entitled the Lord's Shepherd, and the Lord's Messiah or Christ. He is, besides, the only great personality of whom both the Bible and Greek literature treat at length and with sympathy. Did we know nothing more of him than this, the heathen who received the most sacred titles of Revelation, the one man in history who was the cynosure of both Greece and Judah, could not fail to be of the greatest interest to us. But apart from the way in which he impressed the Greek imagination and was interpreted by the Hebrew conscience, we have an amount of historical evidence about Cyrus, which, if it dissipates the beautiful legends told of his origin and his end, confirms most of what is written of his character by Herodotus and Xenophon, and all of what is described as his career by the prophet whom we are studying. Whether of his own virtue, or as being the leader of a new race of men at the fortunate moment of their call, Cyrus lifted himself, from the lowest of royal stations, to a conquest and an empire achieved by only two or three others in the history of the world. Originally but the prince of Anshan, or Anzan,*—a territory of uncertain size at the head of the Persian Gulf,—he brought under his sway, by policy or war, the large and vigorous nations of the Medes and Persians; he overthrew the Lydian kingdom, and subjugated Asia Minor; he so impressed the beginnings of Greek life, that, with all their own great men, the Greeks never ceased to regard this Persian as the ideal king; he captured Babylon, the throne of

the ancient East, and thus effected the transfer of empire from the Semitic to the Aryan stock. He also satisfied the peoples, whom he had beaten, with his rule, and organised his realms with a thoroughness unequalled over so vast an extent till the rise of the Roman Empire.

We have scarcely any contemporary or nearly contemporary evidence about his personality. But his achievements testify to extraordinary genius, and his character was the admiration of all antiquity. To Greek literature Cyrus was the Prince pre-eminent,—set forth as the model for education in childhood, self-restraint in youth, just and powerful government in manhood. Most of what we read of him in Xenophon's "Cyropædia" is, of course, romance; but the very fact, that, like our own King Arthur, Cyrus was used as a mirror to flash great ideals down the ages, proves that there was with him native brilliance and width of surface as well as fortunate eminence of position. He owed much to the virtue of his race. Rotten as the later Persians have become, the nation in those days impressed its enemies with its truthfulness, purity, and vigour. But the man who not only led such a nation, and was their darling, but combined under his sceptre, in equal discipline and contentment, so many other and diverse peoples, so many powerful and ambitious rulers, cannot have been merely the best specimen of his own nation's virtue, but must have added to this, at least much of the original qualities—humanity, breadth of mind, sweetness, patience, and genius for managing men—which his sympathetic biographer imputes to him in so heroic a degree. It is evident that the "Cyropædia" is ignorant of many facts about Cyrus, and must have taken conscious liberties with many more, but nobody—who, on the one hand, is aware of what Cyrus effected upon the world, and who, on the other, can appreciate that it was possible for a foreigner (who, nevertheless, had travelled through most of the scenes of Cyrus' career) to form this rich conception of him more than a century after his death—can doubt that the Persian's character (due allowance being made for hero-worship) must have been in the main as Xenophon describes it.

Yet it is very remarkable that our Scripture states not one moral or religious virtue as the qualification of this Gentile to the title of "Jehovah's Messiah." We search here in vain for any gleam of appreciation of that character, which drew the admiring eyes of Greece. In the whole range of our prophecy there is not a single adjective, expressing a moral virtue, applied to Cyrus. The "righteousness," which so many passages associate with his name, is attributed, not to him, but to God's calling of him, and does not imply justice or any similar quality, but is, as we shall afterwards see when we examine the remarkable use of this word in Second Isaiah, a mixture of good faith and thoroughness,—all-rightness.* The one passage of our prophet, in which it has been supposed

* The parallel which Professor Sayce ("Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments," p. 147) draws between the statement of the Cyrus-cylinder, that Cyrus "governed in justice and righteousness, and was righteous in hand and heart," and Isa. xlv. 13, "Jehovah raised him up in righteousness," is therefore utterly unreal. It is very difficult to see how the Deputy-Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford could have been reminded of the one passage by the other, for in Isa. xlv. 13 *righteousness* neither is used of Cyrus, nor signifies the moral virtue which it does on the cylinder.

* Identified by Delitzsch as East, Halévy as West, and Winckler as North, Elam. Cyrus, though reigning here, was a pure Persian, an Akhæmenid or son of the royal house of Persia.

by some that Jehovah makes a religious claim to Cyrus, as if the Persian were a monotheist—"he calleth on My name"—is, as we have seen,* too uncertain, both in text and rendering, to have anything built upon it. Indeed, no Hebrew could have justly praised this Persian's faith, who called himself the "servant of Merodach," and in his public proclamations to Babylonia ascribed to the Babylonian gods his power to enter their city.† Cyrus was very probably the pious ruler described by Xenophon, but he was no monotheist. And our prophet denies all religious sympathy between him and Jehovah, in words too strong to be misunderstood: "I woo thee, though thou hast not known Me. . . . I gird thee, though thou hast not known Me" (chap. xlv. 4, 5).

On what, then, is the Divine election of Cyrus grounded by our prophet, if not upon his character and his faith? Simply and barely upon God's sovereignty and will. That is the impressive lesson of the passage: "I am Jehovah, Maker of everything; that stretch forth the heavens alone, and spread the earth by Myself . . . that say of Koresh, My shepherd, and all My pleasure he shall accomplish" (xlv. 24, 28). Cyrus is Jehovah's because all things are Jehovah's; of whatsoever character or faith they be, they are His and for His uses. "I am Jehovah, and there is none else: Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of peace and Creator of evil; I, Jehovah, Maker of all these." God's sovereignty could not be more broadly stated. All things, irrespective of their character, are from Him and for His ends. But what end is dearer to the Almighty, what has He more plainly declared, than that His people‡ shall be settled again in their own land? For this He will use the fittest force. The return of Israel to Palestine is a political event, requiring political power; and the greatest political power of the day is Cyrus. Therefore, by His prophet, the Almighty declares Cyrus to be His people's deliverer, His own anointed. "Thus saith Jehovah to His Messiah, to Koresh: . . . That thou mayest know that I am Jehovah, Caller of thee by thy name, God of Israel, for the sake of My servant Jacob and Israel My chosen. And I

have called thee by thy name. I have wooed thee, though thou hast not known Me" (xlv. 1, 3, 4).

Now to this designation of Cyrus, as the Messiah, great objections rose from Israel. We can understand them. People who have fallen from a glorious past, cling passionately to its precedents. All the ancient promises of a deliverer for Israel represented him as springing from the house of David. The deliverance, too, was to have come by miracle, or by the impression of the people's own holiness upon their oppressors. The Lord was to have made bare His arm and Israel to go forth in the pride of His favour, as in the days of Egypt and the Red Sea. But this deliverer, who was announced, was alien to the commonwealth of Israel; and not by some miracle was the people's exodus promised, but as the effect of his imperial word—a minor incident in his policy! The precedents and the pride of Israel called out against such a scheme of salvation, and the murmurs of the people rose against the word of God.

Sternly replies the Almighty: "Woe to him that striveth with his Moulder, a potsherd among the potsherds of the ground! Saith clay to its moulder, What doest thou? or thy work" of thee, "No hands hath he? Woe to him that saith to a father, What begetteth thou? or to a woman, With what travailest thou? Thus saith Jehovah, Holy of Israel and his Moulder: The things that are coming ask of Me; concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands, command ye Me! I have made Earth,* and created man upon her: I, My hands, have stretched Heaven, and all its hosts have I ordered." In that universal providence, this Cyrus is but an incident. "I have stirred him up in righteousness, and all his ways shall I make level. He"—emphatic—"shall build My City, and My Captivity he shall send off—not for price and not for reward, saith Jehovah of Hosts" (xlv. 9-13).

To this bare fiat, the passages referring to Cyrus in chap. xlv. and chap. xlviii. add scarcely anything. "I am God, and there is none like Me. . . . Who say, My counsel shall stand, and all My pleasure will I perform. Who call from the sunrise a Bird-of-prey, from a land far-off the Man of My counsel. Yea, I have spoken, yea, I will bring it to pass. I have formed, yea, will do it" (xlv. 9, 10, 11). "Bird-of-prey" here has been thought to have reference to the eagle, which was the standard of Cyrus. But it refers to Cyrus himself. What God sees in this man to fulfil His purpose is swift, resistless force. Not his character, but his sloop is useful for the Almighty's end. Again: "Be gathered, all of you, and hearken; who among them hath published these things? Jehovah hath loved him: he will do His pleasure on Babel, and his arm" shall be on "the Chaldeans. I, I have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and will cause his way to prosper," or, "I will pioneer his way" (xlviii. 14, 15). This verb "to cause to prosper" is one often used by our prophet, but nowhere more appropriately to its original meaning than here, where it is used of "a way." The word signifies "to cut through;" then "to ford a river"—there is no word for bridge in Hebrew; then "to go on well, prosper."†

* Earth here without the article, but plainly *the earth* and not *the land* of Judah.

† Cf. with this Hebrew word **עָלָה** the Greek *προκοπτειν*,

* See note to ch. vii.

† The following are extracts from the Cylinder of Cyrus (see Sayce's "Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments," pp. 138-140):—"Cyrus, king of Elam, he (Merodach) proclaimed by name for the sovereignty. . . . Whom he had conquered with his hand, he governed in justice and righteousness. Merodach, the great lord, the restorer of his people, beheld with joy the deeds of his viceroy, who was righteous in hand and heart. To Babylon he summoned his march, and he bade him take the road to Babylon; like a friend and a comrade he went at his side. Without fighting or battle he caused him to enter into Babylon, his city of Babylon reared. The god . . . has in goodness drawn nigh to him, has made strong his name. I Cyrus . . . I entered Babylon in peace. . . . Merodach the great lord (cheered) the heart of his servant. . . . My vast armies he marshalled peacefully in the midst of Babylon; throughout Sumer and Accad I had no revilers. . . . Accad, Marad, etc., I restored the gods who dwelt within them to their places. . . . all their peoples I assembled and I restored their lands. And the gods of Sumer and Accad whom Nabonidos, to the anger of the lord of gods (Merodach), had brought into Babylon, I settled in peace in their sanctuaries by command of Merodach, the great lord. In the goodness of their hearts may all the gods whom I have brought into their strong places daily intercede before Bel and Nebo, that they should grant me length of days: may they bless my projects with prosperity, and may they say to Merodach my lord, that Cyrus the king, thy worshipper, and Kambyzes his son (deserve his favour)."

‡ Why so sovereign a God should be in such peculiar relations with one people, we will try to see in ch. xv.

In all these passages, then, there is no word about character. Cyrus is neither chosen for his character nor said to be endowed with one. But that he is there, and that he does so much, is due simply to this, that God has chosen him. And what he is endowed with is force, push, swiftness, irresistibility. He is, in short, not a character, but a tool; and God makes no apology for using him but this, that he has the qualities of a tool.

Now we cannot help being struck with the contrast of all this, the Hebrew view of Cyrus, with the well-known Greek views of him. To the Greeks he is first and foremost a character. Xenophon, and Herodotus almost as much as Xenophon, are less concerned with what Cyrus did than with what he was. He is the King, the ideal ruler. It is his simplicity, his purity, his health, his wisdom, his generosity, his moral influence upon men, that attract the Greeks, and they conceive that he cannot be too brightly painted in his virtues, if so he may serve for an example to following generations. But bring Cyrus out of the light of the eyes of this hero-worshipping people, that light that has so gilded his native virtues, into the shadow of the austere Hebrew faith, and the brilliance is quenched. He still moves forcibly, but his character is neutral. Scripture emphasises only his strength, his serviceableness, his success. "Whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loosen the loins of kings; to open doors before him, and gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee, and make the rugged places plain. I will shiver doors of brass, and bars of iron will I sunder" (xlv. 1, 2). That Cyrus is doing a work in God's hand and for God's end, and therefore forcibly, and sure of success—that is all the interest Scripture takes in Cyrus.

Observe the difference. It is characteristic of the two nations. The Greek views Cyrus as an example; therefore cannot too abundantly multiply his morality. The Hebrew views him as a tool; but with a tool you are not anxious about its moral character, you only desire to be convinced of its force and its fitness. The Greek mind is careful to unfold the noble humanity of the man,—a humanity universally and eternally noble. By the side of that imperishable picture of him, how meagre to Greek eyes would have seemed the temporary occasion, for which the Hebrew claimed Cyrus had been raised up—to lead the petty Jewish tribe back to their own obscure corner of the earth. Herodotus and Xenophon, had you told them that this was the chief commission of Cyrus from God, to restore the Jews to Palestine, would have laughed. "Identify him, forsooth, with those provincial interests!" they would have said. "He was meant, we lift him up, for mankind!"

What judgment are we to pass on these two characteristic pictures of Cyrus? What lessons are we to draw from their contrast?

They do not contradict, but in many particulars they corroborate one another. Cyrus would not have been the efficient weapon in the Almighty's hand, which our prophet panegyrises, but for that thoughtfulness in preparation and swift readiness to seize the occasion, which Xenophon extols. And nothing is more striking to one familiar with our Scriptures, when reading

to beat or cut a way through like pioneers; then to forward a work, advance, prosper (Luke ii. 52; Gal. i. 14; 2 Tim. ii. 16).

the "*Cyropædia*," than the frequency with which the writer insists on the success that followed the Persian. If to the Hebrew Cyrus was the called of God, upheld in righteousness, to the Greek he was equally conspicuous as the favourite of fortune. "I have always," Xenophon makes the dying king say, "seemed to feel my strength increase with the advance of time, so that I have not found myself weaker in my old age than in my youth, nor do I know that I have attempted or desired anything in which I have not been successful." * And this was said piously, for Xenophon's Cyrus was a devout servant of the gods.

The two views, then, are not hostile, nor are we compelled to choose between them. Still, they make a very suggestive contrast, if we put these two questions about them: Which is the more true to historical fact? Which is the more inspiring example?

Which is the more true to historical fact? There is no difficulty in answering this: undoubtedly, the Hebrew. It has been of far more importance to the world that Cyrus freed the Jews than that he inspired the "*Cyropædia*." That single enactment of his, perhaps only one of a hundred consequences of his capture of Babylon, has had infinitely greater results than his character, or than its magnificent exaggeration by Greek hero-worship. No one who has read the "*Cyropædia*"—out of his school-days—would desire to place it in any contrast, in which its peculiar charm would be shadowed, or its own modest and strictly-limited claims would not receive justice. The charm, the truth of the "*Cyropædia*," are eternal; but the significance they borrow from Cyrus—though they are as much due, perhaps, to Xenophon's own pure soul as to Cyrus—is not to be compared for one instant to the significance of that single deed of his, into which the Bible absorbs the meaning of his whole career,—the liberation of the Jews. The "*Cyropædia*" has been the instruction and delight of many,—of as many in modern times, perhaps, as in ancient. But the liberation of the Jews meant the assurance of the world's religious education. Cyrus sent this people back to their land solely as a spiritual people. He did not allow them to set up again the house of David, but by his decree the Temple was rebuilt. Israel entered upon their purely religious career, set in order their vast stores of spiritual experience, wrote their histories of grace and providence, developed their worship, handed down their law, and kept themselves holy unto the Lord. Till, in the fulness of the times, from this petty and exclusive tribe, and by the fire, which they kept burning on the altar that Cyrus had empowered them to raise, there was kindled the glory of an universal religion. To change the figure, Christianity sprang from Judaism as the flower from the seed; but it was the hand of Cyrus, which planted the seed in the only soil, in which it could have fructified. Of such an universal destiny for the Faith, Cyrus was not conscious, but the Jews themselves were. Our prophet represents him, indeed, as acting for "Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel's My chosen," but the chapter does not close without proclamation to "the ends of the earth to look unto Jehovah and be saved," and the promise of a time "when every knee shall bow and every tongue swear unto the God of Israel."

Now put all these results, which the Jews, re-

* "*Cyropædia*," Book VIII. ch. vii. 6.

gardless of the character of Cyrus, saw flowing from his policy, as the servant of God on their behalf, side by side with the influence which the Greeks borrowed from Cyrus, and say whether Greek or Jew had the more true and historical conscience of this great power,—whether Greek or Jew had his hand on the pulse of the world's main artery. Surely we see that the main artery of human life runs down the Bible, that here we have a sense of the control of history, which is higher than even the highest hero-worship. Some may say, "True, but what a very unequal contest, into which to thrust the poor 'Cyrō-pædia'!" Precisely; it is from the inequality of the contrast, that we learn the uniqueness of Israel's inspiration. Let us do all justice to the Greek and his appreciation of Cyrus. In that, he seems the perfection of humanity; but with the Jew we rise to the Divine, touching the right hand of the providence of God.

There is a moral lesson for ourselves in these two views about Cyrus. The Greeks regard him as a hero, the Jews as an instrument. The Greeks are interested in him that he is so attractive a figure, so effective an example to rouse men and restrain them. But the Jews stand in wonder of his subjection to the will of God; their Scriptures extol, not his virtues, but his predestination to certain Divine ends.

Now let us say no word against hero-worship. We have need of all the heroes, which the Greek, and every other, literature can raise up for us. We need the communion of the saints. To make us humble in our pride, to make us hopeful in our despair, we need our big brothers, the heroes of humanity. We need them in history, we need them in fiction; we cannot do without them for shame, for courage, for fellowship, for truth. But let us remember that still more indispensable—for strength, as well as for peace, of mind—is the other temper. Neither self nor the world is conquered by admiration of men, but by the fear and obligation of God. I speak now of applying this temper to ourselves. We shall live fruitful and consistent lives only in so far as we hear God saying to us, "I gird thee," and give ourselves into His guidance. Admire heroes if thou wilt, but only admire them and thou remainest a slave. Learn their secret, to commit themselves to God and to obey Him, and thou shalt become a hero too.

God's anointing of Cyrus, the heathen, has yet another lesson to teach us, which religious people especially need to learn.

This passage about Cyrus lifts us to a very absolute and awful faith. "I am Jehovah, and none else: Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of peace and Creator of mischief; I Jehovah, Maker of all these things." The objection at once rises, "Is it possible to believe this? Are we to lay upon providence everything that happens? Surely we Westerns, with our native scepticism and strong conscience, cannot be expected to hold a faith so Oriental and fatalistic as that."

But notice to whom the passage is addressed. To religious people, who professedly accept God's sovereignty, but wish to make an exception in the one case against which they have a prejudice—that a Gentile should be the deliverer of the holy people. Such narrow and imperfect believers are reminded that they must not substitute for faith in God their own ideas of how God ought to work; that they must not limit

His operations to their own conception of His past revelations; that God does not always work even by His own precedents; and that many other forces than conventional and religious ones—yea, even forces as destitute of moral or religious character as Cyrus himself seemed to be—are also in God's hands, and may be used by Him as means of grace. There is frequent charge made in our day against what are called the more advanced schools of theology, of scepticism and irreverence. But this passage reminds us that the most sceptical and irreverent are those old-fashioned believers, who, clinging to precedent and their own stereotyped notions of things, deny that God's hands are in a movement, because it is novel and not orthodox. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Moulder; shall the clay say to its moulder, What makest thou?" God did not cease "moulding" when He gave us the canon and our creeds, when He founded the Church and the Sacraments. His hand is still among the clay, and upon time, that great "potter's wheel," which still moves obedient to His impulse. All the large forward movements, the big things of to-day—commerce, science, criticism—however neutral, like Cyrus, their character may be, are, like Cyrus, grasped and anointed by God. Therefore let us show reverence and courage before the great things of to-day. Do not let us scoff at their novelty or grow fearful because they show no orthodox, or even no religious character. God reigns, and He will use them, for what has been the dearest purpose of His heart, the emancipation of true religion, the confirmation of the faithful, the victory of righteousness. When Cyrus rose and the prophet named him as Israel's deliverer, and the severely orthodox in Israel objected, did God attempt to soothe them by pointing out how admirable a character he was, and how near in religion to the Jews themselves? God did no such thing, but spoke only of the military and political fitness of this great engine, by which He was to batter Babylon. That Cyrus was a quick marcher, a far shooter, an inspirer of fear, a follower up of victory, one who swooped like a "bird-of-prey," one whose weight of war burst through every obstruction,—this is what the astonished pedants are told about the Gentile, to whose Gentileness they had objected. No soft words to calm their bristling orthodoxy, but heavy facts,—an appeal to their common-sense, if they had any, that this was the most practical means for the practical end God had in view. For again we learn the old lesson the prophets are ever so anxious to teach us, "God is wise." He is concerned, not to be orthodox or true to His own precedent, but to be practical, and effective for salvation.

And so, too, in our own day, though we may not see any religious character whatsoever about certain successful movements—say in science, for instance—which are sure to affect the future of the Church and of Faith, do not let us despair, neither deny that they, too, are in the counsels of God. Let us only be sure that they are permitted for some end—some practical end; and watch, with meekness but with vigilance, to see what that end shall be. Perhaps the endowment of the Church with new weapons of truth; perhaps her emancipation from associations which, however ancient, are unhealthy; perhaps her opportunity to go forth upon new heights of vision, new fields of conquest.

CHAPTER XI.

BEARING OR BORNE.

ISAIAH xlv.

CHAPTER XLVI. is a definite prophecy, complete in itself. It repeats many of the truths which we have found in previous chapters, and we have already seen what it says about Cyrus. But it also strikes out a new truth, very relevant then, when men made idols and worshipped the works of their hands, and relevant still, when so many, with equal stupidity, are more concerned about keeping up the forms of their religion than allowing God to sustain themselves.

The great contrast, which previous chapters have been elaborating, is the contrast between the idols and the living God. On the one side we have had pictures of the busy idol-factories, cast into agitation by the advent of Cyrus, turning out with much toil and noise their tawdry, unstable images. Foolish men, instead of letting God undertake for them, go to and try what their own hands and hammers can effect. Over against them, and their cunning and toil, the prophet sees the God of Israel rise alone, taking all responsibility of salvation to Himself—"I, I am He: look unto Me, all the ends of the earth, and be ye saved." This contrast comes to a head in chap. xlv.

It is still the eve of the capture of Babylon; but the prophet pictures to himself what will happen on the morrow of the capture. He sees the conqueror following the old fashion of triumph—rifling the temples of his enemies and carrying away the defeated and discredited gods as trophies to his own. The haughty idols are torn from their pedestals and brought head foremost through the temple doors. "Bel crouches"—as men have crouched to Bel; "Nebo cowers"—a stronger verb than "crouches," but assonant to it, like "cower" to "crouch."* "Their idols have fallen to the beast and to the cattle." *Beast*, "that is, tamed beast, perhaps elephants in contrast to *cattle*, or domestic animals."† The "things with which ye burdened yourselves," carrying them shoulder high in religious processions, "are things laden," mere baggage-bales, "a burden for a hack, or jade." The nouns are mostly feminine—the Hebrew neuter—in order to heighten the dead-weight impression of the idols. So many baggage-bales for beasts' backs—such are your gods, O Babylonians! "They cower, they crouch together" (fall limp is the idea, like corpses); "neither are they able to recover the burden," and "themselves!"—literally "their soul," any real soul of deity that ever was in them—"into captivity are they gone."

This never happened. Cyrus entered Babylon not in spite of the native gods, but under their patronage, and was careful to do homage to them. Nabunahid, the king of Babylon, whom he supplanted, had vexed the priests of Bel or Merodach; and these priests had been among the many conspirators in favour of the Persian. So far, then, from banishing the idols, upon his entry into the city, Cyrus had himself proclaimed as "the servant of Merodach," restored to their own cities the idols that Nabunahid had brought to Babylon, and prayed, "In the goodness of their hearts may all the gods whom I have

brought into their strong places daily intercede before Bel and Nebo, that they should grant me length of days. May they bless my projects with prosperity, and may they say to Merodach, my lord, that Cyrus the king, thy worshipper, and Kambyeses, his son (deserve thy favour)."*

Are we, then, because the idols were not taken into captivity, as our prophet pictures, to begin to believe in him less? We shall be guilty of that error, only when we cease to allow to a prophet of God what we do allow to any other writer, and praise him when he employs it to bring home a moral truth—the use of his imagination. What if these idols never were packed off by Cyrus, as our prophet here paints for us? It still remains true that, standing where they did, or carried away, as they may have been later on, by conquerors, who were monotheists indeed, they were still mere ballast, so much dead-weight for weary beasts.

Now, over against this kind of religion, which may be reduced to so many pounds avoirdupois, the prophet sees in contrast the God of Israel. And it is but natural, when contrasted with the dead-weight of the idols, that God should reveal Himself as a living and a lifting God: a strong, unfailing God, who carries and who saves. "Hearken unto Me, O House of Jacob, and all the remnant of the House of Israel; burdens from the womb, things carried from the belly. Burdens, things carried," are the exact words used of the idols in ver. 1. "Even unto old age I am He, and unto grey hairs I will bear"—a grievous word, used only of great burdens. "I have made, and I will carry; yea, I will bear, and will recover." Then follow some verses in the familiar style. "To whom will ye liken Me, and match Me, and compare Me, that we may be like? They who pour gold from a bag, and silver they measure off with an ellwand"—gorgeous, vulgar Babylonians—"they hire a smelter, and he maketh it a god"—out of so many ells of silver!—"they bow down to it, yea, they worship it! They carry him upon the shoulder, they bear him,"—again the grievous word,—to bring him to his station; and he stands; from his place he never moves. Yea, one cries unto him, and he answers not; from his trouble he doth not save him. Remember this, and show yourselves men"—the playing with these gilded toys is so unmanly to the monotheist (it will be remembered what we said in chap. iii. about the exiles feeling that to worship idols was to be less than a man†)—"lay it again to heart, ye transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God," El, "and there is none else; God," Elohim, "and there is none like Me. Publishing from the origin the issue, and from ancient times things not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and all My pleasure shall I perform; calling out of the sunrise a Bird-of-prey, from the land that is far off the Man of My counsel. Yea, I have spoken; yea, I will bring it in. I have purposed; yea, I will do it. Hearken unto Me, ye obdurate of heart"—that is, "brave, strong, sound," but too sound to adapt their preconceived notions to God's new revelation;—"ye that are far from righteousness," in spite of your "sound" opinions as to how it ought to come. "I have brought near My righteousness," in distinction to yours. "It shall not be far off," like your impossible ideals,

* Sayce, "Fresh Light," etc., p. 140.

† See p. 740 ff.

* *Crouches*, Kara; *cowers*, Kores. † Bredenkamp.

"and My salvation shall not tarry, and I will set in Zion salvation, for Israel My glory." It is evident that from the idolaters Jehovah has turned again, in these last verses, to the pedants in Israel, who were opposed to Cyrus because he was a Gentile, and who cherished their own obdurate notions of how salvation and righteousness should come. Ah, their kind of righteousness would never come, they would always be far from it! Let them rather trust to Jehovah's, which He was rapidly bringing near in His own way.

Such is the prophecy. It starts a truth, which bursts free from local and temporal associations, and rushes in strength upon our own day and our own customs. The truth is this: it makes all the difference to a man how he conceives his religion—whether as something that he has to carry, or as something that will carry him. We have too many idolatries and idol manufactories among us to linger longer on those ancient ones. This cleavage is permanent in humanity—between the men that are trying to carry their religion, and the men that are allowing God to carry them.

Now let us see how God does carry. God's carriage of man is no mystery. It may be explained without using one theological term; the Bible gives us the best expression of it. But it may be explained without a word from the Bible. It is broad and varied as man's moral experience.

1. The first requisite for stable and buoyant life is ground, and the faithfulness of law. What sends us about with erect bodies and quick, firm step is the sense that the surface of the earth is sure, that gravitation will not fail, that our eyes and the touch of our feet and our judgment of distance do not deceive us. Now, what the body needs for its world, the soul needs for hers. For her carriage and bearing in life the soul requires the assurance that the moral laws of the universe are as conscience has interpreted them to her, and will continue to be as in experience she has found them. To this requisite of the soul—this indispensable condition of moral behaviour—God gives His assurance. "I have made," He says, "and I will bear." * These words were in answer to an instinct, that must have often sprung up in our hearts when we have been struggling for at least moral hope—the instinct which will be all that is sometimes left to a man's soul when unbelief lowers, and under its blackness a flood of temptations rushes in, and character and conduct feel impossible to his strength—the instinct that springs from the thought, "Well, here I am, not responsible for being here, but so set by some One else, and the responsibility of the life, which is too great for me, is His." Some such simple faith, which a man can hardly separate from his existence, has been the first rally and turning-point in many a life. In the moral drift and sweep he finds bottom there, and steadies on it, and gets his face round, and gathers strength. And God's Word comes to him to tell him that his instinct is sure. "Yea, I have made, and I will bear."

2. The most terrible anguish of the heart, however, is that it carries something, which can shake a man off even that ground. The firmest rock is of no use to the paralytic, or to a man with a broken leg. And the most steadfast moral

universe, and most righteous moral governor, is no comfort—but rather the reverse—to the man with a bad conscience, whether that conscience be due to the guilt, or to the habit, of sin. Conscience whispers, "God indeed made thee, but what if thou hast unmade thyself? God reigns; the laws of life are righteousness; creation is guided to peace. But thou art outlaw of this universe, fallen from God of thine own will. Thou must bear thine own guilt, endure thy voluntarily contracted habits. How canst thou believe that God, in this fair world, would bear thee up, so useless, soiled, and infected a thing?" Yet here, according to His blessed Word, God does come down to bear up men. Because man's sunkness and helplessness are so apparent beneath no other burden or billows, God insists that just here He is most anxious, and just here it is His glory, to lift men and bear them upward. Some may wonder what guilt is or the conviction of sin, because they are selfishly or dishonestly tracing the bitterness and unrest of their lives to some other source than their own wicked wills; but the thing is man's realest burden, and man's realest burden is what God stoops lowest to bear. The grievous word for "bear," "šabal," which we emphasised in the above passage, is elsewhere in the writings of the Exile used of the bearing of sins, or of the result of sins. "Our fathers have sinned, and are not, and we bear their iniquities," * says one of the Lamentations. And in the fifty-third of Isaiah it is used twice of the Servant, "that He bore our sorrows," and "that He bare their iniquities." † Here its application to God—to such a God as we have seen bearing the passion of His people's woes—cannot fail to carry with it the associations of these passages. When it is said, God "bears," and this grievous verb is used, we remember at once that He is a God, who does not only set His people's sins in the awful light of His countenance, but takes them upon His heart. Let us learn, then, that God has made this sin and guilt of ours His special care and anguish. We cannot feel it more than He does. It is enough: we may not be able to understand what the sacrifice of Christ meant to the Divine justice, but who can help comprehending from it that in some Divine way the Divine love has made our sin its own business and burden, so that that might be done which we could not do, and that lifted which we could not bear?

3. But this gospel of God's love bearing our sins is of no use to a man unless it goes with another—that God bears him up for victory over temptation and for attainment in holiness. It is said to be a thoroughly Mohammedan fashion, that when a believer is tempted past common he gives way, and slides into sin with the cry, "God is merciful;" meaning that the Almighty will not be too hard on this poor creature, who has held out so long. If this be Mohammedanism, there is a great deal of Mohammedanism in modern Christianity. It is a most perfidious distortion of God's will. "For this is the will of God, even our sanctification;" and God never gives a man pardon but to set him free for effort, and to constrain him for duty. And here we come to what is the most essential part of God's bearing of man. God, as we have seen, bears us by giving us ground to walk on. He bears us by lifting those burdens from our hearts that

* There is a play on the words 'anî 'asithî, wa'anî, 'essâ—"I have made, and I will aid."

* Lam. v. 7.

† Ver. 4, second clause, and vii.

make the firmest ground slippery and impossible to our feet. But He bears us best and longest by being the spirit and the soul and the life of our life. Every metaphor here falls short of the reality. By inspired men the bearing of God has been likened to a father carrying his child, to an eagle taking her young upon her wings, to the shepherd with the lamb in his bosom. But no shepherd, nor mother-bird, nor human father ever bore as the Lord bears. For He bears from within, as the soul lifts and bears the body. The Lord and His own are one. "To me," says he who knew it best, "To me to live is Christ." It is, indeed, difficult to describe to others what this inward sustainment really is, seating itself at the centre of a man's life, and thence affecting vitally every organ of his nature. The strongest human illustration is not sufficient for it. If in the thick of the battle a leader is able to infuse himself into his followers, so is Christ. If one man's word has lifted thousands of defeated soldiers to an assault and to a victory, even so have Christ's lifted millions: lifted them above the habit and depression of sin, above the weakness of the flesh, above the fear of man, above danger and death and temptation more dangerous and fatal still. And yet it is not the sight of a visible leader, though the gospels have made that sight imperishable; it is not the sound of Another's Voice, though that Voice shall peal to the end of time, that Christians only feel. It is something within themselves; another self—purer, happier, victorious. Not as a voice or example, futile enough to the dying, but as a new soul, is Christ in men; and whether their exhaustion needs creative forces, or their vices require conquering forces, He gives both, for He is the fountain of life.

4. But God does not carry dead men. His carrying is not mechanical, but natural; not from below, but from within. You dare not be passive in God's carriage; for as in the natural, so in the moral world, whatever dies is thrown aside by the upward pressure of life, to rot and perish. Christ showed this over and over again in His ministry. Those who make no effort—or, if effort be past, feel no pain—God will not stoop to bear. But all in whom there is still a lift and a spring after life: the quick conscience, the pain of their poverty, the hunger and thirst after righteousness, the sacredness of those in their charge, the obligation and honour of their daily duty, some desire for eternal life—these, however weak, He carries forward to perfection.

Again, in His bearing God bears, and does not overbear, using a man, not as a man uses a stick, but as a soul uses a body,—informing, inspiring, recreating his natural faculties. So many distrust religion, as if it were to be an overbearing of their originality, as if it were bound to destroy the individual's peculiar freshness and joy. But God is not by grace going to undo His work by nature. "I have made, and I will bear—will bear" what I have made. Religion intensifies the natural man.

And now, if that be God's bearing—the gift of the ground, and the lifting of the fallen, and the being a soul and an inspiration of every organ—how wrong those are who, instead of asking God to carry them, are more anxious about how He and His religion are to be sustained by their consistency or efforts!

To young men, who have not got a religion, and are brought face to face with the conventional religion of the day, the question often presents itself in this way: "Is this a thing I can carry?" or "How much of it can I afford to carry?" How much of the tradition of the elders can I take upon myself, and feel that it is not mere dead weight?" That is an entirely false attitude. Here you are, weak, by no means master of yourself; with a heart wonderfully full of suggestions to evil; a world before you, hardest where it is clearest, seeming most impossible where duty most loudly calls; yet mainly dark and silent, needing from us patience oftener than effort, and trust as much as the exercise of our own cleverness; with death at last ahead. Look at life whole, and the question you will ask will not be, Can I carry this faith? but, Can this faith carry me? Not, Can I afford to take up such and such and such opinions? but, Can I afford to travel at all without such a God? It is not a creed, but a living and a lifting God, who awaits your decision.

At the opposite end of life, there is another class of men, who are really doing what young men too often suppose that they must do if they take up a religion,—carrying it, instead of allowing it to carry them; men who are in danger of losing their faith in God, through over-anxiety about traditional doctrines concerning Him. A great deal is being said just now in our country of upholding the great articles of the faith. Certainly let us uphold them. But do not let us have in our churches that saddest of all sights, a mere ecclesiastical procession,—men flourishing doctrines, but themselves with their manhood remaining unseen. We know the pity of a show, sometimes seen in countries on the Continent, where they have not given over carrying images about. Idols and banners and texts will fill a street with their tawdry, tottering progress, and you will see nothing human below, but now and then jostling shoulders and a sweaty face. Even so are many of the loud parades of doctrines in our day by men, who, in the words of this chapter, show themselves "stout of heart" by holding up their religion, but give us no signs in their character or conduct that their religion is holding up them. Let us prize our faith, not by holding it high, but by showing how high it can hold us.

Which is the more inspiring sight,—a banner carried by hands, that must sooner or later weary; or the soldier's face, mantling with the inexhaustible strength of the God who lives at his heart and bears him up?

CHAPTER XII.

BABYLON.

ISAIAH xlvii.

THROUGHOUT the extent of Bible history, from Genesis to Revelation, One City remains, which in fact and symbol is execrated as the enemy of God and the stronghold of evil. In Genesis we are called to see its foundation, as of the first city that wandering men established, and the quick ruin, which fell upon its impious builders. By the prophets we hear it cursed as the oppressor of God's people, the temptress of the nations, full of cruelty and wantonness.

And in the Book of Revelation its character and curse are transferred to Rome, and the New Babylon stands over against the New Jerusalem.

The tradition and infection, which have made the name of Babylon as abhorred in the Scripture as Satan's own, are represented as the tradition and infection of pride,—the pride, which, in the audacity of youth, proposes to attempt to be equal with God: "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may touch heaven, and let us make us a name;" the pride, which, amid the success and wealth of later years, forgets that there is a God at all: "Thou sayest in thine heart, I am, and there is none beside me." Babylon is the Atheist of the Old Testament, as she is the Antichrist of the New.

That a city should have been originally conceived by Israel as the arch-enemy of God is due to historical causes, as intelligible as those which led, in later days, to the reverse conception of a city as God's stronghold, and the refuge of the weak and the wandering. God's earliest people were shepherds, plain men dwelling in tents,—desert nomads, who were never tempted to rear permanent structures of their own except as altars and shrines, but marched and rested, waked and slept, between God's bare earth and God's high heaven; whose spirits were chastened and refined by the hunger and clear air of the desert, and who walked their wide world without jostling or stunting one another. With the dear habits of those early times, the truths of the Bible are therefore, even after Israel has settled in towns, spelt to the end in the images of shepherd life. The Lord is the Shepherd, and men are the sheep of His pasture. He is a Rock and a Strong Tower, such as rise here and there in the desert's wildness for guidance or defence.* He is rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And man's peace is to lie beside still waters, and his glory is, not to have built cities, but to have all these things put under his feet—sheep and oxen and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea.

Over against that lowly shepherd life, the first cities rose, as we can imagine, high, terrible, and impious. They were the production of an alien race,† a people with no true religion, as it must have appeared to the Semites, arrogant and coarse. But Babylon had a special curse. Babylon was not the earliest city,—Akkad and Erekh were famous long before,—but it is Babylon that the Book of Genesis represents as overthrown and scattered by the judgment of God. What a contrast this picture in Genesis,—and let it be remembered that the only other cities to which that book leads us are Sodom and Gomorrah,—what a contrast it forms to the passages in which classic poets celebrate the beginnings of their great cities. There, the favourable omens, the patronage of the gods, the prophecies of the glories of civil life; the tracing of the temple and the forum; visions of the city as the school of industry, the treasury of wealth, the home of freedom. Here, but a few rapid notes of scorn and doom: man's miserable manufacture, without Divine impulse or omen; his attempt to rise to heaven upon that alone, his motive only to make a name for himself; and the result—not, as in Greek legend, the founda-

tion of a polity, the rise of commerce, the growth of a great language, by which through the lips of one man the whole city may be swayed together to high purposes, but only scattering and confusion of speech. To history, a great city is a multitude of men within reach of one man's voice. Athens is Demosthenes; Rome is Cicero persuading the Senate; Florence is Savonarola putting by his word one conscience within a thousand hearts. But Babylon, from the beginning, gave its name to Babel, confusion of speech, incapacity for union and for progress. And all this came, because the builders of the city, the men who set the temper of its civilisation, did not begin with God, but in their pride deemed everything possible to unaided and unblessed human ambition, and had only the desire to make a name upon earth.

The sin and the curse never left the generations, who in turn succeeded those impious builders. Pride and godlessness infested the city, and prepared it for doom, as soon as it again gathered strength to rise to heaven. The early nomads had watched Babylon's fall from afar; but when their descendants were carried as captives within her in the time of her second glory,* they found that the besetting sin, which had once reared its head so fatally high, infected the city to her very heart. We need not again go over the extent and glory of Nebuchadrezzar's architecture, or the greatness of the traffic, from the Levant to India, which his policy had concentrated upon his own wharves and markets.† It was stupendous. But neither walls nor wealth make a city, and no observant man, with the Hebrew's faith and conscience, could have lived those fifty years in the centre of Babylon, and especially after Nebuchadrezzar had passed away, without perceiving that her life was destitute of every principle which ensured union or promised progress. Babylon was but a medley of peoples, without common traditions or a public conscience, and incapable of acting together. Many of her inhabitants had been brought to her, like the Jews, against their own will, and were ever turning from those glorious battlements they were forced to build in their disgust, to scan the horizon for the advent of a deliverer. And many others, who moved in freedom through her busy streets, and shared her riches and her joys, were also foreigners, and bound to her only so long as she ministered to their pleasure or their profit. Her king was an usurper, who had insulted her native gods; her priesthood was against him. And although his army, sheltered by the fortifications of Nebuchadrezzar, had repulsed Cyrus upon the Persian's first invasion from the north, conspiracies were now so rife among his oppressed and insulted subjects, that, on Cyrus' second invasion,* Babylon opened her impregnable gates and suffered herself to be taken without a blow. Nor, even if the city's religion had been better served by the king, could it in the long run have availed for her salvation. For, in spite of the science with which it was connected,—and this "wisdom of the Chaldeans" was contempt-

* Babylon, as far as we can learn, first rose to power about the time of that Amraphel who fought in the Mesopotamian league against the neighbours and friends of Abraham. Amraphel is supposed to have been the father of Hammurabis, who first made Babylon the capital of Chaldea. It scarcely ever again ceased to be such; but it was not till the fall of Assyria, about 625 B. C., and the rebuilding of Babylon by Nebuchadrezzar (604-561), that the city's second and greatest glory began.

† See ch. iv. p. 744.

* Cf. Doughty, "Arabia Deserta."

† The Turanians, who occupied Mesopotamia before the Semitic invasion, were the first builders of cities.

ible in neither its methods nor its results,—the Babylonian religion was not one to inspire either the common people with those moral principles, which form the true stability of states, or their rulers with a reasonable and consistent policy. Babylon's religion was broken up into a multitude of wearisome and distracting details, whose absurd solemnities, especially when administered by a priesthood hostile to the executive, must have hampered every adventure of war, and rendered futile many opportunities of victory. In fact, Babylon, for all her glory, could not but be short-lived. There was no moral reason why she should endure. The masses, who contributed to her building, were slaves who hated her; the crowds who fed her business, would stay with her only so long as she was profitable to themselves; her rulers and her priests had quarrelled; her religion was a burden, not an inspiration. Yet she sat proud, and felt herself secure.

It is just these features, which our prophet describes in ch. xlvii., in verses more notable for their moral insight and indignation, than for their beauty as a work of literature. He is certain of Babylon's immediate fall from power and luxury into slavery and dishonour (vv. 1-3). He speaks of her cruelty to her captives (ver. 6), of her haughtiness and her secure pride (vv. 7, 8). He touches twice upon her atheistic self-sufficiency, her "autotheism,"—"I am, and there is none beside me," words which only God can truly use, but words which man's ignorant, proud self is ever ready to repeat (vv. 8-10). He speaks of the wearisomeness and futility of her religious magic (vv. 10-14). And he closes with a vivid touch, that dissolves the reality of that merely commercial grandeur on which she prides herself. Like every association that arises only from the pecuniary profit of its members, Babylon shall surely break up, and none of those, who sought her for their selfish ends, shall wait to help her one moment after she has ceased to be profitable to them.

Here now are his own words, rendered literally except in the case of one or two conjunctions and articles,—rendered, too, in the original order of the words, and, as far as it can be determined, in the rhythm of the original. The rhythm is largely uncertain, but some verses—1, 5, 14, 15—are complete in that measure which we found in the Taunt-song against the king of Babylon in ch. xiii.,* and nearly every line or clause has the same metrical swing upon it.

Down! and sit in the dust, O virgin,
Daughter of Babel!
Sit on the ground, with no throne,
Daughter of Khasdim!
For not again shall they call thee
Tender and Dainty.
Take to thee millstones, and grind out the meal,
Put back thy veil, strip off the garment,
Make bare the leg, wade through the rivers;
Bare be thy nakedness, yea, be beholden thy shame!
Vengeance I take, and strike treaty with none.

Our Redeemer! Jehovah of Hosts is His Name,
Holy of Israel!

Sit thou dumb, and get into darkness,
Daughter of Khasdim!
For not again shall they call thee
Mistress of Kingdoms.
I was wroth with My people, profaned Mine inheritance,
Gave them to thy hand:
Thou didst show them no mercy, on old men thou madest
Thy yoke very sore.
And thou saidst, For ever I shall be mistress,
Till thou hast set not these things to thy heart,
Nor thought of their issue.

Therefore now hear this, Voluptuous,
Sitting self-confident:
Thou, who saith in her heart, "I am: there is none else.
I shall not sit a widow, nor know want of children."
Surely shall come to thee both of these, sudden, the same
day,
Childlessness, widowhood!
To their full come upon thee, spite of the mass of thy
spells,
Spite of the wealth of thy charms—to the full!

And thou wast bold in thine evil; thou saidst,
"None doth see me."
Thy wisdom and knowledge—they have led thee astray,
Till thou hast said in thine heart, "I am: there is none
else."
Yet there shall come on thee Evil,
Thou know'st not to charm it.
And there shall fall on thee Havoc,
Thou canst not avert it.
And there shall come on thee suddenly,
Unawares, Ruin.
Stand forth, I pray, with thy charms, with the wealth of
thy spells—
With which thou hast wearied thyself from thy youth
up—
If so thou be able to profit,
If so to strike terror!
Thou art sick with the mass of thy counsels:
Let them stand up and save thee—
Mappers of heaven, Planet-observers, Tellers at new
moons—
From what must befall thee!

Behold, they are grown like the straw!
Fire hath consumed them;
Nay, they save not their life
From the hand of the flame!
—'Tis no fuel for warmth,
Fire to sit down at!—
Thus are they grown to thee, they who did weary thee
Traders of thine from thy youth up;
Each as he could pass have they fled;
None is thy saviour!

We, who remember Isaiah's elegies on Egypt and Tyre,* shall be most struck here by the absence of all appreciation of greatness or of beauty about Babylon. Even while prophesying for Tyre as certain a judgment as our prophet here predicts for Babylon, Isaiah spoke as if the ruin of so much enterprise and wealth were a desecration, and he promised that the native strength of Tyre, humbled and purified, would rise again to become the handmaid of religion. But our prophet sees no saving virtue whatever in Babylon, and gives her not the slightest promise of a future. There is pity through his scorn: the way in which he speaks of the futility of the mass of Babylonian science; the way in which he speaks of her ignorance, though served by hosts of counsellors; the way in which, after recalling her countless partners in traffic, he describes their headlong flight, and closes with the words, "None is thy saviour,"—all this is most pathetic. But upon none of his lines is there one touch of awe or admiration or regret for the fall of what is great. To him Babylon is wholly false, vain, destitute—as Tyre was not destitute—of native vigour and saving virtue. Babylon is sheer pretence and futility. Therefore his scorn and condemnation are thorough; and mocking laughter breaks from him, now with an almost savage coarseness, as he pictures the dishonour of the virgin who was no virgin—"Bare thy nakedness, yea, be beholden thy shame;" and now in roguish glee, as he interjects about the fire which shall destroy the mass of Babylon's magicians, astrologers, and haruspices: "No coal this to warm oneself at, fire to sit down before." But withal we are not allowed to forget, that it is one of the Tyrant's poor captives, who thus judges and scorns her.

How vividly from the midst of his satire does the prisoner's sigh break forth to God:—

Our Redeemer! Jehovah of Hosts is His Name,
Holy of Israel!

Not the least interesting feature of this taunt-song is the expression which it gives to the characteristic Hebrew sense of the wearisomeness and immorality of the system of divination, which formed the mass of the Babylonian and many other Gentile religions. The worship of Jehovah had very much in common with the rest of the Semitic cults. Its ritual, its temple-furniture, the division of its sacred year, its terminology, and even many of its titles for the Deity and His relations to men, may be matched in the worship of Phœnician, Syrian, and Babylonian gods, or in the ruder Arabian cults. But in one thing the "law of Jehovah" stands by itself, and that is in its intolerance of all augury and divination. It owed this distinction to the unique moral and practical sense which inspired it. Augury and divination, such as the Chaldeans were most proficient in, exerted two most evil influences. They hampered, sometimes paralysed, the industry and politics of a nation, and they more or less confounded the moral sense of the people. They were, therefore, utterly out of harmony with the practical sanity and Divine morality of the Jewish law, which strenuously forbade them; while the prophets, who were practical men as well as preachers of righteousness, constantly exposed the fatigue they laid upon public life, and the way they distracted attention from the simple moral issues of conduct. Augury and divination wearied a people's intellect, stunted their enterprise, distorted their conscience. "Thy spells, the mass of thy charms, with which thou hast wearied thyself from thy youth. Thou art sick with the mass of thy counsels. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge! they have led thee astray." When "the Chaldean astrology" found its way to the new Babylon, Juvenal's strong conscience expressed the same sense of its wearisomeness and waste of time.*

Ashes and ruins, a servile and squalid life, a desolate site abandoned by commerce,—what the prophet predicted, that did imperial Babylon become. Not, indeed, at the hand of Cyrus, or of any other single invader; but gradually by the rivalry of healthier peoples, by the inevitable working of the poison at her heart, Babylon, though situated in the most fertile and central part of God's earth, fell into irredeemable decay. Do not let us, however, choke our interest in this prophecy, as so many students of prophecy do, in the ruins and dust, which were its primary fulfilment. The shell of Babylon, the gorgeous city which rose by Euphrates, has indeed sunk into heaps; but Babylon herself is not dead. Babylon never dies. To the conscience of Christ's seer, this "mother of harlots," though dead and desert in the East, came to life again in the West. To the city of Rome, in his day, John transferred word by word the phrases of our prophet and of the prophet who wrote the fifty-first chapter of the Book of Jeremiah. Rome was Babylon, in so far as Romans were filled with cruelty, with arrogance, with trust in riches, with credulity in divination, with that waste of mental and moral power which Juvenal

exposed in her. "I sit a queen," John heard Rome say in her heart, "and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning. Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death and mourning and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God which judged her."* But we are not to leave the matter even here: we are to use that freedom with John, which John uses with our prophet. We are to pass by the particular fulfilment of his words, in which he and his day were interested, because it can only have a historical and secondary interest to us in face of other Babylons in our own day, with which our consciences, if they are quick, ought to be busy. Why do some honest people continue to confine the references of those chapters in the Book of Revelation to the city and church of Rome? It is quite true, that John meant the Rome of his day; it is quite true, that many features of his Babylon may be traced upon the successor of the Roman Empire, the Roman Church. But what is that to us, with incarnations of the Babylonian spirit so much nearer ourselves for infection and danger, than the Church of Rome can ever be. John's description, based upon our prophet's, suits better a commercial, than an ecclesiastical state,—though self-worship has been as rife in ecclesiasticism, Roman or Reformed, as among the votaries of Mammon. For every phrase of John's, that may be true of the Church of Rome in certain ages, there are six apt descriptions of the centres of our own British civilisation, and of the selfish, atheistic tempers that prevail in them. Let us ask what are the Babylonian tempers and let us touch our own consciences with them.

Forgetfulness of God, cruelty, vanity of knowledge (which so easily breeds credulity), and vanity of wealth,—but the parent of them all is idolatry of self. Isaiah told us about this in the Assyrian with his war; we see it here in Babylon with her commerce and her science; it was exposed even in the orthodox Jews,† for they put their own prejudices before their God's revelation; and it is perhaps as evident in the Christian Church as anywhere else. For selfishness follows a man like his shadow; and religion, like the sun, the stronger it shines, only makes the shadow more apparent. But to worship your shadow is to turn your back on the sun; selfishness is atheism, says our prophet. Man's self takes God's word about Himself and says, "I am, and there is none beside me." And he who forgets God is sure also to forget his brother; thus self-worship leads to cruelty. A heavy part of the charge against Babylon is her treatment of the Lord's own people. These were God's convicts, and she, for the time, God's minister of justice. But she unnecessarily and cruelly oppressed them. "On the aged thou hast very heavily laid thy yoke." God's people were given to her to be reformed, but she sought to crush the life out of them. God's purpose was upon them, but she used them for her aggrandisement. She did not feel that she was responsible to God for her treatment even of the most guilty and contemptible of her subjects.

In all this Babylon acted in accordance with what was the prevailing spirit of antiquity; and here we may safely affirm that our Christian civilisation has at least a superior conscience. The modern world does recognise in some

* See especially "Satires III. and VI.," and cf. Bagehot's "Physics and Politics."

* Rev. xvii., xviii.

† Ch. xlv.

measure, its responsibility to God for the care even of its vilest and most forfeit lives. No Christian state at the present day would, for instance, allow its felons to be tortured or outraged against their will in the interests either of science or of public amusement. We do not vivisection our murderers nor kill them off by gladiatorial combats. Our statutes do not get rid of worthless or forfeit lives by condemning them to be used up in dangerous labours of public necessity. On the contrary, in prisons we treat our criminals with decency and even with comfort, and outside prisons we protect and cherish even the most tainted and guilty lives. In all our discharge of God's justice, we take care that the inevitable errors of our human fallibility may fall on mercy's side. Now it is true that in the practice of all this we often fail, and are inconsistent. The point at present is that we have at least a conscience about the matter. We do not say, like Babylon, "I am, and there is none beside me. There is no law higher than my own will and desire. I can, therefore, use whatever through its crime or its uselessness falls into my power for the increase of my wealth or the satisfaction of my passions." We remember God, and that even the criminal and the useless are His. In wielding the power which His Law and Providence put into our hands towards many of his creatures, we remember that we are administering His justice, and not satisfying our own revenge, or feeding our own desire for sensation, or experimenting for the sake of our science. They are His convicts, not our spoil. In our treatment of them we are subject to His laws,—one of which, that fences even His justice, is the law against cruelty; and another, for which His justice leaves room, is that to every man there be granted, with his due penalty, the opportunity of penitence and reform. There are among us Positivists, who deny that these opinions and practices of modern civilisation are correct. Carrying out the essential atheism of their school—I am man, and there is none else: that in the discharge of justice and the discharge of charity men are responsible only to themselves—they dare to recommend that the victims of justice should be made the experiments, however painful, of science, and that charity should be refused to the corrupt and the useless. But all this is simply reversion to the Babylonian type, and the Babylonian type is doomed to decay. For history has writ no surer law upon itself than this—that cruelty is the infallible precursor of ruin.

But while speaking of the state, we should remember individual responsibilities as well. Success, even where it is the righteous success of character, is a most subtle breeder of cruelty. The best of us need most strongly to guard ourselves against censoriousness. If God does put the characters of sinful men and women into our keeping, let us remember that our right of judging them, our right of punishing them, our right even of talking about them, is strictly limited. Religious people too easily forget this, and their cruel censoriousness or selfish gossip warns us that to be a member of the Church of Christ does not always mean that a man's citizenship is in heaven; he may well be a Babylonian and carry the freedom of that city upon his face. To "be hard on those who are down" is Babylonian; to make material out of our neigh-

bours' faults, for our pride, or for love of gossip, or for prurience, is Babylonian. There is one very good practical rule to keep us safe. We may allow ourselves to speak about our erring brothers to men, just as much as we pray for them to God. But if we pray much for a man, he will surely become too sacred to be made the amusement of society or the food of our curiosity or of our pride.

The last curse on Babylon reminds us of the fatal looseness of a society that is built only upon the interests of trade; of the loneliness and uselessness that await, in the end, all lives, which keep themselves alive simply by trafficking with men. If we feed life only by the news of the markets, by the interest of traffic, by the excitement of competition, by the fever of speculation, by the passions of cupidity and pride, we may feel healthy and powerful for a time. But such a life, which is merely a being kept brisk by the sense of gaining something or overreaching some one, is the mere semblance of living; and when the inevitable end comes, when they that have trafficked with us from our youth depart, then each particle of strength with which they feed us shall be withdrawn, and we shall fall into decay. There never was a truer picture of the quick ruin of a merely commercial community, or of the ultimate loneliness of a mercenary and selfish life, than the headlong rush of traders, "each as he could find passage," from the city that never had other attractions even for her own citizens than those of gain or of pleasure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CALL TO GO FORTH.

ISAIAH xlviii.

ON the substance of ch. xlviii. we have already encroached, and now it is necessary only to summarise its argument, and to give some attention to the call to go forth from Babylon, with which it concludes.

Chapter xlviii. is addressed, as its first verse declares, to the exiles from Judah*: "Hear this, Oh House of Jacob, that call yourselves by the name of Israel, and from the waters of Judah have come forth:" that is, you so-called Israelites, who spring from Judah. But their worship of Jehovah is only nominal and unreal: "They who swear by the name of Jehovah, and celebrate the God of Israel, not in truth and not in righteousness; although by the Holy City they name themselves, and upon the God of Israel they lean—Jehovah of Hosts is His Name!"

"The former things I published long ago; † from My mouth they went forth, and I let them

* Bredenkamp will have it, that the prophet here mentions first Northern Israel and then Judah: *O House of Jacob*, the general term, both *those that are called by the name of Israel, and that have come forth from the waters of Judah*. But this is entirely opposed to the syntax, and I note the opinion simply to show how precarious the arguments are for the existence of pre-exilic elements in Isa. xl.-xlviii. The point which Bredenkamp makes by his rendering of this verse is that it could only be a pre-exilic prophet who would distinguish between Judah and Northern Israel; and that, therefore, it might be Isaiah himself who wrote the verse!

† *Former things* (ri'shonôth). It is impossible to determine whether these mean *predictions* which Jehovah published long ago, and which have already come to pass,

be heard—suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. Because I knew how hard thou wert, and a sinew of iron thy neck, and thy brow brass. And I published to thee long ago; before it came to pass I let thee hear it, lest thou shouldest say: Mine idol hath wrought them, and my Image and my Casting hath commanded them. Thou didst hear it: look at it whole,” (now that it is fulfilled), “and you! should ye not publish it?” All the past lies as a unity, prediction and fulfilment together complete; all of it the doing of Jehovah, and surely enough of it to provide the text of confession of Him by His people. But now,—

“I let thee hear new things” (in contrast with former things) “from now, and hidden things, and thou knewest them not. Now are they created, and not long ago; and before to-day thou hadst not heard them, lest thou shouldest say, Behold I knew them. Verily,* thou hadst not heard, verily thou hadst not known, verily, long since thine ear was not open; because I knew thou art thoroughly treacherous. and Transgressor-from-the-womb do they call thee.”

The meaning of all this is sufficiently clear. It is a reproach addressed to the formal Israelites. It divides into two parts, each containing an explanation “Because I knew that,” etc.: vv. 3-6a, and vv. 6b-9. In the first part Jehovah treats of history already finished, both in its prediction and fulfilment. Many of the wonderful things of old Jehovah predicted long before they happened, and so left His stubborn people no excuse for an idolatry to which otherwise they would have given themselves (ver. 5). Now that they see that wonderful past complete, and all the predictions fulfilled, they may well publish Jehovah’s renown to the world. In the first part of His reproach, then, Jehovah is dealing with stages of Israel’s history that were closed before the Exile. The *former things* are wonderful events, foretold and come to pass before the present generation. But in the second part of His reproach (vv. 6b-9) Jehovah mentions *new things*. These new things are being created while His prophet speaks, and they have not been foretold (in contradistinction to the former things of ver. 3). What events fulfil these two conditions? Well, Cyrus was on his way, the destruction of Babylon was imminent, Israel’s new destiny was beginning to shape itself under God’s hands: these are evidently the things that are in process of creation while the prophet speaks. But could it also be said of them, that they had not been foretold? This could be said, at least, of Cyrus, the Gentile Messiah. A Gentile Messiah was something so new to Israel, that many, clinging to the letter of the old prophecies, denied, as we have seen, that Cyrus could possibly be God’s instrument for the redemption of Israel. Cyrus, then, as a Gentile, and at the same time the Anointed of Jehovah, is the new thing which is being created while the prophet speaks, and which has not been announced beforehand.

How is it possible, some may now ask, that Cyrus should be one of the unpredicted *new things* that are happening while the prophet speaks, when the prophet has already pointed to

or *former events* which He foretold long ago, and which have happened as He said they would. The distinction, however, is immaterial.

* Literally, *also*. But **וְ**, a cumulative conjunction, when it is introduced to repeat the same thought as preceded it, means *yea, truly, profecto, imo*.

Cyrus and his advance on Babylon as a fulfilment of ancient predictions? The answer to this question is very simple. There were ancient predictions of a deliverance and a deliverer from Babylon. To name no more, there were Jeremiah’s* and Habakkuk’s; and Cyrus, in so far as he accomplished the deliverance, was the fulfilment of these ancient *r’ishonoth*. But in so far as Cyrus sprang from a quarter of the world not hinted at in former prophecies of Jehovah—in so far as he was a Gentile and yet the Anointed of the Lord, a combination not provided for by any tradition in Israel—Cyrus and his career were the “new things not predicted beforehand, the new things” which caused such offence to certain tradition-bound parties in Israel.

We cannot overestimate the importance of this passage. It supplies us with the solution of the problem, how the presently-happening deliverance of Israel from Babylon could be both a thing foretold from long ago, and yet so new as to surprise those Israelites who were most devoted to the ancient prophecies. And at the same time such of us as are content to follow our prophet’s own evidence, and to place him in the Exile, have an answer put into our mouths, to render to those, who say that we destroy a proof of the Divinity of prophecy by denying to Isaiah or to any other prophet, so long before Cyrus was born, the mention of Cyrus by name. Let such objectors, who imagine that they are more careful of the honour of God and of the Divinity of Scripture, because they maintain that Cyrus was named two hundred years before he was born, look at verse 7. There God Himself says, that there are some things, which, for a very good reason, he does not foretell before they come to pass. We believe, and have shown strong grounds for believing, that the selection of Cyrus, the mention of his name, and the furtherance of his arms against Babylon, were among those new things, which God says He purposely did not reveal till the day of their happening, and which by their novel and unpredicted character, offended so many of the traditional and stupid party in Israel. Must there always be among God’s people, to-day as in the day of our prophet, some who cannot conceive a thing to be Divine unless it has been predicted long before?

In vv. 3-8, then, God claims to have changed His treatment of His people, in order to meet and to prevent the various faults of their character. Some things He told to them, long before, so that they might not attribute the occurrence of these to their idols. But other things He sprang upon them, without predictions, and in an altogether novel shape, so that they might not say of these things, in their familiarity with them, We knew of them ourselves. A people who were at one time so stubborn, and at another so slippery, were evidently a people who deserved nothing at God’s hand. Yet He goes on to say, vv. 9-11, that He will treat them with forbearance, if not for their sake, yet for His own: “For the sake of My Name I defer Mine anger, and for My praise” (or renown, or reputation, as we would say of a man) “I will refrain for thee that I cut thee not off. Behold I have smelted thee, but not as silver: I have tested thee in the furnace of affliction. For Mine

* Ch. xxv., which is undoubtedly an authentic prophecy of Jeremiah.

own sake, for Mine own sake, I am working;—for how was My Name being profaned! *—and My glory to another I will not give."

Then He gathers up the sum of what He has been saying in a final appeal.

"Hearken unto Me, O Jacob, and Israel My Called: I am He; I am First, yea, I am Last. Yea, My hand hath founded Earth,† and My right hand hath spread Heaven; when I call unto them they stand together."

"Be gathered, all of you, and hearken, Who among them" (that is, the Gentiles) "hath published these things?" that is, such things as the following, the prophecy given in the next clause of the verse: "Whom Jehovah loveth shall perform His pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans." This was the sum of what Jehovah promised long ago;‡ not Cyrus' name, not that a Gentile, a Persian, should deliver God's people, for these are among the new things which were not published beforehand, at which the traditional Israelites were offended,—but this general fiat of God's sovereignty, "that whomever Jehovah loves, or likes, he shall perform His pleasure on Babylon. I, even I, have spoken"—this, in ver. 14b, was My speaking. "Yea, I have called him; I have brought him, and he will make his way to prosper." Again emphasise the change of tense. Cyrus is already called, but, while the prophet speaks, he has not yet reached his goal in the capture of Babylon.

Some ambassador from the Lord, whether the prophet or the Servant of Jehovah, now takes up the parable, and, after presenting himself, addresses a final exhortation to Israel, summing up the moral meaning of the Exile. "Draw near to me, hear this; not from aforetime in secret have I spoken; from the time that it was, there am I: and now my Lord, Jehovah, hath sent me with His Spirit.§

"Thus saith Jehovah, thy Redeemer, Holy of Israel, I am Jehovah thy God, thy Teacher to profit, thy Guide in the way thou shouldest go; Would that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments, then were like the River thy peace, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea! Then were like the sand thy seed, and the offspring of thy bowels like its grains! || He shall not be cut off, nor shall perish his name from before Me."

And now at last it is time to be up. Our salvation is nearer than when first we believed.

*The Hebrew has not the words "My Name." The LXX. has them.

†A second time without article, though applied to the whole world.

‡Giesebrecht takes this as an actual quotation from some former prophet: a specimen of the ancient prophecies which Jehovah sent to Israel, and which were now being fulfilled. At least it is the sum of what Jehovah's prophets had often predicted.

§This very difficult verse has been attributed either to Jehovah in the first three clauses and to the Servant in the fourth (Delitzsch); or in the same proportion to Jehovah and the prophet (Cheyne and Bredenkamp); or to the Servant all through (Orelli); or to the prophet all through (Hitzig, Knobel, Giesebrecht. See the latter's "Beiträge zur Kritik Jesaja's," p. 136.) It is a subtle matter. The present expositor thinks it clear that all four clauses must be understood as the voice of one speaker, but sees nothing in them to decide finally whether that speaker is the Servant, the people Israel, in which case *I am there* would have reference to Israel's consciousness of every deed done by God since the beginning of their history (*cf.* ver. 6a); or whether the speaker is the prophet, in which case *I am there* would mean that he had watched the rise of Cyrus from the first. But *cf.* Zech. ii. 10-11, Eng. Ver., and iv. 9.

||Or *like its bowels*, referring to the sea.

Day has dawned, the gates are opening, the Word has been sufficiently spoken.

Go forth from Babel: fly from the Chaldeans; With a ringing voice publish and let this be heard, Send ye it out to the end of the earth, Say, Redeemed hath Jehovah His Servant Jacob. And they thirsted not in the deserts He caused them to walk; Waters from a rock He let drop for them, Clave a rock and there flowed forth waters! No peace, saith Jehovah, for the wicked.

We have arrived at the most distinct stage of which our prophecy gives trace. Not that a new start is made with the next passage. Ch. xlix. is the answer of the Servant himself to the appeal made to him in xlviii. 20; and ch. xlix. does not introduce the Servant for the first time, but simply carries further the substance of the opening verses of ch. xlii. Nor is this urgent appeal to "Go forth from Babylon," which has come to Israel, the only one, or the last, of its kind. It is renewed in ch. lij. 11-12. So that we cannot think that our prophet has even yet got the Fall of Babylon behind him. Nevertheless, the end of ch. xlviii. is the end of the first and chief stage of the prophecy. The fundamental truths about God and salvation have been laid down; the idols have been thoroughly exposed; Cyrus has been explained; Babylon is practically done with. Neither Babylon, nor Cyrus, nor, except for a moment, the idols, are mentioned in the rest of the prophecy. The Deliverance of Israel is certain. And what now interests the prophet is first, how the Holy Nation will accomplish the destiny for which it has been set free, and next, how the Holy City shall be prepared for the Nation to inhabit. These are the two themes of chs. xlix. to lxvi. The latter of them, the Restoration of Jerusalem, has scarcely been touched by our prophet as yet. But he has already spoken much of the Nation's Destiny as the Servant of the Lord; and now that we have exhausted the subject of the deliverance from Babylon, we will take up his prophecies on the Servant, both those which we have passed over in chs. xl.-xlviii. and those which still lie ahead of us.

Before we do this, however, let us devote a chapter to a study of our prophet's use of the word righteousness, for which this seems to be as convenient a place as any other.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ISRAEL AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

ISAIAH xl.-lxvi.

IN the chapters which we have been studying we have found some difficulty with one of our prophet's keynotes—"right" or "righteousness." In the chapters to come we shall find this difficulty increase, unless we take some trouble now to define how much the word denotes in Isa. xl.-lxvi. There is no part of Scripture, in which the term "righteousness" suffers so many developments of meaning. To leave these vague, as readers usually do, or to fasten upon one and all the technical meaning of righteousness in Christian theology, is not only to obscure the historical reference and moral force of single passages,—it is to miss one of the main

arguments of the prophecy. We have read enough to see that "righteousness" was the great question of the Exile. But what was brought into question was not only the righteousness of the people, but the righteousness of their God. In Isa. xl.-lxvi. righteousness is more often claimed as a Divine attribute, than enforced as a human duty or ideal.*

I. RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Ssedheq, the Hebrew root for righteousness, had, like the Latin "rectus," in its earliest and now almost forgotten uses, a physical meaning. This may have been either "straightness," or more probably "soundness,"—the state in which a thing is "all right."† "Paths of righteousness," in Psalm xxiii., ver. 4, are not necessarily straight paths, but rather sure, genuine, safe paths.‡ Like all physical metaphors, like our own words "straight" and "right," the applicability of the term to moral conduct was exceedingly elastic. It has been attempted to gather most of its meaning under the definition of "conformity to norm;"§ and so many are the instances in which the word has a forensic force,|| as of "vindication" or "justification," that some have claimed this for its original, or, at least, its governing sense. But it is improbable that either of these definitions conveys the simplest or most general sense of the word. Even if "conformity" or "justification" were ever the prevailing sense of ssedheq, there are a number of instances in which its meaning far overflows the limits of such definitions. Every one can see how a word, which may generally be used to express an abstract idea, like "conformity," or a formal relation towards a law or person, like "justification," might come to be applied to the actual virtues, which realise that idea or lift a character into that relation. Thus righteousness might mean justice, or truth, or almsgiving, or religious obedience,—to each of which, in fact, the Hebrew word was at various times specially applied. Or righteousness might mean virtue in general, virtue apart from all consideration of law or duty whatsoever. In the prophet Amos, for instance, "righteousness" is applied to a goodness so natural and spontaneous that no one could think of it for a moment as conformity to norm or fulfilment of law.¶

In short, it is impossible to give a definition of the Hebrew word, which our version renders as

* It is only by confining his review of the word to its applications to God, and overlooking the passages which attribute it to the people, that Krüger, "Essai sur la Théologie d'Isaïe xl.-lxvi.," can affirm that the prophet holds throughout to a single idea of righteousness (p. 36). On this, as on many other points, it is Calvin's treatment that is most sympathetic to the variations of the original.

† In Arabic the cognate word is applied to a lance, but this may mean a sound or fit lance as well as a straight one.

‡ It is not certain whether righteousness is here used in a physical sense; and in all other cases in which the root is applied in the Old Testament to material objects, it is plainly employed in some reflection of its moral sense, e. g., *just weights, just balance*, Lev. xix. 36.

§ "Der Zustand welcher der Norm entspricht." Schultz, "Alt. Test. Theologie," 4th ed., p. 540, n. 1.

|| Cf. Robertson Smith, "Prophecy of Israel," p. 388, and Kautzsch's paper, which is there quoted.

¶ "Die Begriffe צדקה und צדק . . . bedeuten nun wirklich bei Amos mehr als die juristische Gerechtigkeit. Indirect gehen die Forderungen des Amos über die blos rechtliche Sphäre hinaus" (Duhm, "Theologie der Propheten," p. 115).

"righteousness," less wide than our English word "right." "Righteousness" is "right" in all its senses,—natural, legal, personal, religious. It is to be all right, to be right-hearted, to be consistent, to be thorough; but also to be in the right, to be justified, to be vindicated; and, in particular, it may mean to be humane (as with Amos), to be just (as with Isaiah), to be correct or true to fact (as sometimes with our own prophet), to fulfil the ordinances of religion, and especially the command about almsgiving (as with the later Jews).

Let us now keep in mind that righteousness could express a relation, or a general quality of character, or some particular virtue. For we shall find traces of all these meanings in our prophet's application of the term to Israel and to God.

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ISRAEL.

One of the simplest forms of the use of "righteousness" in the Old Testament is when it is employed in the case of ordinary quarrels between two persons; in which for one of them "to be righteous" means "to be right" or "in the right."* Now to the Hebrew all life and religion was based upon covenants between two, —between man and man and between man and God. Righteousness meant fidelity to the terms of those covenants. The positive contents of the word in any single instance of its use would, therefore, depend on the faithfulness and delicacy of conscience by which those terms were interpreted. In early Israel this conscience was not so keen as it afterwards came to be, and accordingly Israel's sense of their righteousness towards God was, to begin with, a comparatively shallow one. When a Psalmist asseverates his righteousness and pleads it as the ground for God rewarding him, it is plain that he is able with sincerity to make a claim, so repellent to a Christian's feeling, just because he has not anything like a Christian's conscience of what God demands from man. As Calvin says on Psalm xviii. ver. 20, "Death here represents God as the President of an athletic contest, who had chosen him as one of His champions, and David knows that so long as he keeps to the rules of the contest, so long will God defend him." It is evident that in such an assertion righteousness cannot mean perfect innocence, but simply the good conscience of a man, who, with simple ideas of what is demanded from him, feels that on the whole "he has" (slightly to paraphrase Calvin) "played fair."

Two things, almost simultaneously, shook Israel out of this primitive and naïve self-righteousness. History went against them, and the prophets quickened their conscience.† The effect of the former of these two causes will be clear to us, if we recollect the judicial element in the Hebrew righteousness,—that it often meant not so much to be right, as to be vindicated or declared right. History, to Israel, was God's supreme tribunal. It was the faith of the people, expressed over and over again in the Old Testament, that the godly man is vindicated or justified by his prosperity: "the way of the ungodly shall perish." And Israel felt

* Gen. xxxviii. 26. Cf. 2 Sam. xv. 4.

† The first chapter of Isaiah is a perfect summary of these two.

themselves to be in the right, just as David, in Psalm xviii., felt himself, because God had accredited them with success and victory. But when the decision of history went against the nation, when they were threatened with expulsion from their land and with extinction as a people, that just meant that the Supreme Judge of men was giving His sentence against them. Israel had broken the terms of the Covenant. They had lost their right; they were no longer "righteous." The keener conscience, developed by prophecy, swiftly explained this sentence of history. This declaration, that the people were unrighteous, was due, the prophet said, to the people's sins. Isaiah not only exclaimed, "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire;" he added, in equal indictment, "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of justice, righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers: thy princes are rebellious, they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come before them." To Isaiah and the earlier prophets Israel was unrighteous because it was so immoral. With their strong social conscience, righteousness meant to these prophets the practice of civic virtues,—truth-telling, honesty between citizens, tenderness to the poor, inflexible justice in high places.

Here then we have two possible meanings for Israel's righteousness in the prophetic writings, allied and necessary to one another, yet logically distinct,—the one a becoming righteous through the exercise of virtue, the other a being shown to be righteous by the voice of history. In the one case righteousness is the practical result of the working of the Spirit of God; in the other it is vindication, or justification, by the Providence of God. Isaiah and the earlier prophets, while the sentence of history was still not executed and might through the mercy of God be revoked, incline to employ righteousness predominantly in the former sense. But it will be understood how, after the Exile, it was the latter, which became the prevailing determination of the word. By that great disaster God finally uttered the clear sentence, of which previous history had been but the foreboding. Israel in exile was fully declared to be in the wrong—to be unrighteous. As a church, she lay under the ban; as a nation, she was discredited before the nations of the world. And her one longing, hope, and effort during the weary years of Captivity was to have her right vindicated again, was to be restored to right relations to God and to the world, under the Covenant.

This is the predominant meaning of the term, as applied to Israel, in Isa. xl.-lxvi. Israel's unrighteousness is her state of discredit and disgrace under the hands of God; her righteousness, which she hopes for, is her restoral to her station and destiny as the elect people. To our Christian habit of thinking, it is very natural to read the frequent and splendid phrases in which "righteousness" is attributed or promised to the people of God in this evangelical prophecy, as if righteousness were that inward assurance and justification from an evil conscience, which, as we are taught by the New Testament, is provided for us through the death of Christ, and inwardly sealed to us by the Holy Ghost, irrespective of the course of our outward fortune. But if we read that meaning into "righteousness" in Isa. xl.-lxvi., we shall simply not understand some of the grandest passages of the prophecy. We

must clearly keep in view, that while the prophet ceaselessly emphasises the pardon of God "spoken home to the heart" of the people as the first step towards their restoral, he does not apply the term righteousness to this inward justification,* but to the outward vindication and accrediting of Israel by God before the whole world, in their redemption from Captivity, and their reinstatement as His people. This is very clear from the way in which "righteousness" is coupled with "salvation" by the prophet, as (lxii. 1): "I will not rest till her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth." Or again from the way in which righteousness and glory are put in parallel (lxii. 2): "And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory." Or again in the way that "righteousness" and "renown" are identified (lxi. 11): "The Lord Jehovah will cause righteousness and renown to spring forth before all the nations." In each of these promises the idea of an external and manifest splendour is evident; not the inward peace of justification felt only by the conscience to which it has been granted, but the outward historical victory appreciable by the gross sense of the heathen. Of course the outward implies the inward,—this historical triumph is the crown of a religious process, the result of forgiveness and a long purification,—but while in the New Testament it is these which would be most readily called a people's righteousness, it is the former (what the New Testament would rather call "the crown of life"), which has appropriated the name in Isa. xl.-lxvi. The same is manifest from another text (xlviii. 18): "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments; then had thy peace been as the River, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea." Here "righteousness" is not only not applied to inward morality, but set over against this as its external reward,—the health and splendour which a good conscience produces. It is in the same external sense that the prophet talks of the "robe of righteousness" with its bridal splendour, and compares it to the appearance of "Spring" (lxi. 10-11).

For this kind of righteousness, this vindication by God before the world, Israel waited throughout the Exile. God addresses them as "they that pursue righteousness, that seek Jehovah" (li. 1). And it is a closely allied meaning, though perhaps with a more inward application, when the people are represented as praying God to give them "ordinances of righteousness" (lviii. 2),—that is, to prescribe such a ritual as will expiate their guilt and bring them into a right relation with Him. They sought in vain. The great lesson of the Exile was that not by works and performances, but through simply waiting upon the Lord, their righteousness should shine forth. Even this outward kind of justification was to be by faith.

The other meaning of righteousness, however,—the sense of social and civic morality, which was its usual sense with the earlier prophets,—is not altogether excluded from the use of the word in Isa. xl.-lxvi. Here are some commands and reproaches which seem to imply it. "Keep judgment, and do righteousness,"—where, from what follows, righteousness evidently means ob-

* But the verb to *make righteous* or *justify* is used in a sense akin to the New Testament sense in liii. 11. See our chapter on that prophecy.

serving the Sabbath and doing no evil (lvi. 1ff). "And justice is fallen away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off, for truth is fallen in the street, and steadfastness cannot enter" (lix. 14). These must be terms for human virtues, for shortly afterwards it is said: "Jehovah was displeased because there was no justice." Again, "They seek Me as a nation that did righteousness" (lviii. 2); "Hearken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, a people—My law is in their hearts" (li. 7); "Thou meetest him that worketh righteousness" (lxiv. 5); "No one sues in righteousness, and none goeth to law in truth" (lix. 4). In all these passages "righteousness" means something that man can know and do, his conscience and his duty, and is rightly to be distinguished from those others, in which "righteousness" is equivalent to the salvation, the glory, the peace, which only God's power can bring. If the passages that employ "righteousness" in the sense of moral or religious observance really date from the Exile, then the interesting fact is assured to us that the Jews enjoyed some degree of social independence and responsibility during their Captivity. But it is a very striking fact that these passages all belong to chapters, the exilic origin of which is questioned even by critics, who assign the rest of Isa. xl.-lxvi. to the Exile. Yet, even if these passages have all to be assigned to the Exile, how few they are in number! How they contrast with the frequency, with which, in the earlier part of this book,—in the orations addressed by Isaiah to his own times, when Israel was still an independent state,—"righteousness" is reiterated as the daily, practical duty of men, as justice, truthfulness, and charity between man and man! The extreme rarity of such inculcations in Isa. xl.-lxvi. warns us that we must not expect to find here the same practical and political interest which formed so much of the charm and the force of Isa. i.-xxxix. The nation has now no politics, almost no social morals. Israel are not citizens working out their own salvation in the market, the camp, and the senate; but captives waiting a deliverance in God's time, which no act of theirs can hasten. It is not in the street that the interest of Second Isaiah lies: it is on the horizon. Hence the vague feeling of a distant splendour, which as the reader passes from chap. xxxix. to chap. xl., replaces in his mind the stir of living in a busy crowd, the close and throbbing sense of the civic conscience, the voice of statesmen, the clash of the weapons of war. There is no opportunity for individuals to reveal themselves. It is a nation waiting, indistinguishable in shadow, whose outlines only we see. It is no longer the thrilling practical cry, which sends men into the arenas of social life with every sinew in them strung: "Learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." It is rather the cry of one who still waits for his working day to dawn: "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills; from whence cometh my help?" Righteousness is not the near and daily duty, it is the far-off peace and splendour of skies, that have scarce begun to redden to the day.

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

But there was another Person, whose righteousness was in question during the Exile, and who Himself argues for it throughout our

prophecy. Perhaps the most peculiar feature of the theology of Isa. xl.-lxvi. is its argument for "the righteousness of Jehovah."

Some critics maintain that righteousness, when applied to Jehovah, bears always a technical reference to His covenant with Israel. This is scarcely correct. Jehovah's dealings with Israel were no doubt the chief of His dealings, and it is these, which He mainly quotes to illustrate His righteousness; but we have already studied passages, which prove to us that Jehovah's righteousness was an absolute quality of His Godhead, shown to others besides Israel, and in loyalty to obligations different from the terms of His covenant with Israel. In chap. xli. Jehovah calls upon the heathen to match their righteousness with His; righteousness was therefore a quality that might have been attributed to them as well as to Himself. Again, in xlv. 19,—"I, Jehovah, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right,"—righteousness evidently bears a general sense, and not one of exclusive application to God's dealing with Israel. It is the same in the passage about Cyrus (xlv. 13): "I have raised him up in righteousness, I will make straight all his ways." Though Cyrus was called in connection with God's purpose towards Israel, it is not that purpose which makes his calling righteous, but the fact that God means to carry him through, or, as the parallel verse says, "to make straight all his ways." These instances are sufficient to prove that the righteousness, which God attributes to His words, to His actions, and to Himself, is a general quality not confined to His dealings with Israel under the covenant,—though, of course, most clearly illustrated by these.

If now we enquire, what this absolute quality of Jehovah's Deity really means, we may conveniently begin with His application of it to His Word. In chap. xli. He summons the other religions to exhibit predictions that are true to fact. "Who hath declared it on-ahead that we may know, or from aforetime that we may say, He is *ssaddiq*."* Here *ssaddiq* simply means "right, correct," true to fact. It is much the same meaning in xliii. 9, where the verb is used of heathen predictors, "that they may be shown to be right," or "correct" (English version, "justified"). But when, in chap. xlvi., the word is applied by Jehovah to His own speech, it has a meaning, of far richer contents, than mere correctness, and proves to us that after all the Hebrew *ssedheq* was almost as versatile as the English "right." The following passage shows us that the righteousness of Jehovah's speech is its clearness, straightforwardness, and practical effectiveness: "Not in secret have I spoken, in a place of the land of darkness,"—this has been supposed to refer to the remote or subterranean localities in which heathen oracles mysteriously entrenched themselves,—"I have not said to the seed of Jacob, In Chaos seek Me. I am Jehovah, a Speaker of righteousness, a Publisher of straight things. Be gathered and come, draw near together, O remnants of the nations. They know not that carry the log of their image, and pray to a god who does not save. Publish and bring near, yea, let them take counsel together. Who caused this to be heard of old? long since

* At first sight this is remarkably like the cognate Arabic root, which is continually used for truthful. But the Hebrew word never meant truthful in the moral sense of truth, and here is *right* or *correct*.

hath published it? Is it not I, Jehovah, and there is none else God beside Me; a God righteous and a Saviour, there is none except Me. Turn unto Me and be saved, all ends of Earth,* for I am God, and there is none else. By Myself have I sworn, gone forth from My mouth hath righteousness: a word and it shall not turn; for to Me shall bow every knee, shall swear every tongue. Truly in Jehovah, shall they say of Me, are righteousnesses and strength. To Him shall it come,† and shamed shall be all that are incensed against Him. In Jehovah shall be righteous and renowned all the seed of Israel" (xlv. 19-25).

In this very suggestive passage "righteousness" means far more than simple correctness of prediction. Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish how much it means, so quickly do its varying echoes throng upon our ear, from the new associations in which it is spoken. A word such as "righteousness" is like the sensitive tones of the human voice. Spoken in a desert, the voice is itself and nothing more; but utter it where the landscape is crowded with novel obstacles, and the original note is almost lost amid the echoes it startles. So with the "righteousness of Jehovah"; among the new associations in which the prophet affirms it, it starts novel repetitions of itself. Against the ambiguity of the oracles, it is echoed back as "clearness, straightforwardness, good faith" (ver. 19); against their opportunism and want of foresight, it is described as equivalent to the capacity for arranging things beforehand and predicting what must come to pass, therefore as "purposefulness;" while against their futility, it is plainly "effectiveness and power to prevail" (ver. 23). It is the quality in God, which divides His Godhead with His power, something intellectual as well as moral, the possession of a reasonable purpose as well as fidelity towards it.

This intellectual sense of righteousness, as reasonableness or purposefulness, is clearly illustrated by the way in which the prophet appeals, in order to enforce it, to Jehovah's creation of the world. "Thus saith Jehovah, Creator of the heavens—He is the God—Former of the Earth and her Maker, He founded her; not Chaos did He create her, to be dwelt in did He form her" (xlv. 18). The word "Chaos" here is the same as is used in opposition to "righteousness" in the following verse. The sentence plainly illustrates the truth, that whatever God does, He does not so as to issue in confusion, but with a reasonable purpose and for a practical end. We have here the repetition of that deep, strong note, which Isaiah himself so often sounded to the comfort of men in perplexity or despair, that God is at least reasonable, not working for nothing, nor beginning only to leave off, nor creating in order to destroy. The same God, says our prophet, who formed the earth in order to see it inhabited, must surely be believed to be consistent enough to carry to the end also His spiritual work among men. Our prophet's idea of God's righteousness, therefore, includes the idea of reasonableness; implies rational as well as moral consistency, practical sense as well as good faith;

the conscience of a reasonable plan, and, perhaps also, the power to carry it through.

To know that this great and varied meaning belongs to "righteousness" gives us new insight into those passages, which find in it all the motive and efficiency of the Divine action: "It pleased Jehovah for His righteousness' sake" (xlii. 21); "His righteousness, it upheld Him; and He put on righteousness as a breastplate" (lix. 16, 17).

With such a righteousness did Jehovah deal with Israel. To her despair that He has forgotten her He recounts the historical events by which He has made her His own, and affirms that He will carry them on; and you feel the expression both of fidelity and of the consciousness of ability to fulfil, in the words, "I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." "Right hand"—there is more than the touch of fidelity in this; there is the grasp of power. Again, to the Israel who was conscious of being His Servant, God says, "I, Jehovah, have called thee in righteousness;" and, taken with the context, the word plainly means good faith and intention to sustain and carry to success.

It was easy to transfer the name "righteousness" from the character of God's action to its results, but always, of course, in the vindication of His purpose and word. Therefore, just as the salvation of Israel, which was the chief result of the Divine purpose, is called Israel's righteousness, so it is also called "Jehovah's righteousness." Thus, in xlv. 13, "I bring near My righteousness;" and in li. 5, "My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth;" ver. 6, "My salvation shall be for ever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished." It seems to be in the same sense, of finished and visible results, that the skies are called upon "to pour down righteousness," and "the earth to open that they may be fruitful in salvation, and let her cause righteousness to spring up together" (xlv. 8; cf. lxi. 10, "My Lord Jehovah will cause righteousness to spring forth").

One passage is of great interest, because in it "righteousness" is used to play upon itself, in its two meanings of human duty and Divine effect—lvi. 1, "Observe judgment"—probably religious ordinances—"and do righteousness; for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.

To complete our study of "righteousness" it is necessary to touch still upon one point. In Isa. xl.-lxvi. both the masculine and feminine forms of the Hebrew word for righteousness are used, and it has been averred that they are used with a difference. This opinion is entirely dispelled by a collation of the passages. I give the particulars in a note, from which it will be seen that both forms are indifferently employed for each of the many shades of meaning which "righteousness" bears in our prophecies.*

* צדקה, the masculine, is used sixteen times, צדקה, twenty-four. Both are used of Jehovah: xlii. 21 צדקו, and lix. 16 צדקתו. Both of His speech: masc. in xlv. 19, fem. in xlv. 23 and lxiii. 1. Perhaps the passage in which their identity is most plain is li. 5, 6, where they are both parallel to salvation: ver. 5, My righteousness (m.) is near; ver. 6, My righteousness (f.) shall not be abolished. Both are used of the people's duty: lix. 4, None sueth in righteousness (m.); xlviii. 1, But not in truth nor in righteousness (f.); lvi. 1, Keep justice and do righteous-

* *Earth* again without article, though obviously referring to the world.

† Sense doubtful here. Bredenkamp translates by a slight change of reading: *Only speaking by Jehovah: Fulness of righteousness and might come to Him, and ashamed, etc.*

That the masculine and feminine forms sometimes occur, with the same or with different meanings, in the same verse, or in the next verse to one another, proves that the selection of them respectively cannot be due to any difference in the authorship of our prophecy. So that we are reduced to say that nothing accounts for their use, except, it might be, the exigencies of the metre. But who is able to prove this?

BOOK III.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

HAVING completed our survey of the fundamental truths of our prophecy, and studied the subject which forms its immediate and most urgent interest, the deliverance of Israel from Babylon, we are now at liberty to turn to consider the great duty and destiny which lie before the delivered people—the Service of Jehovah. The passages of our prophecy which describe this are scattered both among those chapters we have already studied and among those which lie before us. But, as was explained in the Introduction, they are all easily detached from their surroundings; and the continuity and progress, of which their series, though so much interrupted, gives evidence, demand that they should be treated by us together. They will, therefore, form the Third of the Books, into which this volume is divided.

The passages on the Servant of Jehovah, or, as the English reader is more accustomed to hear him called, the Servant of the Lord, are as follows: xli. 8 ff; xlii. 1-7, 18-25; xliii. *passim*, especially 8-10; xlv. 1, 21; xlviii. 20; xlix. 1-9; l. 4-11; lii. 13-14. The main passages are those in xli., xlii., xliii., xlix., l., and lii.-liii. The others are incidental allusions to Israel as the Servant of the Lord, and do not develop the character of the Servant or the Service.

Upon the questions relevant to the structure of these prophecies—why they have been so scattered, and whether they were originally from the main author of Isa. xl.-xlv., or from any other single writer,—questions on which critics have either preserved a discreet silence, or have spoken to convince nobody but themselves,—I have no final opinions to offer. It may be that these passages formed a poem by themselves before their incorporation with our prophecy; but the evidence which has been offered for this is very far from adequate. It may be that one or more of them are insertions from other authors, to which our prophet consciously works up with ideas of his own about the Servant; but neither for this is there any evidence worth serious consideration. I think that all we can do is to remember that they occur in a dramatic work, which may, partly at least, account for the interruptions which separate them; that the subject of which they treat is woven through and through other portions of Isa. xl.-liii., and that even those of them which, like chap. xlix., look

ness (f.) And both are used of the people's saved and glorious condition: lviii. 8, Thy righteousness (m.) shall go before thee; lxii. 1, Until her righteousness (m.) go forth as brightness; xlviii. 18, Thy righteousness (f.) as the waves of the sea: liv. 17, Their righteousness (f.) which is of Me. Both are used with prepositions (*cf.* xlii. 6 with xlviii. 1), and both with possessive pronouns. In fact, there is absolutely no difference made between the two.

as if they could stand by themselves, are led up to by the verses before them; and that, finally, the series of them exhibits a continuity and furnishes a distinct development of their subject. See pp. 808 and 812 ff.

It is this development which the following exposition seeks to trace. As the prophet starts from the idea of the Servant as being the whole historical nation Israel, it will be necessary to devote, first of all, a chapter to Israel's peculiar relation to God. This will be chap. xv., "One God, One People." In chap. xvi. we shall trace the development of the idea through the whole series of the passages; and in chap. xvii. we shall give the New Testament interpretation and fulfilment of the Servant. Then will follow an exposition of the contents of the Service and of the ideal it presents to ourselves, *first*, as it is given in Isa. xlii. 1-9, as the service of God and man, chap. xviii. of this Book; then as it is realised and owned by the Servant himself, as prophet and martyr, Isa. xlix.-l., chap. xix. of this Book; and finally as it culminates in Isa. lii. 13-14., chap. xx. of this Book.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE GOD, ONE PEOPLE.

ISAIAH xli. 8-20, xlii.-xliii.

WE have been listening to the proclamation of a Monotheism so absolute, that, as we have seen, modern critical philosophy, in surveying the history of religion, can find for it no rival among the faiths of the world. God has been exalted before us, in character so perfect, in dominion so universal, that neither the conscience nor the imagination of man can add to the general scope of the vision. Jesus and His Cross shall lead the world's heart farther into the secrets of God's love; God's Spirit in science shall more richly instruct us in the secrets of His laws. But these shall thereby only increase the contents and illustrate the details of this revelation of our prophet. They shall in no way enlarge its sweep and outline, for it is already as lofty an idea of the unity and sovereignty of God, as the thoughts of man can follow.

Across this pure light of God, however, a phenomenon thrusts itself, which seems for the moment to affect the absoluteness of the vision and to detract from its sublimity. This is the prominence given before God to a single people, Israel. In these chapters the uniqueness of Israel is as much urged upon us as the unity of God. Is He the One God in heaven? they are His only people on earth, "His elect, His own, His witnesses to the end of the earth." His guidance of them is matched with His guidance of the stars, as if, like the stars shining against the night, their tribes alone moved to His hand through an otherwise dark and empty space. His revelation to humanity is given through their little language; the restoration of their petty capital, that hill fort in the barren land of Judah, is exhibited as the end of His processes, which sweep down through history and affect the surface of the whole inhabited world. And His very righteousness turns out to be for the most part His faithfulness to His covenant with Israel.

Now to many in our day it has been a great offence to have "the curved nose of the Jew"

thus thrust in between their eyes and the pure light of God. They ask, Can the Judge of all the earth have been thus partial to one people? Did God confine His revelation to men to the literature of a small, unpolished tribe? Even most uncritical souls have trouble to understand why "salvation is of the Jews."

The chief point to know is that the election of Israel was an election, not to salvation, but to service. To understand this is to get rid of by far the greater part of the difficulty that attaches to the subject. Israel was a means, and not an end; God chose in him a minister, not a favourite. No prophet in Israel failed to say this; but our prophet makes it the burden of his message to the exiles. "Ye are My witnesses, My Servant whom I have chosen. Ye are My witnesses, and I am God. I will also give thee for a light to the nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth" (xliii. 10). Numbers of other verses might be quoted to the same effect, that "there is no God but God, and Israel is His prophet."* But if the election of Israel is thus an election to service, it is surely in harmony with God's usual method, whether in nature or history. So far from such a specialisation as Israel's being derogatory to the Divine unity, it is but part of that order and division of labour which the Divine unity demands as its consequence throughout the whole range of Being. The universe is diverse. "To every man his own work" is the proper corollary of "God over all," and Israel's prerogative was but the specialisation of Israel's function for God in the world. In choosing Israel to be His mediator with mankind, God did but do for religion what in the exercise of the same practical discipline He did for philosophy, when He dowered Greece with her gifts of subtle thought and speech, or with Rome when He trained her people to become the legislators of mankind. And how else should work succeed but by specialisation,—the secret as it is of fidelity and expertness? Of fidelity—for the constraint of my duty surely lies in this, that it is due from me and no other; of expertness—for he drives best and deepest who drives along one line. In lighting a fire you begin with a kindled faggot; and in lighting a world it was in harmony with all His law, physical and moral, for God to begin with a particular portion of mankind.

The next question is, Why should this particular portion of mankind be a nation, and not a single prophet, or a school of philosophers, or a church universal? The answer is found in the condition of the ancient world. Amid its diversities of language and of racial feeling, a missionary prophet travelling like Paul from people to people is inconceivable; and almost as inconceivable is the kind of Church which Paul founded among various nations, in no other bonds than the consciousness of a common faith. Of all possible combinations of men the nation was the only form which in the ancient world stood a chance of surviving in the struggle for existence. The nation furnished the necessary shelter and fellowship for personal religion; it gave to the spiritual a habitation upon earth, enlisted in its behalf the force of heredity, and secured the continuity of its traditions. But the service of the nation to religion was not only conservative, it was missionary as well. It was only through a people that a God became visible

and accredited to the world. Their history supplied the drama in which He played the hero's part. At a time when it was impossible to spread a religion, by means of literature, or by the example of personal holiness, the achievements of a considerable nation, their progress and prestige, furnished a universally understood language, through which the God could publish to mankind His power and will; and in choosing, therefore, a single nation to reveal Himself by, God was but employing the means best adapted for His purpose. The nation was the unit of religious progress in the ancient world. In the nation God chose as His witness, not only the most solid and permanent, but the most widely intelligible and impressive.*

The next question is, Why Israel should have been this singular and indispensable nation. When God selected Israel to serve His purpose, He did so, we are told, of His sovereign grace. But this strong thought, which forms the foundation of our prophet's assurance about his people, does not prevent him from dwelling also on Israel's natural capacity for religious service. This, too, was of God. Over and over again Israel hears Jehovah say: "I have created thee, I have formed thee, I have prepared thee." One passage describes the nation's equipment for the office of a prophet; another their discipline for the life of a saint; and every now and then our prophet shows how far back he feels this preparation to have begun, even when the nation, as he puts it, was "still in the womb." How easily these well-worn phrases slip over our lips! Yet they are not mere formulas. Modern research has put a new meaning into them, and taught us that Israel's *creation, forming, election, polishing, carriage, and defence* were processes as real and measurable as any in natural or political history. For instance, when our prophet says that Israel's preparation began "from the womb,—I am thy moulder, saith Jehovah, from the womb,"—history takes us back to the pre-natal circumstance of the nation, and there exhibits it to us as already being tempered to a religious disposition and propensity. The Hebrews were of the Semitic stock. The "womb" from which Israel sprang was a race of wandering shepherds, upon the hungry deserts of Arabia, where man's home is the flitting tent, hunger is his discipline for many months of the year, his only arts are those of speech and war, and in the long irremediable starvation there is nothing to do but to be patient and dream. Born in these deserts, the youth of the Semitic race, like the probation of their greatest prophets, was spent in a long fast, which lent their spirit a wonderful ease of detachment from the world and of religious imagination, and tempered their will to long suffering—though it touched their blood, too, with a rancorous heat that breaks out through the

* 'Revelation is never revolutionary. . . . As a rule, revelation accepts the fragments of truth and adopts the methods of religion already existing, uniting the former into a whole, and purifying the latter for its own purposes. . . . For instance, in the East each people had its particular god. The god and the people were correlative ideas, that which gave the individuals of a nation unity and made them a people was the unity of its god; as, on the other hand, that which gave a god prestige was the strength and victorious career of his people. The self-consciousness of the nation and its religion re-acted on one another, and rose and fell simultaneously. This conception was not repudiated, but adopted by revelation; and, as occasion demanded, purified from its natural abuses.'—Professor A. B. Davidson, *Expositor*, Second Series, vol. viii. pp. 257-8.

* Wellhausen.

prevailing calm of every Semitic literature.* They were trained also in the desert's august style of eloquence. "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me."† A "natural prophecy," as it has been called, is found in all the branches of the Semitic stock. No wonder that from this race there came forth the three great universal religions of mankind—that Moses and the prophets, John, Jesus Himself and Paul, and Mohammed were all of the seed of Shem.

This racial disposition the Hebrew carried with him into his calling as a nation. The ancestor, who gave the people the double name by which they are addressed throughout our prophecy, "Jacob-Israel," inherited with all his defects the two great marks of the religious temper. Jacob could dream and he could wait. Remember him by the side of the brother, who could so little think of the future that he was willing to sell its promise for a mess of pottage; who, though God was as near to him as to Jacob, never saw visions or wrestled with angels; who seemed to have no power of growth about him, but carrying the same character, unchanged through the discipline of life, finally transmitted it in stereotype to his posterity;—remember Jacob by the side of such a brother, and you have a great part of the secret of the emergence of his descendants from the life of wandering cattle-breeders to be God's chief ministers of religion in the world. Their habits, like their father's, might be bad, but they had the tough and malleable constitution, which it was possible to mould to something better. Like their father, they were false, unchivalrous, selfish, "with the herdsman's grossness in their blood," and much of the rancour and cruelty of their ancestors, the desert-warriors, but with it all they had the two most potential of habits—they could dream and they could wait. In his love and hope for promised Rachel, that were not quenched or soured by the substitution, after seven years' service for her, of her ill-favoured sister, but began another seven years' effort for herself, Jacob was a type of his strange, tenacious people, who, when they were brought face to face with some Leah of a fulfilment of their fondest ideals, as they frequently were in their history, took up again with undiminished ardour the pursuit of their first unforgettable love. It is the wonder of history, how this people passed through the countless disappointments of the prophecies to which they had given their hearts, yet with only a strengthening expectation of the arrival of the promised King and His kingdom. If other peoples have felt a gain in character from such miscarriages of belief, it is generally been at the expense of their faith. But Israel's experience did not take faith away or even impair faith's elasticity. We see their appreciation of God's promises growing only more spiritual with each postponement, and patience performing her perfect work upon their character; yet this never happens at the cost of the original buoyancy and ardour. The glory of it we ascribe, as is most due, to the power of the Word of God; but the people who could stand the strain of the discipline of such a word, its alter-

nate glow and frost, must have been a people of extraordinary fibre and frame. When we think of how they wore for those two thousand years of postponed promise, and how they wear still, after two thousand years more of disillusion and suffering, we cease to wonder why God chose this small tribe to be His instrument on earth. Where we see their bad habits their Creator knew their sound constitution, and the constitution of Israel is a thing unique among mankind.

From the racial temper of the elect nation we pass to their history, on the singularity of which our prophet dwells with emphasis. Israel's political origin had no other reason than a call to God's service. Other peoples grew, as it were, from the soil; they were the product of a fatherland, a climate, certain physical environments: root them out of these, and, as nations, they ceased to be. But Israel had not been so nursed into nationality on the lap of nature. The captive children of Jacob had sprung into unity and independence as a nation at the special call of God, and to serve His will in the world,—His will that so lay athwart the natural tendencies of the peoples. All down their history it is wonderful to see how it was the conscience of this service, which in periods of progress was the real national genius in Israel, and in times of decay or of political dissolution upheld the assurance of the nation's survival. Whenever a ruler like Ahaz forgot that Israel's imperishableness was bound up with their faithfulness to God's service, and sought to preserve his throne by alliances with the world-powers, then it was that Israel were most in danger of absorption into the world. And, conversely, when disaster came down, and there was no hope in the sky, it was upon the inward sense of their election to the service of God that the prophets rallied the people's faith and assured them of their survival as a nation. They brought to Israel that sovereign message which renders all who hear it immortal: "God has a service for you to serve upon earth." In the Exile especially, the wonderful survival of the nation, with the subservience of all history to that end, is made to turn on this,—that Israel has a unique purpose to serve. When Jeremiah and Ezekiel seek to assure the captives of their return to the land and of the restoration of the people, they commend so unlikely a promise by reminding them that the nation is the Servant of God. This name, applied by them for the first time to the nation as a whole, they bind up with the national existence. "Fear thou not, O My Servant Jacob, saith Jehovah; neither be dismayed. O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity."* These words plainly say, that Israel as a nation cannot die, for God has a use for them to serve. The singularity of Israel's redemption from Babylon is due to the singularity of the service that God has for the nation to perform. Our prophet speaks in the same strain: "Thou, Israel, My Servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham My lover, whom I took hold of from the ends of the earth and its corners. I have called thee and said unto thee, My Servant art thou, I have chosen thee and have not cast thee away" (chap. xli. 8 ff). No one can miss the force of these

* Mr. Doughty, in his most interesting account of the nomads of Central Arabia, the unsophisticated Semites on their native soil, furnishes ample material for accounting for the strange mixture of passion and resignation in these prophet-peoples of the world.

† Ch. xli. 2.

* Jer. xxx. 10, cf. xli. 27; also Ezek. xxxvii. 25: *And they shall dwell in the land that I have given My servant Jacob.* Cf. xxviii. 25.

words. They are the assurance of Israel's miraculous survival, not because he is God's favourite, but because he is God's servant, with a unique work in the world. Many other verses repeat the same truth.* They call "Israel the Servant," and "Jacob the chosen," of God, in order to persuade the people that they are not forgotten of Him, and that their seed shall live and be blessed. Israel survives because he serves—"Servus servatur."

Now for this service,—which had been the purpose of the nation's election at first, the mainstay of its unique preservation since, and the reason of all its singular pre-eminence before God,—Israel was equipped by two great experiences. These were Redemption and Revelation.

On the former redemptions of Israel from the power of other nations our prophet does not dwell much. You feel that they are present to his mind, for he sometimes describes the coming redemption from Babylon in terms of them. And once, in an appeal to the "Arm of Jehovah," he calls out: "Awake like the days of old, ancient generations! Art thou not it that hewed Rahab in pieces, that pierced the Dragon? Art thou not it which dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a way of passage for the redeemed?"† There is, too, that beautiful passage in chap. lxiii., which "makes mention of the lovingkindnesses of Jehovah, according to all that He hath bestowed upon us;" which describes the "carriage of the people all the days of old," how "He brought them out of the sea, caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, divided the water before them, led them through the deeps as a horse on the meadow, that they stumbled not." But, on the whole, our prophet is too much engrossed with the immediate prospect of release from Babylon, to remember that past, of which it has been truly said, "He hath not dealt so with any people." It is the new glory that is upon him. He counts the deliverance from Babylon as already come; to his rapt eye it is its marvellous power and costliness, which already clothe the people in their unique brilliance and honour. "Thus saith Jehovah, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake have I sent to Babylon, and I will bring down their nobles, all of them, and the Chaldeans, in the ships of their exulting."‡ But it is more than Babylon that is balanced against them. "I am Jehovah, thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour. I am giving as thy ransom, Egypt, Cush and Seba in exchange for thee, because thou art precious in mine eyes, and hast made thyself valuable" (lit., "of weight"); "and I have loved thee, therefore do I give mankind for thee, and peoples for thy life.§ Mankind for thee, and peoples for thy life,"—all the world for this little people? It is intelligible only because this little people are to be for all the world. "Ye are My witnesses that I am God. I will also give thee for a light to nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth."

But more than on the Redemption, which Israel experienced, our prophet dwells on the Revelation, that has equipped them for their destiny. In a passage, in chap. xliii., to which we shall return, the present stupid and unready character of the mass of the people is contrasted with the

"instruction" which God has lavished upon them. "Thou hast seen many things, and wilt not observe: there is opening of the ears, but he heareth not. Jehovah was pleased for His righteousness' sake to magnify the Instruction and make it glorious,—but that"—the result and the precipitate of it all—"is a people robbed and spoiled." The word "Instruction" or "Revelation" is that same technical term, which we have met with before, for Jehovah's special training and illumination of Israel. How special these were, how distinct from the highest doctrine and practice of any other nation in that world to which Israel belonged, is an historical fact that the results of recent research enable us to state in a few sentences.

Recent exploration in the East, and the progress of Semitic philology, have proved that the system of religion which prevailed among the Hebrews had a very great deal in common with the systems of the neighbouring and related heathen nations. This common element included not only such things as ritual and temple-furniture, or the details of priestly organisation, but even the titles and many of the attributes of God, and especially the forms of the covenant in which He drew near to men. But the discovery of this common element has only thrown into more striking relief the presence at work in the Hebrew religion of an independent and original principle. In the Hebrew religion historians observe a principle of selection operating upon the common Semitic materials for worship,—ignoring some of them, giving prominence to others, and with others again changing the reference and application. Grossly immoral practices are forbidden; forbidden, too, are those superstitions, which, like augury and divination, draw men away from single-minded attention to the moral issues of life; and even religious customs are omitted, such as the employment of women in the sanctuary, which, however innocent in themselves, might lead men into temptations not desirable in connection with the professional pursuit of religion.* In short, a stern and inexorable conscience was at work in the Hebrew religion, which was not at work in any of the religions most akin to it. In our previous volume we saw the same conscience inspiring the prophets. Prophecy was not confined to the Hebrews; it was a general Semitic institution; but no one doubts the absolutely distinct character of the prophecy, which was conscious of having the Spirit of Jehovah. Its religious ideas were original, and in it we have, as all admit, a moral phenomenon unique in history. When we turn to ask the secret of this distinction, we find the answer in the character of God, whom Israel served. The God explains the people; Israel is the response to Jehovah. Each of the laws of the nation is enforced by the reason, "For I am holy." Each of the prophets brings his message from a God, "exalted in righteousness." In short, look where you will in the Old Testament,—come to it as a critic or as a worshipper,—you discover the revealed character of Jehovah to be the effective principle at work. It is this Divine character which draws Israel from among the nations to their destiny, which selects and builds the law to be a wall around them, and which by each revelation of itself discovers to the people both the measure of their

* xliv. 1, 21; xlviii. 20, etc.
† Ch. ii. 9, 10.

‡ Ch. xliii. 14.
§ *Ib.* 3, 4.

* Robertson Smith, Burnett Lectures in Aberdeen, 1889-90.

delinquency and the new ideals of their services to humanity. Like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, we see it in front of Israel at every stage of their marvellous progress down the ages.

So that when Jehovah says that "He has magnified the Revelation and made it glorious," He speaks of a magnitude of a real, historical kind, that can be tested by exact methods of observation. Israel's *election* by Jehovah, their *formation*, their unique *preparation* for service, are not the mere boasts of an overweening patriotism, but sober names for historical processes as real and evident as any that history contains.

To sum up, then. If Jehovah's sovereignty be absolute, so also is the uniqueness of Israel's calling and equipment for His Service. For, to begin with, Israel had the essential religious temper; they enjoyed a unique moral instruction and discipline; and by the side of this they were conscious of a series of miraculous deliverances from servitude and from dissolution. So singular an experience and career were not, as we have seen, bestowed from any arbitrary motive, which exhausted itself upon Israel, but in accordance with God's universal method of specialisation of function were granted to fit the nation as an instrument for a practical end. The sovereign unity of God does not mean equality in His creation. The universe is diverse. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; and even so in the moral kingdom of Him, who is Lord of the Hosts of both earth and heaven, each nation has its own destiny and function. Israel's was religion; Israel was God's specialist in religion.

For confirmation of this we turn to the supreme witness. Jesus was born a Jew, He confined His ministry to Judæa, and He has told us why. By various passing allusions, as well as by deliberate statements, He revealed His sense of a great religious difference between Jew and Gentile. "Use not vain repetitions as the Gentiles do. . . . For after all these things do the nations of the world seek; but your Father knoweth that you have need of these things." He refused to work except upon Jewish hearts: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And He charged His disciples, saying, Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." And again He said to the woman of Samaria: "Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews."

These sayings of our Lord have created as much question as the pre-eminence given in the Old Testament to a single people by a God who is described as the one God of Heaven and earth. Was He narrower of heart than Paul, His servant, who was debtor to Greek and Barbarian? Or was He ignorant of the universal character of His mission till it was forced upon His reluctant sympathies by the importunity of such heathen as the Syrophenician woman? A little common-sense dispels the perplexity, and leaves the problem, over which volumes have been written, no problem at all. Our Lord limited Himself to Israel, not because He was narrow, but because He was practical; not from ignorance, but from wisdom. He came from heaven to sow the seed of Divine truth; and where in

all humanity should He find the soil so ready as within the long-chosen people? He knew of that discipline of the centuries. In the words of His own parable, the Son when He came to earth directed His attention not to a piece of desert, but to "the vineyard" which His Father's servants had so long cultivated, and where the soil was open. Jesus came to Israel because He expected "faith in Israel." That this practical end was the deliberate intention of His will, is proved by the fact that when He found faith elsewhere, either in Syrian or Greek or Roman hearts, He did not hesitate to let His love and power go forth to them.

In short, we shall have no difficulty about these Divine methods with a single, elect people, if we only remember that to be Divine is to be practical. "Yet God also is wise," said Isaiah to the Jews when they preferred their own clever policies to Jehovah's guidance. And we need to be told the same, who murmur that to confine Himself to a single nation was not the ideal thing for the One God to do; or who imagine that it was left to one of our Lord's own creatures to suggest to Him the policy of His mission upon earth. We are shortsighted; and the Almighty is past finding out. But this at least it is possible for us to see, that, in choosing one nation to be His agent among men, God chose the type of instrument best fitted at the time for the work for which He designed it, and that in choosing Israel to be that nation, He chose a people of temper singularly suitable to His end.

Israel's election as a nation, therefore, was to Service. To be a nation and to be God's Servant was pretty much one and the same thing for Israel. Israel were to survive the Exile, because they were to serve the world. Let us carry this over to the study of our next chapter—The Servant of Jehovah.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

ISAIAH xli. 8-20; xlii. 1-7, 18 ff; xliii. 5-10; xlix. 1-9; l. 4-10; lii. 13-14.

WITH chapter xlii. we reach a distinct stage in our prophecy. The preceding chapters have been occupied with the declaration of the great, basal truth, that Jehovah is the One Sovereign God. This has been declared to two classes of hearers in succession—to God's own people, Israel, in chap. xl., and to the heathen in chap. xli. Having established His sovereignty, God now publishes His will, again addressing these two classes according to the purpose which He has for each. Has He vindicated Himself to Israel, the Almighty and Righteous God, Who will give His people freedom and strength: He will now define to them the mission for which that strength and freedom are required. Has He proved to the Gentiles that He is the one true God: He will declare to them now what truth He has for them to learn. In short, to use modern terms, the apologetic of chaps. xl.-xli. is succeeded by the missionary programme of chap. xlii. And although, from the necessities of the case, we are frequently brought back, in the course of the prophecy, to its fundamental claims for the Godhead of Jehovah, we are nevertheless sensible that with ver. 1 of chap. xlii. we

make a distinct advance. It is one of those logical steps which, along with a certain chronological progress that we have already felt, assures us that Isaiah, whether originally by one or more authors, is in its present form a unity, with a distinct order and principle of development.

The Purpose of God is identified with a Minister or Servant, whom He commissions to carry it out in the world. This Servant is brought before us with all the urgency with which Jehovah has presented Himself, and next to Jehovah he turns out to be the most important figure of the prophecy. Does the prophet insist that God is the only source and sufficiency of His people's salvation: it is with equal emphasis that He introduces the Servant as God's indispensable agent in the work. Cyrus is also acknowledged as an elect instrument. But neither in closeness to God, nor in effect upon the world, is Cyrus to be compared for an instant to the Servant. Cyrus is subservient and incidental: with the overthrow of Babylon, for which he was raised up, he will disappear from the stage of our prophecy. But God's purpose, which uses the gates opened by Cyrus, only to pass through them with the redeemed people to the regeneration of the whole world, is to be carried to this Divine consummation by the Servant: its universal and glorious progress is identified with his career. Cyrus flashes through these pages a well-polished sword: it is only his swift and brilliant usefulness that is allowed to catch our eye. But the Servant is a Character, to delineate whose immortal beauty and example the prophet devotes as much space as he does to Jehovah Himself. As he turns again and again to speak of God's omnipotence and faithfulness and agonising love for His own, so with equal frequency and fondness does he linger on every feature of the Servant's conduct and aspect: His gentleness, His patience, His courage, His purity, His meekness; His daily wakefulness to God's voice, the swiftness and brilliance of His speech for others, His silence under His own torments; His resorts—among the bruised, the prisoners, the forwandered of Israel, the weary, and them that sit in darkness, the far-off heathen; His warfare with the world, His face set like a flint; His unworldly beauty, which men call ugliness; His unnoticed presence in His own generation, yet the effect of His face upon kings; His habit of woe, a man of sorrows and acquainted with sickness; His sore stripes and bruises, His judicial murder, His felon's grave; His exaltation and eternal glory—till we may reverently say that these pictures, by their vividness and charm, have drawn our eyes away from our prophet's visions of God, and have caused the chapters in which they occur to be oftener read among us, and learned by heart, than the chapters in which God Himself is lifted up and adored. Jehovah and Jehovah's Servant—these are the two heroes of the drama.

Now we might naturally expect that so indispensable and fondly imagined a figure would also be defined past all ambiguity, whether as to His time or person or name. But the opposite is the case. About Scripture there are few more intricate questions than those on the Servant of the Lord. Is He a Person or Personification? If the latter, is He a Personification of all Israel? Or of a part of Israel? Or of the ideal Israel? Or of the Order of the Prophets? Or

if a Person—is he the prophet himself? Or a martyr who has already lived and suffered, like Jeremiah? Or One still to come, like the promised Messiah? Each of these suggestions has not only been made about the Servant, but derives considerable support from one or another of our prophet's dissolving views of his person and work. A final answer to them can be given only after a comparative study of all the relevant passages; but as these are scattered over the prophecy, and our detailed exposition of them must necessarily be interrupted, it will be of advantage to take here a prospect of them all, and see to what they combine to develop this sublime character and mission. And after we have seen what the prophecies themselves teach concerning the Servant, we shall inquire how they were understood and fulfilled by the New Testament; and that will show us how to expound and apply them with regard to ourselves.

1. The Hebrew work for "Servant" means a person at the disposal of another—to carry out his will, do his work, represent his interests. It was thus applied to the representatives of a king or the worshippers of a god.* All Israelites were thus in a sense the "servants of Jehovah;" though in the singular the title was reserved for persons of extraordinary character and usefulness.

But we have seen, as clearly as possible, that God set apart for His chief service upon earth, not an individual nor a group of individuals, but a whole nation in its national capacity. We have seen Israel's political origin and preservation bound up with that service; we have heard the whole nation plainly called, by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Servant of Jehovah.† Nothing could be more clear than this, that in the earlier years of the Exile the Servant of Jehovah was Israel as a whole, Israel as a body politic.

It is also in this sense that our prophet first uses the title in a passage we have already quoted (xli. 8); "Thou Israel, My Servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham My lover, whom I took hold of from the ends of the earth and its corners! I called thee and said unto thee, My Servant art thou. I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." Here the "Servant" is plainly the historical nation, descended from Abraham, and the subject of those national experiences which are traced in the previous chapter. It is the same in the following verses:—xliv. 1 ff: "Yet now hear, O Jacob My Servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: thus saith Jehovah thy Maker, and thy Moulder from the womb, He will help thee. Fear not, My servant Jacob; and Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. . . . I will pour My spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring." Chap. xlv. 21: "Remember these things, O Jacob; and Israel, for My servant art thou: I have formed thee; a servant for Myself art thou; O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." Chap. xlviii. 20: "Go ye forth

* A king's courtiers, soldiers, or subjects are called *his servants*. In this sense Israel was often styled the *servants of Jehovah*, as in Deut. xxxii. 36; Neh. i. 10, where the phrase is parallel to *His people*. But *Jehovah's servants* is a phrase also parallel to His worshippers (Psalm cxxxiv. 1, etc.); to those who trust Him (Psalm xxxiv. 22); and to those who love His name (Psalm lxxix. 36). The term is also applied in the plural to the prophets (Amos iii. 7); and in the singular, to eminent individuals—such as Abraham, Joshua, David, and Job; also by Jeremiah to the alien Nebuchadrezzar, while engaged on his mission from God against Jerusalem.

† See p. 790.

from Babylon; say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed His servant Jacob." In all these verses, which bind up the nation's restoration from exile with the fact that God called it to be His Servant, the title "Servant" is plainly equivalent to the national name "Israel" or "Jacob." But "Israel" or "Jacob" is not a label for the mere national idea, or the bare political framework, without regard to the living individuals included in it. To the eye and heart of Him, "Who counts the number of the stars," Israel means no mere outline, but all the individuals of the living generation of the people—"thy seed," that is, every born Israelite, however fallen or forwandered. This is made clear in a very beautiful passage in chap. xliii. (vv. 1-7): "Thus saith Jehovah, thy Creator, O Jacob; thy Moulder, O Israel. . . . Fear not, for I am with thee; from the sunrise I will bring thy seed, and from the sunset will I gather thee; . . . My sons from far, and My daughters from the end of the earth; every one who is called by My name, and whom for My glory I have created, formed, yea, I have made him." To this Israel—Israel as a whole, yet no mere abstraction or outline of the nation, but the people in mass and bulk—every individual of whom is dear to Jehovah, and in some sense shares His calling and equipment—to this Israel the title "Servant of Jehovah" is at first applied by our prophet.

2. We say "at first," for very soon the prophet has to make a distinction, and to sketch the Servant as something less than the actual nation. The distinction is obscure; it has given rise to a very great deal of controversy. But it is so natural, where a nation is the subject, and of such frequent occurrence in other literatures, that we may almost state it as a general law.

In all the passages quoted above, Israel has been spoken of in the passive mood, as the object of some affection or action on the part of God: "loved," "formed," "chosen," "called," and "about to be redeemed by Him." Now, so long as a people thus lie passive, their prophet will naturally think of them as a whole. In their shadow his eye can see them only in the outline of their mass; in their common suffering and servitude his heart will go out to all their individuals, as equally dear and equally in need of redemption. But when the hour comes for the people to work out their own salvation, and they emerge into action, it must needs be different. When they are no more the object of their prophet's affection only, but pass under the test of his experience and judgment, then distinctions naturally appear upon them. Lifted to the light of their destiny, their inequality becomes apparent; tried by its strain, part of them break away. And so, though the prophet continues still to call on the nation by its name to fulfil its calling, what he means by that name is no longer the bulk and the body of the citizenship. A certain ideal of the people fills his mind's eye—an ideal, however, which is no mere spectre floating above his own generation, but is realised in their noble and aspiring portion—although his ignorance as to the exact size of this portion must always leave his image of them more or less ideal to his eyes. It will be their quality rather than their quantity that is clear to him. In modern history we have two familiar illustrations of this process of winnowing and idealising a people in the light of their destiny,

which may prepare us for the more obscure instance of it in our prophecy.

In a well-known passage in the "Areopagitica," Milton exclaims, "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself and shaking her invincible locks; methinks I see her as an eagle renewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam. . . . while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means." In this passage the "nation" is no longer what Milton meant by the term in the earlier part of his treatise, where "England" stands simply for the outline of the whole English people; but the "nation" is the true genius of England realised in her enlightened and aspiring sons, and breaking away from the hindering and debasing members of the body politic—"the timorous and flocking birds with those also that love the twilight"—who are indeed Englishmen after the flesh, but form no part of the nation's better self.

Or, recall Mazzini's bitter experience. To no man was his Italy more really one than to this ardent son of hers, who loved every born Italian because he was an Italian, and counted none of the fragments of his unhappy country too petty or too corrupt to be included in the hope of her restoration. To Mazzini's earliest imagination, it was the whole Italian seed, who were ready for redemption, and would rise to achieve it at his summons. But when his summons came, how few responded, and after the first struggles how fewer still remained,—Mazzini himself has told us with breaking heart. The real Italy was but a handful of born Italians; at times it seemed to shrink to the prophet alone. From such a core the conscience indeed spread again, till the entire people was delivered from tyranny and from schism, and now every peasant and burgher from the Alps to Sicily understands what Italy means, and is proud to be an Italian. But for a time Mazzini and his few comrades stood alone. Others of their blood and speech were Piedmontese, Pope's men, Neapolitans,—merchants, lawyers, scholars,—or merely selfish and sensual. They alone were Italians; they alone were Italy.

It is a similar winnowing process, through which we see our prophet's thoughts pass with regard to Israel. Him, too, experience teaches that "the many are called, but the few chosen." So long as his people lie in the shadow of captivity, so long as he has to speak of them in the passive mood, the object of God's call and preparation, it is "their seed," the born people in bulk and mass, whom he names Israel, and entitles "the Servant of Jehovah." But the moment that he lifts them to their mission in the world, and to the light of their destiny, a difference becomes apparent upon them, and the Servant of Jehovah, though still called Israel, shrinks to something less than the living generation, draws off to something finer than the mass of the people. How, indeed, could it be otherwise with this strange people, than which no nation on earth had a loftier ideal identified with its history, or more frequently turned upon its better self, with a sword in its hand. Israel, though created a nation by God for His service, was always what Paul found it, divided into an "Israel after the flesh," and an "Israel after the spirit." But it was in the Exile that this dis-

inction gaped most broad. With the fall of Jerusalem, the political framework, which kept the different elements of the nation together, was shattered, and these were left loose to the action of moral forces. The baser elements were quickly absorbed by heathendom; the nobler, that remained loyal to the divine call, were free to assume a new and ideal form. Every year spent in Babylonia made it more apparent that the true and effective Israel of the future would not coincide with all the "seed of Jacob," who went into exile. Numbers of the latter were as contented with their Babylonian circumstance as numbers of Mazzini's "Italians" were satisfied to live on as Austrian and Papal subjects. Many, as we have seen, became idolaters; many more settled down into the prosperous habits of Babylonian commerce, while a large multitude besides were scattered far out of sight across the world. It required little insight to perceive that the true, effective Israel—the real "Servant of Jehovah"—must needs be a much smaller body than the sum of all these: a loyal kernel within Israel, who were still conscious of the national calling, and capable of carrying it out; who stood sensible of their duty to the whole world, but whose first conscience was for their lapsed and lost countrymen. This Israel within Israel was the real "Servant of the Lord;" to personify it in that character—however vague might be the actual proportion it would assume in his own or in any other generation—would be as natural to our dramatic prophet as to personify the nation as a whole.

All this very natural process—this passing from the historical Israel, the nation originally designed by God to be His Servant, to the conscious and effective Israel, that uncertain quantity within the present and every future generation—takes place in the chapters before us; and it will be sufficiently easy for us to follow if we only remember that our prophet is not a dogmatic theologian, careful to make clear each logical distinction, but a dramatic poet, who delivers his ideas in groups, tableaux, dialogues, interrupted by choruses; and who writes in a language incapable of expressing such delicate differences, except by dramatic contrasts, and by the one other figure of which he is so fond—paradox.

Perhaps the first traces of distinction between the real Servant and the whole nation are to be found in the Programme of his Mission in chap. xlii. 1-7. There it is said that the Servant is to be for a "covenant of the people" (ver. 6). I have explained below why we are to understand "people" as here meaning Israel.* And in ver. 7 it is said of the Servant that he is "to open blind eyes, bring forth from prison the

captive, from the house of bondage dwellers in darkness:" phrases that are descriptive, of course, of the captive Israel. Already, then, in chap. xlii. the Servant is something distinct from the whole nation, whose Covenant and Redeemer he is to be.

The next references to the Servant are a couple of paradoxes, which are evidently the prophet's attempt to show *why* it was necessary to draw in the Servant of Jehovah from the whole to a part of the people. The first of these paradoxes is in chap. xlii. ver. 18.

Ye deaf, hearken! and ye blind, look ye to see!
Who is blind but My Servant, and deaf as My Messenger
whom I send?
Who is blind as Meshullam, and blind as the Servant of
Jehovah?
Vision of many things—and thou dost not observe,
Opening of ears and he hears not!

The context shows that the Servant here—or Meshullam, as he is called, the "devoted" or "submissive one," from the same root, and of much the same form as the Arabic Muslim*—is the whole people; but they are entitled "Servant" only in order to show how unfit they are for the task to which they have been designated, and what a paradox their title is beside their real character. God had given them every opportunity by "making great His instruction" (ver. 21, *cf.* p. 791), and, when that failed, by His sore discipline in exile (vers. 24, 25). "For who gave Jacob for spoil and Israel to the robbers? Did not Jehovah? He against whom we sinned, and they would not walk in His ways, neither were obedient to His instruction. So He poured upon him the fury of His anger and the force of war." But even this did not awake the dull nation. "Though it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it kindled upon him, yet he laid it not to heart." The nation as a whole had been favoured with God's revelation; as a whole they had been brought into His purifying furnace of the Exile. But as they have benefited by neither the one nor the other, the natural conclusion is that as a whole they are no more fit to be God's Servant. Such is the hint which this paradox is intended to give us.

But a little further on there is an obverse paradox, which plainly says, that although the people are blind and deaf as a whole, still the capacity for service is found among them alone (xliii. 8, 10).

Bring forth the blind people—yet eyes are there!
And the deaf, yet ears have they! . . .
Ye are My witnesses, saith Jehovah, and My Servant
whom I have chosen.

The preceding verses (vv. 1-7) show us that it is again the whole people, in their bulk and scattered fragments, who are referred to. Blind though they be, "yet are there eyes" among them; deaf though they be, yet "they have ears." And so Jehovah addresses them all, in contradistinction to the heathen peoples (ver. 9), as His Servant.

These two complementary paradoxes together show this: that while Israel as a whole is unfit to be the Servant, it is nevertheless within Israel, alone of all the world's nations, that the true capacities for service are found—"eyes are there, ears have they." They prepare us for the Servant's testimony about himself, in which,

* Meshullam is found as a proper name in the historical books of the Old Testament, especially Nehemiah, *e. g.* iii. 4, 6, 30.

* The definite article is not used here with the word people, and hence the phrase has been taken by some in the vaguer sense of a *people's covenant*, as a general expression, along with its parallel clause, of the kind of influence the Servant was to exert, not on Israel, but on *any* people in the world; he was to be a *people's covenant* and a *light for nations*. So practically Schultz, "A. T. Theologie," 4th ed., p. 284. But the Hebrew word for people עַם is often used without the article to express the people Israel, just as the Hebrew word for land אֶרֶץ is often used without the article to express the land of Judah. (הָאָרֶץ with the article, is in Isa. xl.-lxvi. *the Earth*). And in ch. xlix. the phrase a *covenant of the people* again occurs, and in a context in which it can only mean a *covenant of the people*, Israel. Some render עַם בְּרִית a *covenant people*. But in xlix. 8 this is plainly an impossible rendering.

while he owns himself to be distinct from Israel as a whole, he is nevertheless still called Israel. This is given in chap. xlix. "And He said unto me, My Servant art thou; Israel, in whom I will glorify Myself. And now saith Jehovah, my moulder from the womb to be a Servant unto Him, to turn again Jacob to Him, and that Israel might not be destroyed; and I am of value in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God is my strength. And He said, It is too light for thy being My Servant, *merely* to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also set thee for a light of nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth" (xlix. 3-6). Here the Servant, though still called Israel, is clearly distinct from the nation as a whole, for part of his work is to raise the nation up again. And, moreover, he tells us this as his own testimony about himself. He is no longer spoken of in the third person, he speaks for himself in the first. This is significant. It is more than a mere artistic figure, the effect of our prophet's dramatic style—as if the Servant now stood opposite him, so vivid and near that he heard him speak, and quoted him in the direct form of speech. It is more probably the result of moral sympathy: the prophet speaks out of the heart of the Servant, in the name of that better portion of Israel which was already conscious of the Divine call, and of its distinction in this respect from the mass of the people.

It is futile to inquire what this better portion of Israel actually was, for whom the prophet speaks in the first person. Some have argued, from the stress which the speaker lays upon his gifts of speech and office of preaching, that what is now signified by the Servant is the order of the prophets: but such forget that in these chapters the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the ideal, not of prophets only, but of the whole people. Zion as a whole is to be "heraldess of good news" (xl. 9). It is, therefore, not the official function of the prophet-order which the Servant here owns, but the ideal of the prophet-nation. Others have argued from the direct form of speech, that the prophet puts himself forward as the Servant. But no individual would call himself Israel. And as Professor Cheyne remarks, the passage is altogether too self-assertive to be spoken by any man of himself as an individual; although, of course, our prophet could not have spoken of the true Israel with such sympathy, unless he had himself been part of it. The writer of these verses may have been, for the time, as virtually the real Israel as Mazzini was the real Italy. But still he does not speak as an individual. The passage is manifestly a piece of personification. The Servant is *Israel*—not now the nation as a whole, not the body and bulk of the Israelites, for they are to be the object of his first efforts, but the loyal, conscious, and effective Israel, realised in some of her members, and here personified by our prophet, who himself speaks for her out of his heart, in the first person.

By chap. xlix., then, the Servant of Jehovah is a personification of the true, effective Israel as distinguished from the mass of the nation—a Personification, but not yet a Person. Something within Israel has wakened up to find itself conscious of being the Servant of Jehovah, and distinct from the mass of the nation—something that is not yet a Person. And this definition of the Servant may stand (with some modifica-

tions) for his next appearance in chap. l. 4-9. In this passage the Servant, still speaking in the first person, continues to illustrate his experience as a prophet, and carries it to its consequence in martyrdom. But let us notice that he now no longer calls himself *Israel*, and that if it were not for the previous passages it would be natural to suppose that an individual was speaking. This supposition is confirmed by a verse that follows the Servant's speech, and is spoken, as chorus, by the prophet himself. "Who among you is a fearer of Jehovah, obedient to the voice of His Servant, who walketh in darkness, and hath no light. Let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and stay himself upon his God." In this too much neglected verse, which forms a real transition to chap. lii. 13-liii., the prophet is addressing any individual Israelite, on behalf of a personal God. It is very difficult to refrain from concluding that therefore the Servant also is a Person. Let us, however, not go beyond what we have evidence for; and note only that in chap. l. the Servant is no more called Israel, and is represented not as if he were one part of the nation, over against the mass of it, but as if he were one individual over against other individuals; that in fine the Personification of chap. xlix. has become much more difficult to distinguish from an actual Person.

3. This brings us to the culminating passage—chap. lii. 13-liii. Is the Servant still a Personification here, or at last and unmistakably a Person?

It may relieve the air of that electricity, which is apt to charge it at the discussion of so classic a passage as this, and secure us calm weather in which to examine exegetical details, if we at once assert, what none but prejudiced Jews have ever denied, that this great prophecy, known as the fifty-third of Isaiah, was fulfilled in One Person, Jesus of Nazareth, and achieved in all its details by Him alone. But, on the other hand, it requires also to be pointed out that Christ's personal fulfilment of it does not necessarily imply that our prophet wrote it of a Person. The present expositor hopes, indeed, to be able to give strong reasons for the theory usual among us, that the Personification of previous passages is at last in chap. liii. presented as a Person. But he fails to understand, why critics should be regarded as unorthodox or at variance with New Testament teaching on the subject, who, while they acknowledge that only Christ fulfilled chap. liii., are yet unable to believe that the prophet looked upon the Servant as an individual, and who regard chap. liii. as simply a sublimer form of the prophet's previous pictures of the ideal people of God. Surely Christ could and did fulfil prophecies other than personal ones. The types of Him, which the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament, are not exclusively individuals. Christ is sometimes represented as realising in His Person and work statements, which, as they were first spoken, could only refer to Israel, the nation. Matthew, for instance, applies to Jesus a text which Hosea wrote primarily of the whole Jewish people: "Out of Egypt have I called My Son."* Or, to take an instance from our own prophet—who but Jesus fulfilled chap. xlix., in which, as we have seen, it is not an individual, but the ideal of the prophet people, that is figured? So that, even if it were proved past all doubt—proved from gram-

* Hosea xi. 1; Matt. ii. 15.

mar, context, and every prophetic analogy—that in writing chap. liii. our prophet had still in view that aspect of the nation which he has personified in chap. xlix., such a conclusion would not weaken the connection between the prophecy and its unquestioned fulfilment by Jesus Christ, nor render the two less evidently part of one Divine design.

But we are by no means compelled to adopt the impersonal view of chap. liii. On the contrary, while the question is one to which all experts know the difficulty of finding an absolutely conclusive answer one way or the other, it seems to me that reasons prevail which make for the personal interpretation.

Let us see what exactly are the objections to taking chap. lii. 13-14 in a personal sense. First, it is very important to observe that they do not rise out of the grammar or language of the passage. The reference of both of these is consistently individual. Throughout, the Servant is spoken of in the singular.* The name Israel is not once applied to him: nothing—except that the nation has also suffered—suggests that he is playing a national rôle; there is no reflection in his fate of the features of the Exile. The antithesis, which was evident in previous passages, between a better Israel and the mass of the people has disappeared. The Servant is contrasted, not with the nation as a whole, but with His people as individuals. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." As far as grammar can, this surely distinguishes a single person. It is true, that one or two phrases suggest so colossal a figure—"he shall startle many nations, and kings shall shut their mouths at him"—that for a moment we think of the spectacle of a people rather than of a solitary human presence. But even such descriptions are not incompatible with a single person.† On the other hand, there are phrases which we can scarcely think are used of any but a historical individual; such as that he was taken from "oppression and judgment," that is from a process of law which was tyranny, from a judicial murder, and that he belonged to a particular generation—"As for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living." Surely a historical individual is the natural meaning of these words. And, in fact, critics like Ewald and Wellhausen, who interpret the passage, in its present context, of the ideal Israel, find themselves forced to argue that it has been borrowed for this use from the older story of some actual martyr—so individual do its references seem to them throughout.

If, then, the grammar and language of the passage thus conspire to convey the impression of an individual, what are the objections to supposing that an individual is meant? Critics have felt, in the main, three objections to the discovery of a historical individual in Isaiah lii. 13-14.

The *first* of these that we take is chronological, and arises from the late date to which we have found it necessary to assign the prophecy. Our prophet, it is averred, associates the work of the

Servant with the restoration of the people; but he sees that restoration too close to him to be able to think of the appearance, ministry, and martyrdom of a real historic life happening before it. (Our prophet, it will be remembered, wrote about 546, and the Restoration came in 538.) "There is no room for a history like that of the suffering Servant between the prophet's place and the Restoration."*

Now, this objection might be turned, even if it were true that the prophet identified the suffering Servant's career with so immediate and so short a process as the political deliverance from Babylon. For, in that case, the prophet would not be leaving less room for the Servant, than, in chap. ix., Isaiah himself leaves for the birth, the growth to manhood, and the victories of the Prince-of-the-Four-Names, before that immediate relief from the Assyrian which he expects the Prince to effect. But does our prophet identify the suffering Servant's career with the redemption from Babylon and the Return? It is plain that he does not—at least in those portraits of the Servant, which are most personal. Our prophet has really two prospects for Israel—one, the actual deliverance from Babylon; the other, a spiritual redemption and restoration. If, like his fellow prophets, he sometimes runs these two together, and talks of the latter in the terms of the former, he keeps them on the whole distinct, and assigns them to different agents. The burden of the first he lays on Cyrus, though he also connects it with the Servant, while the Servant is still to him an aspect of the nation (see xlix. 8a, 9b). It is temporary, and soon passes from his thoughts, Cyrus being dropped with it. But the other, the spiritual redemption, is confined to no limits of time; and it is with its process—indefinite in date and in length of period—that he associates the most personal portraits of the Servant (chap. i. and lii. 13-14). In these the Servant, now spoken of as an individual, has nothing to do with that temporary work of freeing the people from Babylon, which was over in a year or two, and which seems to be now behind the prophet's standpoint. His is the enduring office of prophecy, sympathy, and expiation—an office in which there is all possible "room" for such a historical career as is sketched for him. His relation to Cyrus, before whose departure from connection with Israel's fate the Servant does not appear as a person, is thus most interesting. Perhaps we may best convey it in a homely figure. On the ship of Israel's fortunes—as on every ship and on every voyage—the prophet sees two personages. One is the Pilot through the shallows, Cyrus, who is dropped as soon as the shallows are past; and the other is the Captain of the ship, who remains always identified with it—the Servant. The Captain does not come to the front till the Pilot has gone; but, both alongside the Pilot, and after the Pilot has been dropped, there is every room for his office.

The *second* main objection to identifying an individual in chap. lii. 13-14 is, that an individual with such features has no analogy in Hebrew prophecy. It is said that, neither in his humiliation nor in the kind of exaltation which is ascribed to him, is there his like in any other individual in the Old Testament, and certainly not in the Messiah. Elsewhere in Scripture (it is

* A. B. D., in a review of the last edition of Delitzsch's "Isaiah," in the *Theol. Review*, iv. p. 276.

* Of all the expressions used of him the only one which shows a real tendency to a plural reference is *in his deaths* (ver. 9), and even it (if it is the correct reading) is quite capable of application to an individual who suffered such manifold martyrdom as is set forth in the passage.

† Not one word in them betrays any sense of a body of men or an ideal people standing behind them, which sense surely some expression would have betrayed if it had been in the prophet's mind.

averred) the Messiah reigns, and is glorious; it is the people who suffer, and come through suffering to power. Nor is the Messiah's royal splendour at all the same as the very vague influence, evidently of a spiritual kind, which is attributed to the Servant in the end of chap. liii. The Messiah is endowed with the military and political virtues. He is a warrior, a king, a judge. He "sits on the throne of David, He establishes David's kingdom. He smites the land with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He slays the wicked." But very different phrases are used of the Servant. He is not called king, though kings shut their mouths at him,—he is a prophet and a martyr, and an expiation; and the phrases, "I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong," are simply metaphors of the immense spiritual success and influence with which His self-sacrifice shall be rewarded; as a spiritual power He shall take His place among the dominions and forces of the world. This is a true prophecy of what Israel, that "worm of a people," should be lifted to; but it is quite different from the political throne, from which Isaiah had promised that the Messiah should sway the destinies of Israel and mankind.

But in answer to this objection to finding the Messiah, or any other influential individual, in chap. liii., we may remember that there were already traces in Hebrew prophecy of a suffering Messiah: we come across them in chap. vii. There Isaiah presents Immanuel, whom we identified with the Prince-of-the-Four-Names in chap. ix., as at first nothing but a sufferer—a sufferer from the sins of His predecessors.* And, even though we are wrong in taking the suffering Immanuel from the Messiah, and though Isaiah meant him only as a personification of Israel suffering for the error of Ahaz, had not the two hundred years, which elapsed between Isaiah's prophecy of Israel's glorious Deliverer, been full of room enough, and, what is more, of experience enough, for the ideal champion of the people to be changed to something more spiritual in character and in work? Had the nation been baptised, for most of those two centuries, in vain, in the meaning of suffering, and in vain had they seen exemplified in their noblest spirits the fruits and glory of self-sacrifice?† The type of Hero had changed in Israel since Isaiah wrote of his Prince-of-the-Four-Names. The king had been replaced by the prophet; the conqueror by the martyr; the judge who smote the land by the rod of his mouth, and slew the wicked by the breath of his lips,—by the patriot who took his country's sins upon his own conscience. The monarchy had perished: men knew that, even if Israel were set upon their own land again, it would not be under an independent king of their own; nor was a Jewish champion of the martial kind, such as Isaiah had promised for deliverance from the Assyrian, any more required. Cyrus, the Gentile, should do all the campaigning required against Israel's enemies, and Israel's native Saviour be relieved for gentler methods and more spiritual aims. It is all this experience, of nearly two centuries, which explains the omission of the features of warrior and judge from chap. liii., and their replacement by those of a suffering patriot, prophet, and priest. The reason of the change is, not because the prophet who wrote the chapter had not, as

much as Isaiah, an individual in his view, but because, in the historical circumstance of the Exile, such an individual as Isaiah had promised seemed no longer probable or required.

So far, then, from the difference between chap. liii. and previous prophecies of the Messiah affording evidence that in chap. liii. it is not the Messiah who is presented, this very change that has taken place, explicable as it is from the history of the intervening centuries, goes powerfully to prove that it is the Messiah, and therefore an individual, whom the prophet so vividly describes.

The *third* main objection to our recognising an individual in chap. liii. is concerned only with our prophet himself. Is it not impossible, say some—or at least improbably inconsistent—for the same prophet first to have identified the Servant with the nation, and then to present him to us as an individual? We can understand the transference by the same writer of the name from the whole people to a part of the people; it is a natural transference, and the prophet sufficiently explains it. But how does he get from a part of the nation to a single individual? If in chap. xlix. he personifies, under the name Servant, some aspect of the nation, we are surely bound to understand the same personification when the Servant is again introduced—unless we have an explanation to the contrary. But we have none. The prophet gives no hint, except by dropping the name Israel, that the focus of his vision is altered,—no more paradoxes such as marked his passage from the people as a whole to a portion of them,—no consciousness that any explanation whatever is required. Therefore, however much finer the personification is drawn in chap. liii. than in chap. xlix., it is surely a personification still.

To which objection an obvious answer is, that our prophet is not a systematic theologian, but a dramatic poet, who allows his characters to disclose themselves and their relation without himself intervening to define or relate them. And any one who is familiar with the literature of Israel knows, that no less than the habit of drawing in from the whole people upon a portion of them, was the habit of drawing in from a portion of the people upon one individual. The royal Messiah Himself is a case in point. The original promise to David was of a seed; but soon prophecy concentrated the seed in one glorious Prince. The promise of Israel had always culminated in an individual. Then, again, in the nation's awful sufferings, it had been one man—the prophet Jeremiah—who had stood forth singly and alone, at once the incarnation of Jehovah's word, and the illustration in his own person of all the penalty that Jehovah laid upon the sinful people. With this tendency of his school to focus Israel's hope on a single individual, and especially with the example of Jeremiah before him, it is almost inconceivable that our prophet could have thought of any but an individual when he drew his portrait of the suffering Servant. No doubt the national sufferings were in his heart as he wrote; it was probably a personal share in them that taught him to write so sympathetically about the Man of pains, who was familiar with ailing. But to gather and concentrate all these sufferings upon one noble figure, to describe this figure as thoroughly conscious of their moral meaning, and capable of turning them to his people's salvation, was a

* "Isaiah I." i.-xxxix., p. 764.

† See p. 741.

process absolutely in harmony with the genius of Israel's prophecy, as well as with the trend of their recent experience; and there is, besides, no word in that great chapter, in which the process culminates, but is in thorough accordance with it. So far, therefore, from its being an impossible or an unlikely thing for our prophet to have at last reached his conception of an individual, it is almost impossible to conceive of him executing so personal a portrait as chap. lii. 13-liii., without thinking of a definite historical personage, such as Hebrew prophecy had ever associated with the redemption of his people.

4. We have now exhausted the passages in Isaiah xl.-lxvi. which deal with the Servant of the Lord. We have found that our prophet identifies him at first with the whole nation, and then with some indefinite portion of the nation—indefinite in quantity, but most marked in character; that this personification grows more and more difficult to distinguish from a person; and that in chap. lii. 13-liii. there are very strong reasons, both in the text itself and in the analogy of other prophecy, to suppose that the portrait of an individual is intended. To complete our study of this development of the substance of the Servant, it is necessary to notice that it runs almost stage for stage with a development of his office. Up to chap. xlix., that is to say, while he is still some aspect of the people, the Servant is a prophet. In chap. l., where he is no longer called Israel, and approaches more nearly to an individual, his prophecy passes into martyrdom. And in chap. liii., where at last we recognise him as intended for an actual personage, his martyrdom becomes an expiation for the sins of the people. Is there a natural connection between these two developments? We have seen that it was by a very common process that our prophet transferred the national calling from the mass of the nation to a select few of the people. Is it by any equally natural tendency that he shrinks from the many to the few, as he passes from prophecy to martyrdom, or from the few to the one, as he passes from martyrdom to expiation? It is a possibility for all God's people to be prophets: few are needed as martyrs. Is it by any moral law equally clear, that only one man should die for the people? These are questions worth thinking about. In Israel's history we have already found the following facts with which to answer them. The whole living generation of Israel felt themselves to be sinbearers: "Our fathers have sinned, and we bear their iniquities." This conscience and penalty were more painfully felt by the righteous in Israel. But the keenest and heaviest sense of them was conspicuously that experienced by one man—the prophet Jeremiah.* And yet all these cases from the past of Israel's history do not furnish more than an approximation to the figure presented to us in chap. liii. Let us turn, therefore, to the future to see if we can find in it motive or fulfilment for this marvellous prophecy.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

In last chapter we confined our study of the Servant of Jehovah to the text of Isaiah xl.-lxvi.,

* See ch. ii. Book I.

and to the previous and contemporary history of Israel. Into our interpretation of the remarkable Figure, whom our prophet has drawn for us, we have put nothing which cannot be gathered from those fields and by the light of the prophet's own day. But now we must travel further, and from days far future to our prophet borrow a fuller light to throw back upon his mysterious projections. We take this journey into the future for reasons he himself has taught us. We have learned that his pictures of the Servant are not the creation of his own mind; a work of art complete "through fancy's or through logic's aid." They are the scattered reflections and suggestions of experience. The prophet's eyes have been opened to read them out of the still growing and incomplete history of his people. With that history they are indissolubly bound up. Their plainest forms are but a transcript of its clearest facts; their paradoxes are its paradoxes (reflections now of the confused and changing consciousness of this strange people, or again of the contrast between God's design for them and their real character): their ideals are the suggestion and promise which its course reveals to an inspired eye. Thus, in picturing the Servant, our prophet sometimes confines himself to history that has already happened to Israel; but sometimes, also, upon the purpose and promise of this, he outruns what has happened, and plainly lifts his voice from the future. Now we must remember that he does so, not merely because the history itself has native possibilities of fulfilment in it, but because he believes that it is in the hands of an Almighty and Eternal God, who shall surely guide it to the end of His purpose revealed in it. It is an article of our prophet's creed, that the God who speaks through him controls all history, and by His prophets can publish beforehand what course it will take; so that, when we find in our prophet anything we do not see fully justified or illustrated by the time he wrote, it is only in observance of the conditions he has laid down, that we seek for its explanation in the future.

Let us, then, take our prophet upon his own terms, and follow the history, with which he has so closely bound up the prophecy of the Servant, both in suggestion and fulfilment, in order that we may see whether it will yield to us the secret of what, if we have read his language aright, his eyes perceived in it—the promise of an Individual Servant. And let us do so in his faith that history is one progressive and harmonious movement under the hand of the God in whose name he speaks. Our exploration will be rewarded, and our faith confirmed. We shall find the nation, as promised, restored to its own land, and pursuing through the centuries its own life. We shall find within the nation what the prophet looked for,—an elect and effective portion, with the conscience of a national service to the world, but looking for the achievement of this to such an Individual Servant, as the prophet seemed ultimately to foreshadow. The world itself we shall find growing more and more open to this service. And at last, from Israel's national conscience of the service we shall see emerge One with the sense that He alone is responsible and able for it. And this One Israelite will not only in His own person exhibit a character and achieve a work that illustrate and far excel our prophet's highest imaginations, but will also become, to a new Israel infinitely more numerous

than the old, the conscience and inspiration of their collective fulfilment of the ideal.

1. In the Old Testament we cannot be sure of any further appearance of our prophet's Servant of the Lord. It might be thought that in a post-exilic promise, Zech. iii. 8, "I will bring forth My servant the Branch," we had an identification of the hero of the first part of the Book of Isaiah, "the Branch out of Jesse's roots" (xi. 1), with the hero of the second part; but "servant" here may so easily be meant in the more general sense in which it occurs in the Old Testament, that we are not justified in finding any more particular connection. In Judaism beyond the Old Testament the national and personal interpretations of the Servant were both current. The Targum of Jonathan, and both the Talmud of Jerusalem and the Talmud of Babylon, recognise the personal Messiah in chap. liii.; the Targum also identifies him as early as in chap. xlii. This personal interpretation the Jews abandoned only after they had entered on their controversy with Christian theologians; and in the cruel persecutions, which Christians inflicted upon them throughout the Middle Ages, they were supplied with only too many reasons for insisting that chap. liii. was prophetic of suffering Israel—the martyr-people—as a whole.* It is a strange history—the history of our race, where the first through their pride and error so frequently become the last, and the last through their sufferings are set in God's regard with the first. But of all its strange reversals none surely was ever more complete than when the followers of Him, who is set forth in this passage, the unresisting and crucified Saviour of men, behaved in His Name with so great a cruelty as to be righteously taken by His enemies for the very tyrants and persecutors whom the passage condemns.

2. But it is in the New Testament that we see the most perfect reflection of the Servant of the Lord, both as People and Person.

In the generation from which Jesus sprang there was, amid national circumstances closely resembling those in which the Second Isaiah was written, a counterpart of that Israel within Israel, which our prophet has personified in chap. xlix. The holy nation lay again in bondage to the heathen, partly in its own land, partly scattered across the world; and Israel's righteousness, redemption, and ingathering were once more the questions of the day. The thoughts of the masses, as of old in Babylonian days, did not rise beyond a political restoration; and although their popular leaders insisted upon national righteousness as necessary to this, it was a righteousness mainly of the ceremonial kind—hard, legal, and often more unlovely in its want of enthusiasm and hope than even the political fanaticism of the vulgar. But around the temple, and in quiet recesses of the land, a number of pious and ardent Israelites lived on the true milk of the

word, and cherished for the nation hopes of a far more spiritual character. If the Pharisees laid their emphasis on the law, this chosen Israel drew their inspiration rather from prophecy; and of all prophecy it was the Book of Isaiah, and chiefly the latter part of it, on which they lived.

As we enter the Gospel history from the Old Testament, we feel at once that Isaiah is in the air. In this fair opening of the new year of the Lord, the harbinger notes of the book awaken about us on all sides like the voices of birds come back with the spring. In Mary's song, the phrase "He hath holpen His Servant Israel;" in the description of Simeon, that he waited for the "consolation of Israel," a phrase taken from the "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" in Isaiah xl. 1; such frequent phrases, too, as "the redemption of Jerusalem, a light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, light to them that sit in darkness," and other echoed promises of light and peace and the remission of sins, are all repeated from our evangelical prophecy. In the fragments of the Baptist's preaching, which are extant, it is remarkable that almost every metaphor and motive may be referred to the Book of Isaiah, and mostly to its exilic half: "the generation of vipers,"* the "trees and axe laid to the root,"† "the threshing floor and fan,"‡ "the fire,"§ "the bread and clothes to the poor,"|| and especially the proclamation of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God that beareth the sin of the world."¶ To John himself were applied the words of Isaiah xl.: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight;" and when Christ sought to rouse again the Baptist's failing faith it was of Isaiah lxi. that He reminded him.

Our Lord, then, sprang from a generation of Israel, which had a strong conscience of the national aspect of the Service of God,—a generation with Isaiah xl.-lxvi. at its heart. We have seen how He Himself insisted upon the uniqueness of Israel's place among the nations—"salvation is of the Jews"—and how closely He identified Himself with His people—"I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But all Christ's strong expression of Israel's distinction from the rest of mankind is weak and dim compared with His expression of His own distinction from the rest of Israel. If they were the one people with whom God worked in the world, He was the one Man whom God sent to work upon them, and to use them to work upon others. We cannot tell how early the sense of this distinction came to the Son of Mary. Luke reveals it in Him, before He had taken His place as a citizen and was still within the family: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" At His first public appearance He had it fully, and others acknowledged it. In the opening year of His ministry it threatened to be only a Distinction of the First—"they took Him by force, and would have made Him King." But as time went on it grew evident that it was to be, not the Distinction of the First, but the Distinction of the Only. The enthusiastic crowds melted

* Cf. "The Jewish Interpreters on Isa. liii.," Driver and Neubauer, Oxford, 1877. Abravanel, who himself takes ch. liii. in a national sense, admits, after giving the Christian interpretation, that "in fact Jonathan ben Uziel, 'the Targumist,' applied it to the Messiah, who was still to come, and this is likewise the opinion of the wise in many of their Midrashim." And R. Moscheh al Shech, of the sixteenth century, says: "See, our masters have with one voice held as established and handed down, that here it is King Messiah who is spoken of." (Both these passages quoted by Bredenkamp in his commentary, p. 307.)

* Isa. lix. 5.

† *Id.* vi. 13; ix. 18; x. 17, 34; xlvii. 14.

‡ *Id.* xxi. 10; xxviii. 27; xl. 24; xli. 15 ff.

§ *Id.* i. 31; xlvii. 14.

|| Isa. lviii. 7.

¶ Undoubtedly taken from Isa. liii.

away: the small band, whom He had most imbued with His spirit, proved that they could follow Him but a certain length in His consciousness of His Mission. Recognising in Him the supreme prophet—"Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life"—they immediately failed to understand that suffering also must be endured by Him for the people: "Be it far from Thee, Lord." This suffering was His conscience and His burden alone. Now, we cannot overlook the fact that the point at which Christ's way became so solitary was the same point at which we felt our prophet's language cease to oblige us to understand by it a portion of the people, and begin to be applicable to a single individual,—the point, namely, where prophecy passes into martyrdom. But whether our prophet's pictures of the suffering and atoning Servant of the Lord are meant for some aspect of the national experience, or as the portrait of a real individual, it is certain that in His martyrdom and service of ransom Jesus felt Himself to be absolutely alone. He who had begun His Service of God with all the people on His side, consummated the same with the leaders and the masses of the nation against Him, and without a single partner from among His own friends, either in the fate which overtook Him, or in the conscience with which He bore it.

Now all this parallel between Jesus of Nazareth and the Servant of the Lord is unmistakable enough, even in this mere outline; but the details of the Gospel narrative and the language of the Evangelists still more emphasise it. Christ's herald hailed Him with words which gather up the essence of Isaiah liii.: "Behold the Lamb of God." He read His own commission from chap. lxi.: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." To describe His first labours among the people, His disciples again used words from chap. liii.: "Himself bare our sicknesses." To paint His manner of working in face of opposition they quoted the whole passage from chap. xlii.: "Behold My Servant . . . He shall not strive." The name Servant was often upon His own lips in presenting Himself: "Behold, I am among you as one that serveth." When His office of prophecy passed into martyrdom, He predicted for Himself the treatment which is detailed in chap. i,—the "smiting," "plucking" and "spitting:" and in time, by Jew and Gentile, this treatment was inflicted on Him to the very letter.* As to His consciousness in fulfilling something more than a martyrdom, and alone among the martyrs of Israel offering by His death an expiation for His people's sins, His own words are frequent and clear enough to form a counterpart to chap. liii. With them before us, we cannot doubt that He felt Himself to be the One of whom the people in that chapter speak, as standing over against them all, sinless, and yet bearing their sins. But on the night on which He was betrayed, while just upon the threshold of this extreme and unique form of service, into which it has been given to no soul of man, that ever lived, to be conscious of following Him—as if anxious that His disciples should not be so overwhelmed by the awful part in which they could not imitate Him as to forget the countless other ways in which they were called to fulfil His serving spirit—"He took a towel and girded Himself, and when He had

washed their feet, He said unto them, If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"—thereby illustrating what is so plainly set forth in our prophecy, that short of the expiation, of which only One in His sinlessness has felt the obligation, and short of the martyrdom which it has been given to but few of His people to share with Him, there are a thousand humble forms rising out of the needs of everyday life, in which men are called to employ towards one another the gentle and self-forgetful methods of the true Servant of God.

With the four Gospels in existence, no one doubts or can doubt that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the cry, "Behold My Servant." With Him it ceased to be a mere ideal, and took its place as the greatest achievement in history.

3. In the earliest discourses of the Apostles, therefore, it is not wonderful that Jesus should be expressly designated by them as the Servant of God,—the Greek word used being that by which the Septuagint specially translates the Hebrew term in Isaiah xl.-lxvi.*: "God hath glorified His Servant Jesus. Unto you first, God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities. . . . In this city against Thy holy Servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel foreordained to pass. Grant that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Thy Holy Servant Jesus."† It must also be noticed, that in one of the same addresses, and again by Stephen in his argument before the Sanhedrim, Jesus is called "The Righteous One,"‡ doubtless an allusion to the same title for the Servant in Isaiah liii. 11. Need we recall the interpretation of Isaiah liii. by Philip?§

It is known to all how Peter develops this parallel in his First Epistle, borrowing the figures, but oftener the very words, of Isaiah liii. to apply to Christ. Like the Servant of the Lord, Jesus is "as a lamb:" He is a patient sufferer in silence; He "is the Righteous (again the classic title) for the unrighteous;" in exact quotation from the Greek of Isaiah liii.: "He did no sin, neither was found guile in His mouth, ye were as sheep gone astray, but He Himself hath borne our sins, with whose stripes ye are healed."||

Paul applies two quotations from Isaiah lii. 13-liii. to Christ: "I have striven to preach the Gospel not where Christ was named; as it is written, To whom He was not spoken of they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand; and He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin."¶ And none will doubt that when he so often disputed that the "Messiah must suffer," or wrote "Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures," he had Isaiah liii. in mind, exactly as we have seen it applied to the Messiah by Jewish scholars a hundred years later than Paul.

* In Isa. xl.-lxvi. the Septuagint translates the Hebrew for Servant by one or other of two words—*παῖς* and *δουλος*. *Παῖς* is used in xli. 8; xliii. 1; xlv. 1 ff.; xlv. 21; xlv. 4; xlix. 6; l. 10; lii. 13. But *δουλος* is used in xlviii. 20; xlix. 3 and 5. In the Acts it is *παῖς* that is used of Christ: "An apostle is never called *παῖς* (but only *δουλος*) Θεοῦ" (Meyer). But David is called *παῖς* (Acts iv. 25).

† Acts iii. 13, 26; iv. 27-30.

‡ Acts iii. 14; vii. 52.

§ Acts viii. 30 ff.

|| 1 Peter i. 19; ii. 22, 23; iii. 18.

¶ Rom. xv. 20 f.; 2 Cor. v. 21.

Cf. with the Greek version of Isa. i. 4-7, Luke xviii. 31, 32; Matt. xxvi. 67.

4. Paul, however, by no means confines the prophecy of the Servant of the Lord to Jesus the Messiah. In a way which has been too much overlooked by students of the subject, Paul revives and reinforces the collective interpretation of the Servant. He claims the Servant's duties and experience for himself, his fellow-labourers in the Gospel, and all believers.

In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas said of themselves to the Jews: "For so hath the Lord" commanded us, saying, "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation to the ends of the earth." * Again, in the eighth of Romans, Paul takes the Servant's confident words, and speaks them of all God's true people. "He is near that justifieth me, who is he that condemneth me?" † cried the Servant in our prophecy, and Paul echoes for all believers: "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" ‡ And again, in his second letter to Timothy, he says, speaking of that pastor's work, "For the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all;" words which were borrowed from, or suggested by, Isaiah xlii. 1-3. § In these instances, as well as in his constant use of the terms "slave," "servant," "minister," with their cognates, Paul fulfils the intention of Jesus, who so continually, by example, parable, and direct commission, enforced the life of His people as a Service to the Lord.

5. Such, then, is the New Testament reflection of the Prophecy of the Servant of the Lord, both as People and Person. Like all physical reflections, this moral one may be said, on the whole, to stand reverse to its original. In Isaiah xl.-lxvi. the Servant is People first, Person second. But in the New Testament—except for a faint and scarcely articulate application to Israel in the beginning of the gospels—the Servant is Person first and People afterwards. The Divine Ideal which our prophet saw narrowing down from the Nation to an Individual, was owned and realised by Christ. But in Him it was not exhausted. With added warmth and light, with a new power of expansion, it passed through Him to fire the hearts and enlist the wills of an infinitely greater people than the Israel for whom it was originally designed. With this witness, then, of history to the prophecies of the Servant, our way in expounding and applying them is clear. Jesus Christ is their perfect fulfilment and illustration. But we who are His Church are to find in them our ideal and duty,—our duty to God and to the world. In this, as in so many other matters, the unfulfilled prophecy of Israel is the conscience of Christianity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SERVICE OF GOD AND MAN.

ISAIAH xlii. 1-7.

WE now understand whom to regard as the Servant of the Lord. The Service of God was a commission to witness and prophesy for God

* Acts xiii. 47, after Isa. xlix. 6.

† Isa. i. 8, and Rom. viii. 33, 24.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 24. We may note, also, how Paul in Eph. vi. takes the armour with which God is clothed in Isa. lix. 17, breastplate and helmet, and equips the individual Christian with them; and how, in the same passage, he takes for the Christian from Isa. xl. the Messiah's girdle of truth and the sword of the Spirit,—he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

upon earth, made out at first in the name of the entire nation Israel. When their unfitness as a whole became apparent, it was delegated to a portion of them. But as there were added to its duties of prophecy, those of martyrdom and atonement for the sins of the people, our prophet, it would seem, saw it focussed in the person of an individual.

In history Jesus Christ has fulfilled this commission both in its national and in its personal aspects. He realised the ideal of the prophet-people. He sacrificed Himself and made atonement for the sins of men. But having illustrated the service of God in the world, Christ did not exhaust it. He returned it to His people, a more clamant conscience than ever, and He also gave them grace to fulfil its demands. Through Christ the original destination of these prophecies becomes, as Paul saw, their ultimate destination as well. That Israel refused this Service or failed in it only leaves it more clearly to us as duty; that Jesus fulfilled it not only confirms that duty, but adds hope and courage to discharge it.

Although the terms of this Service were published nearly two thousand five hundred years ago, in a petty dialect that is now dead, to a helpless tribe of captives in a world whose civilisation has long sunk to ruin, yet these terms are so free of all that is provincial or antique, they are so adapted to the lasting needs of humanity, they are so universal in their scope, they are so instinct with that love which never faileth, though prophecies fail and tongues cease, that they come home to heart and conscience to-day with as much tenderness and authority as ever. The first programme of these terms is given in chap. xlii. 1-7. The authorised English version is one of unapproachable beauty, but its emphasis and rhythm are not the emphasis and rhythm of the original, and it has missed one at least of the striking points of the Hebrew. The following version, which makes no attempt at elegance, is almost literal, follows the same order as the original that it may reproduce the same emphasis, and, as far as English can, repeats the original rhythm. The point, which it rescues from the neglect of the Authorised Version, is this, that the verbs used of the Servant in ver. 4, "He shall not fade nor break," are the same as are used of the wick and the reed in ver. 3.

Lo, My Servant! I hold by him;
My Chosen! Well-pleased is My soul!
I have set My Spirit upon him;
Law to the Nations he brings forth.

He cries not, nor lifts up,*
Nor lets his voice be heard in the street.
Reed *that is* broken he breaks not off,
Wick *that is* fading he does not quench;
Faithfully brings he forth Law.
He shall not fade neither break,
Till he have set in the Earth † Law;
And for his teaching the Isles are waiting.

Thus saith the God, Jehovah,
Creator of the heavens that stretched them forth,
Spreader of Earth and her produce,
Giver of breath to the people upon her,
And of spirit to them that walk therein:
I, Jehovah, have called thee in righteousness,
To grasp thee fast by thy hand, and to keep thee,
And to set thee for a covenant of the People,
For a light of the Nations:
To open blind eyes,
To bring forth from durance the captive,
From prison the dwellers in darkness.

* The English equivalent is, *nor is loud*.

† This time with the article, so not *the land* of Judah only, but *the Earth*.

I. THE CONSCIENCE OF SERVICE.

As several of these lines indicate, this is a Service to Man, but what we must first fasten upon is that before being a Service to Man it is a Service for God. "Behold, My Servant," says God's commission very emphatically. And throughout the prophecy the Servant is presented as chosen of God, inspired of God, equipped of God, God's creature, God's instrument; useful only because he is used, influential because he is influenced, victorious because he is obedient; learning the methods of his work by daily wakefulness to God's voice, a good speaker only because he is first a good listener; with no strength or courage but what God lends, and achieving all for God's glory. Notice how strongly it is said that God "holds by him, grasps him by the hand." We shall see that his Service is as sympathetic and comprehensive a purpose for humanity as was ever dreamed in any thought or dared in any life. Whether we consider its tenderness for individuals, or the universalism of its hope for the world, or its gentle appreciation of all human effort and aspiration, or its conscience of mankind's chief evil, or the utterness of its self-sacrifice in order to redeem men,—we shall own it to be a programme of human duty, and a prophecy of human destiny, to which the growing experience of our race has been able to add nothing that is essential. But the Service becomes all that to man, because it first takes all that from God. Not only is the Servant's sense of duty to all humanity just the conscience of God's universal sovereignty,—for it is a remarkable and never-to-be-forgotten fact, that Israel recognised their God's right to the whole world, before they felt their own duty to mankind,—but the Servant's character and methods are the reflection of the Divine. Feature by feature the Servant corresponds to His Lord. His patience is but sympathy with Jehovah's righteousness,—“I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” His gentleness with the unprofitable and the unlovely—“He breaks not off the broken reed nor quenches the flickering wick”—is but the temper of “the everlasting God, who giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.” His labour and passion and agony, even they have been anticipated in the Divine nature, for “the Lord stirreth up zeal like a man of war; He saith, I will cry out like a travelling woman.” In no detail is the Servant above his Master. His character is not original, but is the impress of his God's: “I have put My spirit upon him.”

There are many in our day, who deny this indebtedness of the human character to the Divine, and in the Service of Man would have us turn our backs upon God. Positivists, while admitting that the earliest enthusiasm of the individual for his race did originate in the love of a Divine Being, assert nevertheless that we have grown away from this illusory motive; and that in the example of humanity itself we may find all the requisite impulse to serve it. The philosophy of history, which the extreme Socialists have put forward, is even more explicit. According to them, mankind was disturbed in a primitive, tribal socialism—or service of each other—by the rise of spiritual religion, which drew the individual away from his kind and absorbed him in selfish relations to God. Such a stage, repre-

sented by the Hebrew and Christian faiths, and by the individualist political economy which has run concurrent with the later developments of Christianity, was (so these Socialists admit) perhaps necessary for temporary discipline and culture, like the land of Egypt to starved Jacob's children; but like Egypt, when it turned out to be the house of bondage, the individualist economy and religion are now to be abandoned for the original land of promise,—Socialism once more, but universal instead of tribal as of old. Out of this analogy, which is such Socialists' own, Sinai and the Ten Commandments are, of course, omitted. We are to march back to freedom without a God, and settle down to love and serve each other by administration.

But can we turn our backs on God without hurting man? The natural history of philanthropy would seem to say that we cannot. This prophecy is one of its witnesses. Earliest ideal as it is, of a universal service of mankind, it starts in its obligation from the universal Sovereignty of God; it starts in every one of its affections from some affection of the Divine character. And we have not grown away from the need of its everlasting sources. Cut off God from the Service of man, and the long habit and inherent beauty of that Service may perpetuate its customs for a few generations; but the inevitable call must come to subject conduct to the altered intellectual conditions, and in the absence of God every man's ideal shall surely turn from, How can I serve my neighbour? to How can I make my neighbour serve me? As our prophet reminds us in his vivid contrast between Israel, the Servant of the Lord, and Babylon, “who saith in her heart: I am, and there is none beside me;” there are ultimately but two alternative lords of the human will, God and Self. If we revolt from the Authority and Example of the One, we shall surely become subject, in the long run, to the ignorance, the short-sightedness, the pedantry, the cruelty of the other. These words are used advisedly.

With no sense of the sacredness of every human life as created in the image of God, and with no example of an Infinite Mercy before them, men would leave to perish all that was weak, or, from the limited point of view of a single community or generation, unprofitable. Some Positivists, and those Socialists who do not include God in the society they seek to establish, admit that they expect something like that to follow from their denial of God. In certain Positivist proposals for the reform of charity, we are told that the ideal scheme of social relief would be the one which limited itself to persons judged to be of use to the community as a whole; that is, that in their succour of the weak, their bounty to the poor, and their care of the young, society should be guided, not by the eternal laws of justice and of mercy, but by the opinions of the representatives of the public for the time being and by their standard of utility to the commonwealth. Your atheist-Socialist is still more frank. In the state, which he sees rising after he has got rid of Christianity, he would suppress, he tells us, all who preached such a thing as the fear of the future life, and he would not repeat the present exceptional legislation for the protection of women and children, for whom, he whines, far too much has been recently done in comparison with what has been enacted for the

protection of men.* These are, of course, but vain things which the heathen imagine (and some of us have an ideal of socialism very different from the godlessness which has usurped the noble name), but they serve to illustrate what clever men, who have thrown off all belief in God, will bring themselves to hope for: a society utterly Babylonian, without pity or patience,—if it were possible for these eternal graces to die out of any human community,—subject to the opinion of pedants, whose tender mercies would be far more fatal to the weak and poor than the present indifference of the rich; seriously fettering liberty of conscience and destitute of chivalry. It may be that our Positivist critics are right, and that the interests of humanity have suffered in Christian times from the prevalence of too selfish and introspective a religion; but whether our religion has looked too intensely inward or not, we cannot, it is certain, do without a religion that looks steadily up, owning the discipline of Divine Law and the Example of an Infinite Mercy and Longsuffering.

But, though we had never heard of Positivism or of the Socialism that denies God, our age, with its popular and public habits, would still require this example of Service, which our prophecy enforces: it is an age so charged with the instincts of work, with the ambition to be useful, with the fashion of altruism; but so empty of the sense of God, of reverence, discipline, and prayer. We do not need to learn philanthropy,—the thing is in the air; but we do need to be taught that philanthropy demands a theology both for its purity and its effectiveness. When philanthropy has become, what it is so much to-day, the contest of rival politicians, the ambition of every demagogue who can get his head above the crowd, the fitful self-indulgence of weak hearts, the opportunity of vain theorists, and for all a temptation to work with lawless means for selfish ends,—it is time to remember that the Service of Man is first of all a great Service for God. This faith alone can keep us from the wilfulness, the crochets, and the insubordination, which spoil so many well-intentioned to their kind, and so wofully break up the ranks of progress. Humility is the first need of the philanthropist of to-day: humility, discipline, and the sense of proportion; and these are qualities which only faith in God and the conscience of law are known to bestow upon the human heart. It is the fear of God that will best preserve us from making our philanthropy the mere flattery of the popular appetite. To keep us utterly patient with men we need to think of God's patience with ourselves; while to us all there come calls to sacrifice, which our fellow-men may so little deserve from us, and against which our self-culture can plead so many reasons, that unless God's will and example were before us, the calls would never be obeyed. In short, to be most useful in this life it is necessary to feel that we are used. Look at Christ. To Him philanthropy was no mere habit and spontaneous affection; even for that great heart the love of man had to be enforced by the compulsion of the will of God. The busy days of healing and teaching had between them long nights of lonely prayer: and the Son of God did not pass to His supreme self-sacrifice for men till after the struggle with, and the submission to, His Father's will in Gethsemane.

* Bax, "Religion of Socialism."

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF SERVICE.

The substance of the Servant's work is stated in one word, uttered thrice in emphatic positions. "Judgment for the nations shall he bring forth. . . . According to truth shall he bring forth judgment. . . . He shall not flag nor break, till he set in the earth * judgment."

The English word "judgment" is a natural but misleading translation of the original, and we must dismiss at once the idea of judicial sentence, which it suggests. The Hebrew is "mishpat," which means, among other things, either a single statute, or the complete body of law which God gave Israel by Moses, at once their creed and their code; or, perhaps, also the abstract quality of justice or right. We rendered it as the latter in Isa. i.-xxxix. But, as will be seen from the note below,† when used in Isa. xl.-lxvi. without the article, as here, it is the "mishpat" of Jehovah,—not so much the actual body of statutes given to Israel, as the principles of right or justice which they enforce. In one passage it is given in parallel to the civic virtues "righteousness," "truth," "uprightness," but—as its etymology compared with theirs shows us—it is these viewed not in their character as virtues, but in their obligation as ordained by God. Hence, "duty" to Jehovah as inseparable from His religion (Ewald), "religion" as the law of life (Delitzsch), "the law" (Cheyne, who admirably compares the Arabic *ed-Din*) are all good renderings. Professor Davidson gives the fullest exposition. "It can scarcely," he says, "be rendered 'religion' in the modern sense; it is the equity and civil right which is the result of the true religion of Jehovah; and though comprehended under religion in the Old Testament sense, is rather, according to our conceptions, religion applied in civil life. Of old the religious unit was the state, and the life of the state was the expression of its religion. Morality was law or custom, and both reposed upon God. A condition of thought such as now prevails, where morality is based on independent grounds, whether natural law or the principles inherent in the mind apart from religion, did not then exist. What the prophet means by 'bringing forth right' is explained in another passage, where it is said that Jehovah's 'arms shall judge the peoples,' and that the 'isles shall wait for His arm' (chap. li. 5). 'Judgment' is that pervading of life by the principles of equity and

* This time "arets" with the article. So not the *land* of Judah only, but the world.

† The following are the four main meanings of "mishpat" in Isa. xl.-lxvi.: 1. In a general sense, a legal process, xli. 1, *let us come together to the judgment, or the law* (with the article), cf. l. 8, *man of my judgment, i. e., my fellow-at-law, my adversary*; liii. 8, *oppression and judgment, i. e., a judgment which was oppressive, a legal injustice*. 2. A person's *cause* or *right*, xl. 27, xlix. 4. 3. *Ordinance* instituted by Jehovah for the life and worship of His people, lviii. 2, *ordinances of righteousness, i. e., either canonical laws, or ordinances by observing which the people would make themselves righteous*. 4. In general, the sum of the laws given by Jehovah to Israel, *the Law*, lviii. 2, *Law of their God*; li. 4, Jehovah says *My Law* (Rev. Ver. *judgment*), parallel to "Torah" or Revelation (Rev. Ver. *law*). Then absolutely, without the article or Jehovah's name attached, xlii. 1, 3, 4. In lvi. 1 parallel to righteousness; lix. 14 parallel to righteousness, truth, and uprightness. In fact, in this last use, while represented as equivalent to civic morality, it is this, not as viewed in its character, *right, upright*, but in its obligation as ordained by God: *morality as His Law*. The absence of the article may either mean what it means in the case of *people* and *land, i. e., the Law*, too much of a proper name to need the article, or it may be an attempt to abstract the quality of the Law; and if so "mishpat" is equal to *justice*.

humanity which is the immediate effect of the true religion of Jehovah." * In short, "mishpat" is not only the civic righteousness and justice, to which it is made parallel in our prophecy, but it is these with God behind them. On the one hand it is conterminous with national virtue, on the other it is the ordinance and will of God.

This, then, is the burden of the Servant's work, to pervade and instruct every nation's life on earth with the righteousness and piety that are ordained of God. "He shall not flag nor break, till he have set in the earth Law,"—till in every nation justice, humanity, and worship are established as the law of God. We have seen that the Servant is in this passage still some aspect or shape of the people,—the people who are not a people, but scattered among the brickfields of Babylonia, a horde of captives. When we keep that in mind, two or three things come home to us about this task of theirs. First, it is no mere effort at proselytism. It is not an ambition to Judaise the world. The national consciousness and provincial habits, which cling about so many of the prophecies of Israel's relation to the world, have dropped from this one, and the nation's mission is identified with the establishment of law, the diffusion of light, the relief of suffering. "I will give thee for a light to the nations: to open blind eyes, to bring out from darkness the bound, from the prison the dwellers in darkness." † Again, it is no mere office of preaching to which the Servant's commission is limited, no mere inculcation of articles of belief. But we have here the same rich, broad idea of religion, identifying it with the whole national life, which we found so often illustrated by Isaiah, and which is one of the beneficial results to religion of God's choice for Himself of a nation as a whole. ‡ What such a Service has to give the world, is not merely testimony to the truth, nor fresh views of it, nor artistic methods of teaching it; but social life under its obligation, the public conscience of it, the long tradition and habit of it, the breed—what the prophets call the "seed"—of it. To establish true religion as the constitution, national duty, and regular practice of every people under the sun, in all the details of order, cleanliness, justice, purity, and mercy, in which it had been applied to themselves,—such was the Service and the Destiny of Israel. And the marvel of so universal and political an ideal was that it came not to a people in the front ranks of civilisation or of empire, but to a people that at the time had not even a political shape for themselves,—a mere herd of captives, despised and rejected of men. When we realise this, we understand that they never would have dared to think of it, or to speak of it to one another, unless they had believed it to be the purpose and will of Almighty God for them; unless they had recognised it, not only as a service desirable and true in itself, and needed also by humanity, but withal as His "mishpat," His "judgment" or "law," who by His bare word can bring all things to pass. But before we see how strongly He impressed them with this, that His creative force was in their mission, let us turn to the methods by which He commanded them to

achieve it,—methods corresponding to its purely spiritual and universal character.

III. THE TEMPER OF SERVICE.

- I. He shall not cry, nor lift up,
Nor make his voice to be heard in the street.

There is nothing more characteristic of our prophecy than its belief in the power of speech, its exultation in the music and spell of the human voice. It opens with a chorus of high calls: none are so lovely to it as heralds, or so musical as watchmen when they lift up the voice; it sets the preaching of glad tidings before the people as their national ideal; eloquence it describes as a sharp sword leaping from God's scabbard. The Servant of the Lord is trained in style of speech; his words are as pointed arrows; he has the mouth of the learned, a voice to command obedience. The prophet's own tones are superb: nowhere else does the short sententiousness of Hebrew roll out into such long, sonorous periods. He uses speech in every style: for comfort, for bitter controversy, in clear proclamation, in deep-throated denunciation: "Call with the throat, spare not, lift up the voice like a trumpet." His constant key-notes are, "speak a word, lift up the voice with strength, sing, publish, declare." In fact, there is no use to which the human voice has ever been put in the Service of Man, for comfort's sake, or for justice, or for liberty, for the diffusion of knowledge or for the scattering of music, which our prophet does not enlist and urge upon his people.

When, then, he says of the Servant that "he shall not cry, nor lift up, nor make his voice to be heard in the street," he cannot be referring to the means and art of the Service, but rather to the tone and character of the Servant. Each of the triplet of verbs he uses shows us this. The first one, translated "cry," is not the cry or call of the herald voice in chap. xl., the high, clear *Kārā*; it is *ssa'ak*, a sharper word with a choke in the centre of it, meaning "to scream," especially under excitement. Then "to lift up" is the exact equivalent of our "to be loud." And if we were seeking to translate into Hebrew our phrase "to advertise oneself," we could not find a closer expression for it than to "make his voice be heard in the street." To be "screamy," to be "loud," to "advertise oneself,"—these modern expressions for vices that were ancient as well as modern render the exact force of the verse. Such the Servant of God will not be nor do. He is at once too strong, too meek, and too practical. That God is with him, "holding him fast," keeps him calm and unhysterical; that he is but God's instrument keeps him humble and quiet; and that his heart is in his work keeps him from advertising himself at its expense. It is perhaps especially for the last of these reasons that Matthew (in his twelfth chapter) quotes this passage of our Lord. Jesus had been disturbed in His labours of healing by the disputatious Pharisees. He had answered them, and then withdrawn from their neighbourhood. Many sick were brought after Him to His privacy, and He healed them all. But "He charged them that they should not make Him known; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Behold, My Servant . . . he shall not strive, nor cry aloud, neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets." Now this

* *Expositor*, Second Series, vol. viii. p. 364.

† This might, of course, only mean what the Servant had to do for his captive countrymen. But coming as it does after the *light of nations*, it seems natural to take it in its wider and more spiritual sense.

‡ See ch. xv. of Book III.

cannot be, what some carelessly take it for, an example against controversy or debate of all kinds, for Jesus had Himself just been debating; nor can it be meant as an absolute forbidding of all publishing of good works, for Christ has shown us, on other occasions, that such advertisement is good. The difficulty is explained, by what we have seen to explain other perplexing actions of our Lord, His intensely practical spirit. The work to be done determined everything. When it made argument necessary, as that same day it had done in the synagogue, then our Lord entered on argument: He did not only heal the man with the withered hand, but He made him the text of a sermon. But when talking about His work hindered it, provoked the Pharisees to come near with their questions, and took up His time and strength in disputes with them, then for the work's sake He forbade to talk about it. We have no trace of evidence that Christ forbade this advertisement also for His own sake,—as a temptation to Himself and fraught with evil effects upon His feelings. We know that it is for this reason we have to shun it. Even though we are quite guiltless of contributing to such publication ourselves, and it is the work of generous and well-meaning friends, it still becomes a very great danger to us. For it is apt to fever us and exhaust our nervous force, even when it does not turn our heads with its praise,—to distract us and to draw us more and more into the enervating habit of paying attention to popular opinion. Therefore, as a man values his efficiency in the Service of Man, he will not "make himself to be heard in the street." There is an amount of "making to be heard" which is absolutely necessary for the work's sake; but there is also an amount which can be indulged in only at the work's expense. Present-day philanthropy, even with the best intentions, suffers from this over-publicity, and its besetting sins are "loudness" and hysteria.

What, then, shall tell us how far we can go? What shall teach us how to be eloquent without screaming, clear without being loud, impressive without wasting our strength in seeking to make an impression? These questions bring us back to what we started with, as the indispensable requisite for Service—some guiding and religious principles behind even the kindest and steadiest tempers. For many things in the Service of Man no exact rules will avail; neither logic nor bylaws of administration can teach us to observe the uncertain and constantly varying degree of duty, which they demand. Tact for that is bestowed only by the influence of lofty principles working from above. This is a case in point. What rules of logic or "directions of the superior authority" can, in the Service of Man, distinguish for us between excitement and earnestness, bluster and eloquence, energy and mere self-advertisement; on whose subtle differences the whole success of the service must turn. Only the discipline of faith, only the sense of God, can help us here. The practical temper by itself will not help us. To be busy but gives us too great self-importance; and hard work often serves only to bring out the combative instincts. To know that we are His Servants shall keep us meek; that we are held fast by His hand shall keep us calm; that His great laws are not abrogated shall keep us sane. When for our lowliest and most commonplace kinds of service

we think no religion is required, let us remember the solemn introduction of the evangelist to his story of the foot-washing. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God and goeth into God, riseth from supper, and layeth aside His garments; and He took a towel, and girded Himself; then He poureth water into the bason, and began to wash His disciples' feet."

2. But to meekness and discipline the Servant adds gentleness.

Reed that is broken he breaks not off,
Wick that is fading he does not quench;
Faithfully brings he forth law.

The force of the last of these three lines is, of course, qualificative and conditional. It is set as a guard against the abuse of the first two, and means that though the Servant in dealing with men is to be solicitous about their weakness, yet the interests of religion shall in no way suffer. Mercy shall be practised, but so that truth is not compromised.

The original application of the verse is thus finely stated by Professor Davidson: "This is the singularly humane and compassionate view the Prophet takes of the Gentiles,—they are bruised reeds and expiring flames. . . . What the prophet may refer to is the human virtues, expiring among the nations, but not yet dead; the sense of God, debased by idolatries, but not extinct; the consciousness in the individual soul of its own worth and its capacities, and the glimmering ideal of a true life and a worthy activity almost crushed out by the grinding tyranny of rulers and the miseries entailed by their ambitions—this flickering light the Servant shall feed and blow into a flame.* . . . It is the future relation of the 'people' Israel to other peoples that he describes. The thought which has now taken possession of statesmen of the higher class, that the point of contact between nation and nation need not be the sword, that the advantage of one people is not the loss of another but the gain of mankind, that the land where freedom has grown to maturity and is worshipped in her virgin serenity and loveliness should nurse the new-born babe in other homes, and that the strange powers of the mind of man and the subtle activities of his hand should not be repressed but fostered in every people, in order that the product may be poured into the general lap of the race—this idea is supposed to be due to Christianity. And, immediately, it is; but it is older than Christianity. It is found in this Prophet. And it is not new in him, for a Prophet, presumably a century and a half his senior, had said: "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as a dew from the Lord, as showers upon the grass" (Micah v. 7)."†

But while this national reference may be the one originally meant, the splendid vagueness of the metaphor forbids us to be content with it, or with any solitary application. For the two clauses are as the eyes of the All-Pitiful Father, that rest wherever on this broad earth there is any life, though it be so low as to be conscious only through pain or doubt; they are as the healing palms of Jesus stretched over the multitudes to bless and gather to Himself the weary and the poor in spirit. We contrast our misera-

* *Expositor*, Second Series, viii. pp. 364, 365, 366.

† *Ibid.*, p. 366.

ble ruin of character, our feeble sparks of desire after holiness, with the life which Christ demands and has promised, and in despair we tell ourselves, this can never become that. But it is precisely this that Christ has come to lift to that. The first chapter of the Sermon on the Mount closes with the awful command, "Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect;" but we work our way back through the chapter, and we come to this, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" and to this, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Such is Christ's treatment of the bruised reed and the smoking flax. Let us not despair. There is only one kind of men for whom it has no gospel,—the dead and they who are steeped in worldliness, who have forgotten what the pain of a sore conscience is, and are strangers to humility and aspiration. But for all who know their life, were it only through their pain or their doubt, were it only in the despair of what they feel to be a last struggle with temptation, were it only in contrition for their sin or in shame for their uselessness, this text has hope. "Reed that is broken he breaketh not off, wick that is fading he doth not quench."

This objective sense of the Servant's temper must always be the first for us to understand. For more than he was, we are, mortal, ready ourselves to "break and to fade." But having experienced the grace, let us show the same in our service to others. Let us understand that we are sent forth like the great Servant of God, that man "may have life, and have it more abundantly." We need resolutely and with pious obstinacy to set this temper before us, for it is not natural to our hearts. Even the best of us, in the excitement of our work, forget to think of anything except of making our mark, or of getting the better of what we are at work upon. When work grows hard, the combative instincts waken within us, till we look upon the characters God has given us to mould as enemies to be fought. We are passionate to convince men, to overcome them with an argument, to wring the confession from them that we are right and they wrong. Now Christ our Master must have seen in every man He met a very great deal more to be fought and extirpated than we can possibly see in one another. Yet He largely left that alone, and addressed Himself rather to the sparks of nobility He found, and fostered these to a strong life, which from within overcame the badness of the man,—the badness which opposition from the outside would but have beaten into harder obduracy. We must ever remember that we are not warriors but artists,—artists after the fashion of Jesus Christ, who came not to condemn life because it was imperfect, but to build life up to the image of God. So He sends us to be artists; as it is written, "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some pastor's and teachers." For what end? For convincing men, for telling them what fools they mostly are, for crushing them in the inquisition of their own conscience, for getting the better of them in argument?—no, not for these combative purposes at all, but for fostering and artistic ones: "for the perfecting of the saints, for the building up of the body of Christ; till we all come unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

He who, in his Service of Man, practises such a temper towards the breaking and the fading, shall never himself break or fade, as this prophecy implies when it uses the same verbs in verses *three* and *four*. For he who is loyal to life shall find life generous to him; he who is careful of weakness shall never want for strength.

IV. THE POWER BEHIND SERVICE.

There only remains now to emphasise the power that is behind Service. It is, say verses *five* and *six*, the Creative Power of God.

Thus saith The God, Jehovah,
Creator of the heavens, that stretched them forth,
Spreader of the earth and her produce,
Giver of breath to the people upon her,
And of spirit to them that walk thereon,
I, Jehovah, have called thee in righteousness,
That I may grasp thee by thy hand, and keep thee.

Majestic confirmation of the call to Service! based upon the fundamental granite of this whole prophecy, which here crops out into a noble peak, firm station for the Servant, and point for prospect of all the future. It is our easy fault to read these words of the Creator as the utterance of mere ceremonial commonplace, blast of trumpets at the going forth of a hero, scenery for his stage, the pomp of nature summoned to assist at the presentation of God's elect before the world. Yet not for splendour were they spoken, but for bare faith's sake. God's Servant has been sent forth, weak and gentle, with quiet methods and to very slow effects. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor make his voice to be heard in the streets." What chance has such, our service, in the ways of the world, where to be forceful and selfish, to bluster and battle, is to survive and overcome! So we speak, and the panic ambition rises to fight the world with its own weapons, and to employ the kinds of debate, advertisement, and competition by which the world goes forward. For this, the Creator calls to us, and marshals His powers before our eyes. We thought there were but two things,—our own silence and the world's noise. There are three, and the world's noise is only an interruption between the other two. Across it deep calleth unto deep; the immeasurable processes of creation cry to the feeble convictions of truth in our hearts, We are one. Creation is the certificate that no moral effort is a forlorn hope. When God, after repeating His results in creation, adds, I have called thee in "righteousness," He means that there is some consistency between His processes in creation, rational and immense as they are, and those poor efforts He calls on our weakness to make, which look so foolish in face of the world. Behind every moral effort there is, He says, Creative force. Right and Might are ultimately one. Paul sums up the force of the passage, when, after speaking of the success of his ministry, he gives as its reason that the God of Creation and of Grace are the same. "Therefore seeing we have received this ministry we faint not. For God, who hath commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The spiritual Service of Man, then, has creative forces behind it; work for God upon the hearts and characters of others has creative force behind it. And nature is the seal and the sacrament of this. Let our souls, therefore, di-

late with her prospects. Let our impatience study her reasonableness and her laws. Let our weak wills feel the rush of her tides. For the power that is in her, and the faithful pursuance of purposes to their ends, are the power and the character that work behind each witness of our conscience, each effort of our heart for others. Not less strong than she, not less calm, not less certain of success, shall prove the moral Service of Man.

CHAPTER XIX.

PROPHET AND MARTYR.

ISAIAH xlix. 1-9; l. 4-11.

THE second great passage upon the Servant of the Lord is chap. xlix. 1-9, and the third is chap l. 4-11. In both of these the servant himself speaks; in both he speaks as prophet; while in the second he tells us that his prophecy leads him on to martyrdom. The two passages may, therefore, be taken together.

Before we examine their contents, let us look for a moment at the way in which they are woven into the rest of the text. As we have seen, chap. xlix. begins a new section of the prophecy, in so far that with it the prophet leaves Babylon and Cyrus behind him, and ceases to speak of the contrast between God and the idols. But, still, chap. xlix. is linked to chap. xlviii. In leading up to its climax,—the summons to Israel to depart from Babylon,—chap. xlviii. does not forget that Israel is delivered from Babylon in order to be the Servant of Jehovah: "say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed His Servant Jacob." It is this service, which chap. xlix. carries forward from the opportunity, and the call, to go forth from Babylon, with which chap. xlviii. closes. That opportunity, though real, does not at all mean that Israel's redemption is complete. There were many moral reasons which prevented the whole nation from taking full advantage of the political freedom offered them by Cyrus. Although the true Israel, that part of the nation which has the conscience of service, has shaken itself free from the temptation as well as from the tyranny of Babel, and now sees the world before it as the theatre of its operations,—ver. 1, "Hearken, ye isles, unto Me; and listen, ye peoples, from far,"—it has still, before it can address itself to that universal mission, to exhort, rouse, and extricate the rest of its nation, "saying to the bounden, Go forth; and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves" (ver. 9). Chap. xlix., therefore, is the natural development of chap. xlviii. There is certainly a little interval of time implied between the two—the time during which it became apparent that the opportunity to leave Babylon would not be taken advantage of by all Israel, and that the nation's redemption must be a moral as well as a political one. But chap. xlix. 1-9 comes out of chaps. xl.-xlviii., and it is impossible to believe that in it we are not still under the influence of the same author.

A similar coherence is apparent if we look to the other end of chap. xlix. 1-9. Here it is evident that Jehovah's commission to the Servant concludes with ver. 9a; but then its closing words, "Say to the bound, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves," start fresh thoughts about the redeemed on their way

back (vv. 9b-13); and these thoughts naturally lead on to a picture of Jerusalem imagining herself forsaken, and amazed by the appearance of so many of her children before her (vv. 14-21). Promises to her and to them follow in due sequence down to chap. l. 3, when the Servant resumes his soliloquy about himself, but abruptly, and in no apparent connection with what immediately precedes. His soliloquy ceases in ver. 9, and another voice, probably that of God Himself, urges obedience to the Servant (ver. 10), and judgment to the sinners in Israel (ver. 11); and chap. li. is an address to the spiritual Israel, and to Jerusalem, with thoughts much the same as those uttered in xlix. 14-l. 3.

In face of these facts, and taking into consideration the dramatic form in which the whole prophecy is cast, we find ourselves unable to say that there is anything which is incompatible with a single authorship, or which makes it impossible for the two passages on the Servant to have originally sprung, each at the place at which it now stands, from the progress of the prophet's thoughts.*

Babylon is left behind, and the way of the Lord is prepared in the desert. Israel have once more the title-deeds to their own land, and Zion looms in sight. Yet with their face to home, and their heart upon freedom, the voice of this people, or at least of the better half of this people, rises first upon the conscience of their duty to the rest of mankind.

Hearken, O Isles, unto Me;
And listen, O Peoples, from far!
From the womb Jehovah hath called me,
From my mother's midst mentioned my name.†
And He set my mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand did He hide me;
Yea, He made me a pointed arrow,
In His quiver He laid me in store,
And said to me, My Servant art thou,
Israel, in whom I shall break into glory.

And I—I said, In vain have I laboured,
For waste and for wind my strength have I spent!
Surely my right's with Jehovah,
And the meed of my work with my God!

But now, saith Jehovah—
Moulding me from the womb to be His own Servant,
To turn again Jacob towards Him,
And that Israel be not destroyed.‡
And I am of honour in the eyes of Jehovah,
And my God is my strength!
And He saith,
'Tis too light for thy being My Servant,
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
Or gather the survivors of Israel.
So I will set thee a light of the Nations,
To be My salvation to the end of the earth.

Thus saith Jehovah,
Israel's Redeemer, his Holy,
To this mockery of a life, abhorrence of a nation, servant
of tyrants.§
Kings shall behold and shall stand up,
Princes shall also do homage,
For the sake of Jehovah, who shows Himself faithful,
Holy of Israel, and thou art His chosen.

Thus saith Jehovah,
In a favourable time I have given thee answer,
In the day of salvation have helped thee,
To keep thee, to give thee for covenant of the people,
To raise up the land,

* This, of course, goes against Prof. Briggs' theory of the composition of Isa. xl.-lxvi. out of two poems (see p. 735).

† This line is full of the letter m.

‡ This is as the text is written; but the Massoretic reading gives, *that Israel to Him may be gathered*.

§ So it seems best to give the sense of this difficult line, but most translators render *despised of soul*, or *thoroughly despised*, *abhorred by peoples* or *by a people*, etc. The word for *despised* is used elsewhere only in ch. liii. 3.

To give back the heirs to the desolate heirdoms,
Saying to the bounden, Go forth!
To them that are in darkness, Appear!

"Who is so blind as not to perceive that the consciousness of the Servant here is only a mirror in which the history of Israel is reflected—first, in its original call and design that Jehovah should be glorified in it; second, in the long delay and apparent failure of the design, and, thirdly, as the design is now in the present juncture of circumstances and concurrence of events about to be realised?"* Yes: but it is Israel's calling, native insufficiency, and present duty, as owned by only a part of the people, which, though named by the national name (ver. 3), feels itself standing over against the bulk of the nation, whose redemption it is called to work out (vv. 8 and 9) before it takes up its world-wide service. We have already sufficiently discussed this distinction of the Servant from the whole nation, as well as the distinction of the moral work he has to effect in Israel's redemption from Babylon, from the political enfranchisement of the nation, which is the work of Cyrus. Let us, then, at once address ourselves to the main features of his consciousness of his mission to mankind. We shall find these features to be three. The Servant owns for his chief end the glory of God; and he feels that he has to glorify God in two ways—by Speech, and by Suffering.

I. THE SERVANT GLORIFIES GOD.

He did say to me, My servant art thou,
Israel, in whom I shall break into glory.

The Hebrew verb, which the Authorised Version translates "will be glorified," means to "burst forth, become visible," break like the dawn into splendour. This is the scriptural sense of Glory. Glory is God become visible. As we put it in Book I.,† glory is the expression of holiness, as beauty is the expression of health. But, in order to become visible, the Absolute and Holy God needs mortal man. We have felt something like a paradox in these prophecies. Nowhere else is God lifted up so absolute, and so able to effect all by His mere will and word; yet nowhere else is a human agency and service so strongly asserted as indispensable to the Divine purpose. But this is no more a paradox than the fact that physical light needs some material in which to become visible. Light is never revealed of itself, but always when shining from, or burning in, something else. To be seen, light requires a surface that will reflect, or a substance that will consume. And so, to "break into glory," God requires something outside Himself. A responsive portion of humanity is indispensable to Him,—a people who will reflect Him and spend itself for Him. Man is the mirror and the wick of the Divine. God is glorified in man's character and witness,—these are His mirror; and in man's sacrifice,—that is His wick.

And so we meet again the central truth of our prophecy, that in order to serve men it is necessary first to be used of God. We must place ourselves at the disposal of the Divine, we must let God shine on us and kindle us, and break into glory through us, before we can hope either to comfort mankind or to set them on fire. It is true that ideas very different from this pre-

vail among the ranks of the servants of humanity in our day. A large part of our most serious literature professes for "its main bearing this conclusion, that the fellowship between man and man, which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent upon conceptions of what is not man, and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human."* But such theories are possible only so long as the still unexhausted influence of religion upon society continues to supply human nature, directly or indirectly, with a virtue which may be plausibly claimed for human nature's own original product. Let religion be entirely withdrawn, and the question, Whence comes virtue? will be answered by virtue ceasing to come at all. The savage imagines that it is the burning-glass which sets the bush on fire, and as long as the sun is shining it may be impossible to convince him that he is wrong; but a dull day will teach even his mind that the glass can do nothing without the sun upon it. And so, though men may talk glibly against God, while society still shines in the light of His countenance, yet, if they and society resolutely withdraw themselves from that light, they shall certainly lose every heat and lustre of the spirit which is indispensable for social service.† On this the ancient Greek was at one with the ancient Hebrew. "Enthusiasm" is just "God breaking into glory" through a human life. Here lies the secret of the buoyancy and "freshness of the earlier world," whether pagan or Hebrew, and by this may be understood the depression and pessimism which infect modern society. They had God in their blood, and we are anæmic. "But I, I said, I have laboured in vain; for waste and for wind have I spent my strength." We must all say that, if our last word is "our strength." But let this not be our last word. Let us remember the sufficient answer: "Surely my right is with the Lord, and the meed of my work with my God." We are set, not in our own strength or for our own advantage, but with the hand of God upon us, and that the Divine life may "break into glory" through our life. Carlyle said, and it was almost his last testimony, "The older I grow, and I am now on the brink of eternity, the more comes back to me the first sentence of the catechism, which I learned when a child, and the fuller does its meaning grow—'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.'"

It was said above, that, as light breaks to visibleness either from a mirror or a wick, so God "breaks to glory" either from the witness of men,—that is His mirror,—or from their sacrifice,—that is His wick. Of both of these ways of glorifying God is the Servant conscious. His service is Speech and Sacrifice, Prophecy and Martyrdom.

II. THE SERVANT AS PROPHET.

Concerning his service of Speech, the Servant speaks in these two passages—chap. xlix. 2 and l. 4-5:

* So George Eliot wrote of her own writings shortly before her death. See "Life," iii. 245.

† Lady Ponsonby, to whom George Eliot wrote the letter quoted above, confessed that, with the disappearance of religious faith from her soul, there vanished also the power of interest in, and of pity for, her kind.

* Prof. A. B. Davidson, *Expositor*, Second Series, viii.

41.
† Page 633.

He set my mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand did He hide me,
And made me a pointed arrow;
In his quiver He laid me in store.

My Lord Jehovah hath given me
The tongue of the learners,
To know how to succour the weary with words.
He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear
To hear as the learners.
My Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear.
I was not rebellious,
Nor turned away backward.

At the bidding of our latest prophet we have become suspicious of the power of speech, and the goddess of eloquence walks, as it were, under surveillance among us. Carlyle reiterated, "All speech and rumour is short-lived, foolish, untrue. Genuine work alone is eternal. The talent of silence is our fundamental one. The dumb nations are the builders of the world." Under such doctrine some have grown intolerant of words, and the ideal of to-day tends to become the practical man rather than the prophet. Yet, as somebody has said, Carlyle makes us dissatisfied with preaching only by preaching himself; and you have but to read him with attention to discover that his disgust with human speech is consistent with an immense reverence for the voice as an instrument of service to humanity. "The tongue of man," he says, "is a sacred organ. Man himself is definable in philosophy as an 'Incarnate Word,' the Word not there, you have no man there either, but a Phantasm instead."

Let us examine our own experience upon the merits of this debate between Silence and Speech in the service of man. Though beginning low, it will help us quickly to the height of the experience of the Prophet Nation, who, with naught else for the world but the voice that was in them, accomplished the greatest service that the world has ever received from her children.

One thing is certain,—that Speech has not the monopoly of falsehood or of any other presumptuous sin. Silence does not only mean ignorance,—by some supposed to be the heaviest sin of which Silence can be guilty,—but many things far worse than ignorance, like unreadiness, and cowardice, and falsehood, and treason, and base consent to what is evil. No man can look back on his past life, however lowly or limited his sphere may have been, and fail to see that not once or twice his supreme duty was a word, and his guilt was not to have spoken it. We all have known the shame of being straitened in prayer or praise; the shame of being, through our cowardice to bear witness, traitors to the truth; the shame of being too timid to say No to the tempter, and speak out the brave reasons of which the heart was full; the shame of finding ourselves incapable of uttering the word that would have kept a soul from taking the wrong turning in life; the shame, when truth, clearness, and authority were required from us, of being able only to stammer or to mince or to rant. To have been dumb before the ignorant or the dying, before a questioning child or before the tempter,—this, the frequent experience of our common life, is enough to justify Carlyle when he said, "If the Word is not there, you have no man there either, but a Phantasm instead."

Now, when we look within ourselves we see the reason of this. We perceive that the one fact, which amid the mystery and chaos of our inner life gives certainty and light, is a fact which

is a Voice. Our nature may be wrecked and dissipated, but conscience is always left; or in ignorance and gloom, but conscience is always audible; or with all the faculties strong and assertive, yet conscience is still unquestionably queen,—and conscience is a Voice. It is a still, small voice, which is the surest thing in man, and the noblest; which makes all the difference in his life; which lies at the back and beginning of all his character and conduct. And the most indispensable, and the grandest service, therefore, which a man can do his fellow-men, is to get back to this voice, and make himself its mouthpiece and its prophet. What work is possible till the word be spoken? Did ever order come to social life before there was first uttered the command, in which men felt the articulation and enforcement of the ultimate voice within themselves? Discipline and instruction and energy have not appeared without speech going before them. Knowledge and faith and hope do not dawn of themselves; they travel, as light issued forth in the beginning, upon the pulses of the speaking breath.

It was the greatness of Israel to be conscious of their call as a nation to this fundamental service of humanity. Believing in the Word of God as the original source of all things,—“In the beginning God said, Let there be light; and there was light,”—they had the conscience that, as it had been in the physical world, so must it always be in the moral. Men were to be served, and their lives to be moulded by the Word. God was to be glorified by letting His Word break through the life and the lips of men. There was in the Old Testament, it is true, a triple ideal of manhood: “prophet, priest, and king.” But the greatest of these was the prophet, for king and priest had to be prophets too. Eloquence was a royal virtue,—with persuasion, the power of command, and swift judgment. Among the seven spirits of the Lord which Isaiah sees descending in the King-to-Come is the spirit of counsel, and he afterwards adds of the King: “He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” Similarly, the priests had originally been the ministers, not so much of sacrifice, as of the revealed Word of God. And now the new and high ideal of priesthood, the laying down of one’s life a sacrifice for God and for the people, was not the mere imitation of the animal victim required by the priestly law, but was the natural development of the prophetic experience. It was (as we shall presently see) the prophet, who, in his inevitable sufferings on behalf of the truth he uttered, developed that consciousness of sacrifice for others, in which the loftiest priesthood consists. Prophecy, therefore, the Service of Men by the Word of God, was for Israel the highest and most essential of all service. It was the individual’s and it was the nation’s ideal. As there was no true king and no true priest, so there was no true man, without the Word. “Would to God,” said Moses, “that all the Lord’s people were prophets.” And in our prophecy Israel exclaims: “Listen, O Isles, unto me; and hearken, ye peoples from far. He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me.”

At first it seems a forlorn hope thus to challenge the attention of the world in a dialect of one of its most obscure provinces,—a dialect,

too, that was already ceasing to be spoken even there. But the fact only serves more forcibly to emphasise the belief of these prophets, that the word committed to what they must have known to be a dying language was the Word of God Himself,—bound to render immortal the tongue in which it was spoken, bound to re-echo to the ends of the earth, bound to touch the conscience and commend itself to the reason of universal humanity. We have already seen, and will again see, how our prophet insists upon the creative and omnipotent power of God's Word; so we need not dwell longer on this instance of his faith. Let us look rather at what he expresses as Israel's preparation for the teaching of it.

To him the discipline and qualification of the prophet nation—and that means, of every Servant of God—in the high office of the Word, are threefold.

1. First, he lays down the supreme condition of Prophecy, that behind the Voice there must be the Life. Before he speaks of his gifts of Speech, the Servant emphasises his peculiar and consecrated life. "From the womb Jehovah called me, from my mother's midst mentioned my name." Now, as we all know, Israel's message to the world was largely Israel's life. The Old Testament is not a set of dogmas, nor a philosophy, nor a vision; but a history, the record of a providence, the testimony of experience, the utterances called forth by historical occasions from a life conscious of the purpose for which God has called it and set it apart through the ages. But these words, which the prophet nation uses, were first used of an individual prophet. Like so much else in "Second Isaiah," we find a suggestion of them in the call of Jeremiah. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth from the womb I consecrated thee: I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations."* A prophet is not a voice only. A prophet is a life behind a voice. He who would speak for God must have lived for God. According to the profound insight of the Old Testament, speech is not the expression of a few thoughts of a man, but the utterance of his whole life. A man blossoms through his lips;† and no man is a prophet, whose word is not the virtue and the flower of a gracious and a consecrated life.

2. The second discipline of the prophet is the Art of Speech. "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me: He hath made me a polished shaft, in His quiver hath He laid me in store." It is very evident that in these words the Servant does not only recount technical qualifications, but a moral discipline as well. The edge and brilliance of his speech are stated as the effect of solitude, but of a solitude that was at the same time a nearness to God. Now solitude is a great school of eloquence. In speaking of the Semitic race, of which Israel was part, we pointed out that, prophet-race of the world as it has proved, it sprang from the desert, and nearly all its branches have inherited the desert's clear and august style of speech; for, in the leisure and serene air of the desert, men speak as they speak nowhere else. But Israel speaks of a solitude that was the shadow of God's hand and the fastness of God's quiver; a seclusion which, to the desert's art of eloquence, added a special

inspiration by God, and a special concentration upon His main purpose in the world. The desert sword felt the grasp of God; He laid the Semitic shaft in store for a unique end.*

3. But in chap. l., vv. 4-5, the Servant unfolds the most beautiful and true understanding of the Secret of Prophecy that ever was unfolded in any literature,—worth quoting again by us, if so we may get it by heart.

My Lord Jehovah hath given me
The tongue of the learners,
To know how to succour the weary with words.
He wakeneth, morning by morning He wakeneth mine
ear
To hear as the learners.
My Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear,
I was not rebellious,
Nor turned away backward.

The prophet, say these beautiful lines, learns his speech, as the little child does, by listening. Grace is poured upon the lips through the open ear. It is the lesson of our Lord's Ephphatha. When He took the deaf man with the impediment in his speech aside from the multitude privately, He said unto him, not, Be loosed, but, "Be opened; and" first "his ears were opened, and" then the "bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." To speak, then, the prophet must listen; but mark to what he must listen! The secret of his eloquence lies not in the hearing of thunder, nor in the knowledge of mysteries, but in a daily wakefulness to the lessons and experience of common life. "Morning by morning He openeth mine ear." This is very characteristic of Hebrew prophecy and Hebrew wisdom, which listened for the truth of God in the voices of each day, drew their parables from things the rising sun lights up to every wakeful eye, and were, in the bulk of their doctrine, the virtues, needed day by day, of justice, temperance, and mercy, and in the bulk of their judgments the results of everyday observation and experience. The strength of the Old Testament lies in this its realism, its daily vigilance and experience of life. It is its contact with life—the life, not of the yesterday of its speakers, but of their to-day—that makes its voice so fresh and helpful to the weary. He whose ear is daily open to the music of his current life will always find himself in possession of words that refresh and stimulate.

But serviceable speech needs more than attentiveness and experience. Having gained the truth, the prophet must be obedient and loyal to it. Yet obedience and loyalty to the truth are the beginnings of martyrdom, of which the Servant now goes on to speak as the natural and immediate consequence of his prophecy.

III. THE SERVANT AS MARTYR.

The classes of men who suffer physical ill-usage at the hands of their fellow-men may roughly be described as three,—the Military Enemy, the Criminal, and the Prophet; and of these three we have only to read history to know that the Prophet fares by far the worst. However fatal men's treatment of their enemies in war or of their criminals may be, it is, nevertheless, subject to a certain order, code of honour, or principle of justice. But in all ages the Prophet has been the target for the most licentious spite and cruelty; for torture, indecency,

* Jer. i. 5.

† See Book I. p. 634.

* See p. 789 f.

and filth past belief. Although our own civilisation has outlived the system of physical punishment for speech, we even yet see philosophers and statesmen, who have used no weapons but exposition and persuasion, treated by their opponents—who would speak of a foreign enemy with respect—with execration, gross epithets, vile abuse, and insults, that the offenders would not pour upon a criminal. If we have this under our own eyes, let us think how the Prophet must have fared before humanity learned to meet speech by speech. Because men attacked it, not with the sword of the invader or with the knife of the assassin, but with words, therefore (till not very long ago) society let loose upon them the foulest indignities and most horrible torments. Socrates' valour as a soldier did not save him from the malicious slander, the false witness, the unjust trial, and the poison, with which the Athenians answered his speech against themselves. Even Hypatia's womanhood did not awe the mob from tearing her to pieces for her teaching. This unique and invariable experience of the Prophet is summed up and clenched in the name Martyr. Martyr originally meant a *witness* or *witness-bearer*, but now it is the synonym for every shame and suffering which the cruel ingenuity of men's black hearts can devise for those they hate. A Book of Battles is horrible enough, but at least valour and honour have kept down in it the baser passions. A Newgate Chronicle is ugly enough, but there at least are discipline and an hospital. You have got to go to a Book of Martyrs to see to what sourness, wickedness, malignity, pitilessness, and ferocity men's hearts can lend themselves. There is something in the mere utterance of truth, that rouses the very devil in the hearts of many men.

Thus it had always been in Israel, nation not only of prophets, but of the slayers of prophets. According to Christ, prophet-slaying was the ineradicable habit of Israel. "Ye are the sons of them that slew the prophets. . . . O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of prophets and stoner of them that are sent unto her!" To them who bare it the word of Jehovah had always been "a reproach:" cause of estrangement, indignities, torments, and sometimes of death. Up to the time of our prophet there had been the following notable sufferers for the Word: Elijah, Micaiah the son of Imlah; Isaiah, if the story be true that he was slain by Manasseh; but nearer, more lonely, and more heroic than all, Jeremiah, a "laughing-stock" and "mockery," "reviled," "smitten," fettered, and condemned to death. In words which recall the experience of so many individual Israelites, and most of which were used by Jeremiah of himself, the Servant of Jehovah describes his martyrdom in immediate consequence from his prophecy.

And I—I was not rebellious,
Nor turned away backward.
My back I have given to the smiters,
And my cheek to tormentors;
My face I hid not from insults and spitting.

These are not national sufferings. They are no reflection of the hard usage which the captive Israel suffered from Babylon. They are the reflection of the reproach and pains, which, for the sake of God's word, individual Israelites more than once experienced from their own nation. But if individual experience, and not national, formed the original of this picture of the

Servant as Martyr, then surely we have in this another strong reason against the objection to recognise in the Servant at last an individual. It may be, of course, that for the moment our prophet feels that this frequent experience of individuals in Israel is to be realised by the faithful Israel, as a whole, in their treatment by the rest of their cruel and unspiritual countrymen. But the very fact that individuals have previously fulfilled this martyrdom in the history of Israel, surely makes it possible for our prophet to foresee that the Servant, who is to fulfil it again, shall also be an individual.

But, returning from this slight digression on the person of the Servant to his fate, let us emphasise again, that his sufferings came to him as the result of his prophesying. The Servant's sufferings are not penal, they are not yet felt to be vicarious. They are simply the reward with which obdurate Israel met all her prophets, the inevitable martyrdom which followed on the uttering of God's Word. And in this the Servant's experience forms an exact counterpart to that of our Lord. For to Christ also reproach and agony and death—whatever higher meaning they evolved—came as the result of His Word. The fact that Jesus suffered as our great High Priest must not make us forget that His sufferings fell upon Him because He was a Prophet. He argued explicitly He must suffer, because so suffered the prophets before Him. He put Himself in the line of the martyrs: as they had killed the servants, He said, so would they kill the Son. Thus it happened. His enemies sought "to entangle Him in His talk:" it was for His talk they brought Him to trial. Each torment and indignity which the Prophet-Servant relates, Jesus suffered to the letter. They put Him to shame and insulted Him; * His helpless hands were bound: they spat in His face and smote Him with their palms; they mocked and they reviled Him; scourged Him again; teased and tormented Him; hung Him between thieves; and to the last the ribald jests went up, not only from the soldiers and the rabble, but from the learned and the religious authorities as well, to whom His fault had been that He preached another word than their own. The literal fulfilments of our prophecy are striking, but the main fulfilment, of which they are only incidents, is, that like the Servant, our Lord suffered directly as a Prophet. He enforced and He submitted to the essential obligation, which lies upon the true Prophet, of suffering for the Word's sake. Let us remember to carry this over with us to our final study of the Suffering Servant as the expiation for sin.

In the meantime, we have to conclude the Servant's appearance as Martyr in chap. l. He has accepted his martyrdom; but he feels it is not the end with him. God will bring him through, and vindicate him in the eyes of the world. For the world, in their usual way, will say that because he gives them a new truth he must be wrong, and because he suffers he is surely guilty and cursed before God. But he will not let himself be confounded, for God is his help and advocate.

But My Lord Jehovah shall help me;
Therefore, I let not myself be rebuffed:

*How all their meanness, how all the sense of shame from which He suffered, breaks forth in these words: *Are ye come out as against a robber?*

Therefore, I set my face like a flint,
 And know that I shall not be shamed.
 Near is my Justifier; who will dispute with me?
 Let us stand up together!
 Who is mine adversary? *
 Let him draw near me.
 Lo! my Lord Jehovah shall help me;
 Who is he that condemns me?
 Lo! like a garment all of them rot,
 The moth doth devour them.

These lines, in which the Holy Servant, the Martyr of the Word, defies the world and asserts that God shall vindicate his innocence, are taken by Paul and used to assert the justification, which every believer enjoys through faith in the sufferings of Him who was indeed the Holy Servant of God.†

The last two verses of chap. i. are somewhat difficult. The first of them still speaks of the Servant,‡ and distinguishes him—a distinction we must note and emphasise—from the God-fearing in Israel.

Who is among you that feareth Jehovah,
 That hearkens the voice of His Servant,
 That walks in dark places,
 And light he has none?
 Let him trust in the name of Jehovah,
 And lean on his God.

That is, every pious believer in Israel is to take the Servant for an example; for the Servant in distress "leans upon his God." And so Paul's application of the Servant's words to the individual believer is a correct one. But if our prophet is able to think of the Servant as an example to the individual Israelite, that surely is a thought not very far from the conception of the Servant himself as an individual.

If ver. 10 is addressed to the pious in Israel, ver. 11 would seem to turn with a last word—as the last words of the discourses in Second Isaiah so often turn—to the wicked in Israel.

Lo! all you, players with fire,§
 That gird you with firebrands!
 Walk in the light of your fire,
 In the firebrands ye kindled.
 This from my hand shall be yours;
 Ye shall lie down in sorrow.

It is very difficult to know who are meant by this warning. An old and almost forgotten interpretation is, that the prophet meant those exiles who played with the fires of political revolution, instead of abiding the deliverance of the Lord. But there is now current among exegetes the more general interpretation that these incendiaries are the revilers and abusers of the Servant within Israel: for so the Psalms speak of the slingers of burning words at the righteous. We must notice, however, that the metaphor stands over against those in Israel who "walk in dark places and have no light." In contrast to that kind of life, this may be the kind that coruscates with vanity, flashes with pride, or burns and scorches with its evil passions. We have a similar name for such a life. We call it a display of fireworks. The prophet tells them, who depend on nothing but their own false fires, how transient these are, how quickly quenched.

But is it not weird, that on our prophet's stage, however brilliantly its centre shines with figures

* Literally, *lord of my cause*; my adversary or opponent at law.

† Epistle to the Romans viii. 31 ff.

‡ Though Cheyne takes *His Servant* in ver. 10 to be, not the Servant, but the prophet.

§ *Kindlers of fire* is the literal rendering. But the word is not the common word to kindle, and is here used of wanton fire-raising.

of heroes and deeds of salvation, there should always be this dark, lurid background of evil and accursed men?

CHAPTER XX.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT.

ISAIAH lii. 13-1iii.

WE are now arrived at the last of the passages on the Servant of the Lord. It is known to Christendom as the Fifty-third of Isaiah, but its verses have, unfortunately, been divided between two chapters, lii. 13-15 and 1iii. Before we attempt the interpretation of this high and solemn passage of Revelation, let us look at its position in our prophecy, and examine its structure.

The peculiarities of the style and of the vocabulary of chap. lii. 13-1iii., along with the fact that, if it be omitted, the prophecies on either side readily flow together, have led some critics to suppose it to be an insertion, borrowed from an earlier writer.* The style—broken, sobbing, and recurrent—is certainly a change from the forward, flowing sentences, on which we have been carried up till now, and there are a number of words that we find quite new to us. Yet surely both style and words are fully accounted for by the novel and tragic nature of the subject to which the prophet has brought us: regret and remorse, though they speak through the same lips as hope and the assurance of salvation, must necessarily do so with a very different accent and set of terms. Criticism surely overreaches itself, when it suggests that a writer, so versatile and dramatic as our prophet, could not have written chap. lii. 13-1iii. along with, say, chap. xl. or chap. lii. 1-12 or chap. liv. We might as well be asked to assign to different authors Hamlet's soliloquy, and the King's conversation, in the same play, with the ambassadors from Norway. To aver that if chap. lii. 13-1iii. were left out, no one who had not seen it would miss it, so closely does chap. liv. follow on to chap. lii. 12, is to aver what means nothing. In any dramatic work you may leave out the finest passage,—from a Greek tragedy its grandest chorus, or from a play of Shakespeare's the hero's soliloquy,—without seeming, to eyes that have not seen what you have done, to have disturbed the connection of the whole. Observe the juncture in our prophecy at which this last passage on the Servant appears. It is one exactly the same as that at which another great passage on the Servant was inserted (chap. xlix. 1-9), viz., just after a call to the people to seize the redemption achieved for them and to come forth from Babylon. It is the kind of climax or pause in their tale, which dramatic writers of all kinds employ for the solemn utterance of principles lying at the back, or transcending the scope, of the events of which they treat. To say the least, it is surely more probable that our prophet himself employed so natural an opportunity to give expression to his highest truths about the Servant, than that some one else took his work, broke up

* Thus Ewald supposed ch. lii. 13-1iii. to be an elegy upon some martyr in the persecutions under Manasseh. Professor Briggs, as we have noticed before, claims to have discovered that all the passages in the Servant are parts of a trimeter poem, older than the rest of the prophecy, which he finds to be in hexameters. See p. 808.

another already extant work on the Servant and thrust the pieces of the latter into the former. Moreover, we shall find many of the ideas, as well as of the phrases, of chap. lii. 13-15, to be essentially the same as some we have already encountered in our prophecy.*

There is then no evidence that this singular prophecy ever stood apart from its present context, or that it was written by another writer than the prophet, by whom we have hitherto found ourselves conducted. On the contrary, while it has links with what goes before it, we see good reasons why the prophet should choose just this moment for uttering its unique and transcendent contents, as well as why he should employ in it a style and a vocabulary so different from his usual.

Turning now to the structure of chap. lii. 13-15, we observe that, as arranged in the Canon, there are fifteen verses in the prophecy. These fifteen verses fall into five strophes of three verses each, as printed by the Revised English Version. When set in their own original lines, however, the strophes appear, not of equal, but of increasing length. As will be seen from the version given below, the first (chap. lii. 13-15) has nine lines, the second (chap. liii. 1-3) has ten lines, the third (vv. 4-6) has eleven lines, the fourth (vv. 7-9) thirteen lines, the fifth (vv. 10-12) fourteen lines. This increase would be absolutely regular, if, in the fourth strophe, we made either the first two lines one, or the last two one, and if in the fifth again we ran the first two lines together,—changes which the metre allows and some translators have adopted. But, in either case, we perceive a regular increase from strophe to strophe, that is not only one of the many marks with which this most artistic of poems has been elaborated, but gives the reader the very solemn impression of a truth that is ever gathering more of human life into itself, and sweeping forward with fuller and more resistless volume.

Each strophe, it is well to notice, begins with one word or two words which summarise the meaning of the whole strophe and form a title for it. Thus, after the opening exclamation "Behold," the words "My Servant shall prosper" form, as we shall see, not only a summary of the first strophe, in which his ultimate exaltation is described, but the theme of the whole prophecy. Strophe ii. begins "Who hath believed," and accordingly in this strophe the unbelief and thoughtlessness of them who saw the Servant without feeling the meaning of his suffering is confessed. "Surely our sicknesses" fitly entitles strophe iii., in which the people describe how the Servant in his suffering was their substitute. "Oppressed yet he humbled himself" is the headline of strophe iv., and that strophe deals with the humility and innocence of the Servant in contrast to the injustice accorded him; while the headline of strophe v., "But Jehovah had purposed," brings us back to the main theme of the poem, that behind men's treatment of the Servant is God's holy will;

which theme is elaborated and brought to its conclusion in strophe v. These opening and entitling words of each strophe are printed, in the following translation, in larger type than the rest.

As in the rest of Hebrew poetry, so here, the measure is neither regular nor smooth, and does not depend on rhyme. Yet there is an amount of assonance which at times approaches to rhyme. Much of the meaning of the poem depends on the use of the personal pronouns—*we* and *he* stand contrasted to each other—and it is these coming in a lengthened form at the end of many of the lines that suggest to the ear something like rhyme. For instance, in liii. 5, 6, the second and third verses of the third strophe, two of the lines run out on the bisyllable -*ênu*, two on *inu*, and two on the word *lanu*, while the third has *ênu*, not at the end, but in the middle; in each case, the pronominal suffix of the first person plural. We transcribe these lines to show the effect of this.

Wehu' meholal mippesha'ênu
Medhukka' me'âwônôthênu
Mûsar shelômênû 'alaw
Ubhahâbhurâtho nirpa'-lânû
Kullânû kass-ss'on ta'inû
'ish ledharko paninû
Wa Jahweh hiphgî 'a bô 'eth-'awon kullânû.

This is the strophe in which the assonance comes oftenest to rhyme; but in strophe i. *ênu* ends two lines, and in strophe ii. it ends three. These and other assonants occur also at the beginning and in the middle of lines. We must remember that in all the cases quoted it is the personal pronouns, which give the assonance,—the personal pronouns on which so much of the meaning of the poem turns; and that, therefore, the parallelism primarily intended by the writer is one rather of meaning than of sound. The pair of lines, parallel in meaning, though not in sound, which forms so large a part of Hebrew poetry, is used throughout this poem; but the use of it is varied and elaborated to a unique degree. The very same words and phrases are repeated, and placed on points, from which they seem to call to each other; as, for instance, the double "many" in strophe i., the "of us all" in strophe iii., and "nor opened he his mouth" in strophe iv. The ideas are very few and very simple; the words "he, we, his, ours, see, hear, know, bear, sickness, strike, stroke," and "many" form, with prepositions and participles, the bulk of the prophecy. It will be evident how singularly suitable this recurrence is for the expression of reproach, and of sorrowful recollection. It is the nature of grief and remorse to harp upon the one dear form, the one most vivid pain. The finest instance of this repetition is verse 6, with its opening keynote "kullanu" "of us all like sheep went astray," with its close on that keynote "guilt of us all," "kullanu." But throughout notes are repeated, and bars recur, expressive of what was done to the Servant, or what the Servant did for man, which seem in their recurrence to say, You cannot hear too much of me: I am the very Gospel. A peculiar sadness is lent to the music by the letters *h* and *l* in "holie" and "hehelie," the word for sickness or ailing (ailing is the English equivalent in sense and sound), which happens so often in the poem. The new words, which have been brought to vary this recurrence of a few simple features, are mostly of a sombre type. The heavier let-

*I may quote Dillmann's opinion on this last point: "Andererseits sind nicht blos die Grundgedanken und auch einzelne Wendungen wie 52, 23-25, 53, 7, 11, 12 durch 42, 1 ff. 49, 1 ff. 50, 3 ff. so wohl vorbereitet, und so sehr in Uebereinstimmung damit, dass an eine fast unveränderte Herübernahme des Abschnitts aus einer verlorenen Schrift (Ew.) nicht gedacht werden kann, sondern derselbe doch wesentlich als Werk des Vrf. angesehen werden muss" ("Commentary" 4th ed., 1890, p. 453.)

ters throng the lines: grievous *bs* and *ms* are multiplied, and syllables with long vowels before *m* and *w*. But the words sob as well as tramp; and here and there one has a wrench and one a cry in it.

Most wonderful and mysterious of all is the spectral fashion in which the prophecy presents its Hero. He is named only in the first line and once again: elsewhere He is spoken of as He. We never hear or see Himself. But all the more solemnly is He there: a shadow upon countless faces, a grievous memory on the hearts of the speakers. He so haunts all we see and all we hear, that we feel it is not Art, but Conscience, that speaks of Him.

Here is now the prophecy itself, rendered into English quite literally, except for a conjunction here and there, and, as far as possible, in the rhythm of the original. A few necessary notes on difficult words and phrases are given.

I.

lii. 13: Behold, my Servant shall prosper,*
Shall rise, be lift up, be exceedingly high.†

Like as they that were astonished before thee were many,
—So marred from a man's was his visage,
And his form from the children of men!—
So shall the nations be startled‡ be many,
Before him shall kings shut their mouths.
For that which had never been told them they see,
And what they had heard not, they have to consider.

II.

Who gave believing to that which we heard,§
And the arm of Jehovah to whom was it bared?
For he sprang like a sapling before Him,||
As a root from the ground that is parched;
He had no form nor beauty that we should regard him,
Nor aspect that we should desire him.
Despised and rejected of men,
Man of pains and familiar with ailing,
And as one we do cover the face from,
Despised, and we did not esteem him.

III.

Surely our ailments he bore,
And our pains he did take for his burden.¶
But we—we accounted him stricken,
Smitten of God and degraded.**

* This verb best gives the force of the Hebrew, which means both *to deal prudently* and *to prosper* or succeed. See p. 816.

† Vulgate finely: “extolletur, sublimis erit et valde elatus.”

‡ “The term rendered ‘startle’ has created unnecessary difficulty to some writers. The word means ‘to cause to spring or leap;’ when applied to fluids, to spirt or sprinkle them. The fluid spirted is put in the *accusative*, and it is spirted *upon* the person. In the present passage the person, ‘many nations,’ is in the *accusative*, and it is simply treason against the Hebrew language to render ‘sprinkle.’ The interpreter who will so translate will ‘do anything.’”—A. B. Davidson, *Expositor*, 2d series, viii. 443. The LXX. has *θανασονται ἐθνη πολλά*. The Peschitto and Vulgate render *sprinkle*.

§ And not *our report*, or *something we caused to be heard*, as in the English Version, — *שמעה* is the passive participle of *שמע*, to hear, and not of *השמיע*, to cause to hear. The speakers are now the penitent people of God who had been preached to, and not the prophets who had preached.

|| *Tender shoot*. Masculine participle, meaning *sucker*, or *suckling*. Dr. John Hunter (“Christian Treasury”) suggests succulent plant, such as grow in the desert. But in Job viii. 16; xiv. 7; xv. 30, the feminine form is used of any tender shoot of a tree, and the feminine plural in Ezek. xvii. 22 of the same. The LXX. read *παιδιον, infant*. Before Him, i. e., Jehovah. Cheyne, following Ewald, reads *before us*. So Giesebrecht.

¶ Took for his burden. Loaded himself with them. The same grievous word which God uses of Himself in ch. xlvi. See p. 775.

** There is more than *afflicted* (Authorised Version) in this word. There is the sense of being *humbled*, punished for his own sake.

Yet he—he was pierced for crimes that were ours,*
He was crushed for guilt that was ours,*
The chastisement of our peace was upon him,
By his stripes healing is ours.*
Of us all † like to sheep went astray,
Every man to his way we did turn,
And Jehovah made light upon him
The guilt of us all.

IV.

Oppressed, he did humble himself,
Nor opened his mouth—
As a lamb to the slaughter is led,
As a sheep 'fore her shearers is dumb—
Nor opened his mouth.
By tyranny and law was he taken ‡
And of his age who reflected,
That he was wrenched § from the land of the living,
For My people's transgressions the stroke was on him?
So they made with the wicked his grave,
Yea, with the felon || his tomb.
Though never harm had he done,
Neither was guile in his mouth.

V.

But Jehovah had purposed to bruise him,
Had laid on him sickness;
So ¶ if his life should offer guilt offering,
A seed he should see, he should lengthen his days.
And the purpose of Jehovah by his hand should prosper,
From the travail of his soul shall he see,**
By his knowledge be satisfied.
My Servant, the Righteous, righteousness wins he for many,
And their guilt he takes for his load.
Therefore I set him a share with the great,††
Yea, with the strong shall he share the spoil:
Because that he poured out his life unto death,
Let himself with transgressors be reckoned;
Yea, he the sin of the many hath borne,
And for the transgressors he interposes.

Let us now take the interpretation strophe by strophe.

I. lii. 13–15. When last our eyes were directed to the Servant, he was suffering unexplained and unvindicated (chap. l. 4–6). His sufferings seemed to have fallen upon him as the consequence of his fidelity to the Word committed to him; the Prophet had inevitably become the Martyr. Further than this his sufferings were not explained, and the Servant was left in them, calling upon God indeed, and sure that God would hear and vindicate him, but as yet unanswered by word of God or word of man.

It is these words, words both of God and of man, which are given in Isaiah chap. lii. 13–liii. The Sufferer is explained and vindicated, first by God in the first strophe, chap. lii. 13–15, and then by the Conscience of Men, His own people, in the second and third (liii. 1–6); and then, as it appears, the Divine Voice, or the Prophet speaking for it, resumes in strophes iv. and v., and concludes in a strain similar to strophe i.

God's explanation and vindication of the Suf-

* The possessive pronoun has been put to the end of the lines, where it stands in the original, producing a greater emphasis and even a sense of rhyme.

† כלנו *Kūllanū* so rendered instead of “all of us,” in order to be assonant with the close of the verse, as the original is, which closes with *kullam*.

‡ That is, by a form of law that was tyranny, a judicial crime.

§ Cut off violently, prematurely, unnaturally.

|| See p. 821.

¶ The verbs, hitherto in the perfect in this verse, now change to the imperfect; a sign that they express the purpose of God. Cf. Dillmann, *in loco*.

** From the travail of his soul shall he see, and by his knowledge be satisfied. Taking *ברעתו* with *ישבע* instead of with *ידיק*. This reading suggested itself to me some years ago. Since then I have found it only in Prof. Briggs' translation, “Messianic Prophecy,” p. 359. It is supported by the frequent parallel in which we find *seeing* and *knowing* in Hebrew.

†† Some translate *many*, i. e., the many to whom he brings righteousness, as if he were a victor with a great host behind him.

ferer is, then, given in the first strophe. It is summed up in the first line, and in one very pregnant word. Jeremiah had said of the Messiah, "He shall reign as a King and deal wisely" or "prosper;"* and so God says here of the Servant, "Behold he shall deal wisely" or "prosper." The Hebrew verb does not get full expression in any English one. In rendering it "shall deal wisely" or "prudently" our translators undoubtedly touch the quick of it. For it is originally a mental process or quality: "has insight, understands, is farseeing." But then it also includes the effect of this—"understands so as to get on, deals wisely so as to succeed, is practical" both in his way of working and in being sure of his end. Ewald has found an almost exact equivalent in German, "hat Geschick;" for Geschick means both "skill" or "address" and "fate" or "destiny." The Hebrew verb is the most practical in the whole language, for this is precisely the point which the prophecy seeks to bring out about the Servant's sufferings. They are practical. He is practical in them. He endures them, not for their own sake, but for some practical end of which he is aware and to which they must assuredly bring him. His failure to convince men by his word, the pain and spite which seem to be his only wage, are not the last of him, but the beginning and the way to what is higher. So "shall he rise and be lift up and be very high." The suffering, which in chap. I. seemed to be the Servant's misfortune, is here seen as his wisdom which shall issue in his glory.

But of themselves men do not see this, and they need to be convinced. Pain, the blessed means of God, is man's abhorrence and perplexity. All along the history of the world the Sufferer has been the astonishment and stumbling-block of humanity. The barbarian gets rid of him; he is the first difficulty with which every young literature wrestles; to the end he remains the problem of philosophy and the sore test of faith. It is not native to men to see meaning or profit in the Sufferer; they are staggered by him, they see no reason or promise in him. So did men receive this unique Sufferer, this Servant of Jehovah. "The many were astonished at him; his visage was so marred more than men, and his form than the children of men." But his life is to teach them the opposite of their impressions, and to bring them out of their perplexity into reverence before the revealed purpose of God in the Sufferer. "As they that were astonished at thee were many, so shall the nations he startles be many; kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which was not told them they see, and that which they have heard not they have to consider,"—viz., the triumph and influence to which the Servant was consciously led through suffering. There may be some reflection here of the way in which the Gentiles regarded the Suffering Israel, but the reference is vague, and perhaps purposely so.

The first strophe, then, gives us just the general theme. In contrast to human experience God reveals in His servant that suffering is fruitful, that sacrifice is practical. Pain, in God's service, shall lead to glory.

II. liii. 1-3. God never speaks but in man. He wakens conscience, and the second strophe of the prophecy (along with the third) is the answer of conscience to God. Penitent men,

looking back from the light of the Servant's exaltation to the time when his humiliation was before their eyes, say, "Yes; what God has said is true of us. We were the deaf and the indifferent. We heard, but 'who of us believed what we heard, and to whom was the arm of the Lord'—His purpose, the hand He had in the Servant's sufferings—'revealed?'"*

Who are these penitent speakers? Some critics have held them to be the heathen, more have said that they are Israel. But none have pointed out that the writer gives himself no trouble to define them, but seems more anxious to impress us with their consciousness of their moral relation to the Servant. On the whole, it would appear that it is Israel, whom the prophet has in mind as the speakers of vv. 1-6. For, besides the fact that the Old Testament knows nothing of a bearing by Israel of the sins of the Gentiles, it is expressly said in ver. 8, that the sins for which the Servant was stricken were the sins of "my people;" which people must be the same as the speakers, for they own in vv. 4-6 that the Servant bore their sins. For these and other reasons the mass of Christian critics at the present day are probably right when they assume that Israel are the speakers in vv. 1-6;† but the reader must beware of allowing his attention to be lost in questions of that kind. The art of the poem seems intentionally to leave vague the national relation of the speakers to the Servant, in order the more impressively to bring out their moral attitude towards him. There is an utter disappearance of all lines of separation between Jew and Gentile,—both in the first strophe, where, although Gentile names are used, Jews may yet be meant to be included, and in the rest of the poem,—as if the writer wished us to feel that all men stood over against that solitary Servant in a common

* Hitzig (among others) held that it is the prophets who are the speakers of ver. 1, and that the voices of the penitent people come in only with ver. 2 or ver. 3. In that case שמעתינו would mean *what we heard from God* (שמעה) is elsewhere used for the prophetic message) and delivered to the people. This interpretation multiplies the dramatis personæ, but does not materially alter the meaning of the prophecy. It merely changes part of the penitent people's self-reproach into a reproach cast on them by their prophets. But there is no real reason for introducing the prophets as the speakers of ver. 1.

† For the argument that it is Israel who speaks here, see Hoffmann ("Schriftbeweis,") who was converted from the other view, and Dillmann, 4th ed., *in loco*. A very ingenious attempt has been made by Giesebrecht ("Beiträge zur Jesaja Kritik," 1890, p. 146 ff.), in favour of the interpretation that the heathen are the speakers. His reasons are these: 1. It is the heathen who are spoken of in lii. 13-15, and a change to Israel would be too sudden. Answer: The heathen are not exclusively spoken of in lii. 13-15; but if they were, a change in the next verse to Israel would not be more rapid than some already made by the prophet. 2. The words in liii. 1 suit the heathen. They have already received the news of the exaltation of the Servant, which in lii. 15 was promised them. This is the שמעתינו, that is *news we have just heard*. האמין

is a pluperfect of the subjunctive mood: *Who could or who would have believed this news of the exaltation we have just heard, and the arm of Jehovah to whom was it revealed!* i. e., it was revealed to nobody. Answer:

Besides the precariousness of taking האמין as a pluperfect subjunctive, this interpretation is opposed to the general effort of the prophecy, which is to expose unbelief before the exaltation, not after it. 3. To get rid of the argument—that, while the speakers own that the Servant bears their sins, it is said the Servant was stricken for the sins of *my people*, and that therefore the speakers must be the same as "my people"—Giesebrecht would utterly alter the reading of ver. 8 from *כפשע עמו נגע לכו*, for the transgression of my people was the stroke to him to *כפשעם נגע*, for their stroke was he smitten.

* Jer. xxiii. 5.

indifference to his suffering and a common conscience of the guilt he bears. In short, it is no historical situation, such as some critics seem anxious to fasten him down upon, that the prophet reflects; but a certain moral situation, ideal in so far as it was not yet realised,—the state of the quickened human conscience over against a certain Human Suffering, in which, having ignored it at the time, that conscience now realises that the purpose of God was at work.

In vv. 2 and 3 the penitent speakers give us the reasons of their disregard of the Servant in the days of his suffering. In these reasons there is nothing peculiar to Israel, and no special experience of Jewish history is reflected by the terms in which they are conveyed. They are the confession, in general language, of an universal human habit,—the habit of letting the eye cheat the heart and conscience, of allowing the aspect of suffering to blind us to its meaning; of forgetting in our sense of the ugliness and helplessness of pain, that it has a motive, a future, and a God. It took ages to wean mankind from those native feelings of aversion and resentment, which caused them at first to abandon or destroy their sick. And, even now, scorn for the weak and incredulity in the heroism or in the profitableness of suffering are strong in the best of us. We judge by looks; we are hurried by the physical impression which the sufferer makes on us, or by our pride that we are not as he is, into peremptory and harsh judgments upon him. Every day we allow the dulness of poverty, the ugliness of disease, the unprofitableness of misfortune, the ludicrousness of failure, to keep back conscience from discovering to us our share of responsibility for them, and to repel our hearts from that sympathy and patience with them, which along with conscience would assuredly discover to us their place in God's Providence and their special significance for ourselves. It is this original sin of man, of which these penitent speakers own themselves guilty.

But no one is ever permitted to rest with a physical or intellectual impression of suffering. The race, the individual, has always been forced by conscience to the task of finding a moral reason for pain; and nothing so marks man's progress as the successive solutions he has attempted to this problem. The speakers, therefore, proceed in the next part of their confession, strophe iii., to tell us what they first falsely accounted the moral reason of the Servant's suffering and what they afterwards found to be the truth.

III. liii. 4-6. The earliest and most common moral judgment which men pass upon pain is that which is implied in its name—that it is penal. A man suffers because God is angry with him and has stricken him. So Job's friends judged him, and so these speakers tell us they had at first judged the Servant. "We had accounted him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted,"—"stricken," that is, with a plague of sickness, as Job was, for the simile of the sick man is still kept up; "smitten of God and degraded" or "humbled," for it seemed to them that God's hand was in the Servant's sickness, to punish and disgrace him for his own sins. But now they know they were wrong. The hand of God was indeed upon the Servant, and the reason was sin; yet the sin was not his, but theirs. "Surely our sicknesses he bore, and our pains he took as his burden. He was pierced for iniquities

that were ours. He was crushed for crimes that were ours." Strictly interpreted, these verses mean no more than that the Servant was involved in the consequences of his people's sins. The verbs "bore" and "made his burden" are indeed taken by some to mean, necessarily, removal or expiation; but in themselves, as is clear from their application to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the whole of the generation of Exile, they mean no more than implication in the reproach and the punishment of the people's sins.* Nevertheless, as we have explained in a note below, it is really impossible to separate the suffering of a Servant, who has been announced as practical and prosperous in his suffering, from the end for which it is endured. We cannot separate the Servant's bearing of the people's guilt from his removal of it. And, indeed, this practical end of his passion springs forth, past all doubt, from the rest of the strophe, which declares that the Servant's sufferings are not only vicarious but redemptive. "The discipline of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." Translators agree that "discipline of our peace" must mean discipline which procures our peace. The peace, the healing, is ours, in consequence of the chastisement and the scourging that was his. The next verse gives us the obverse and complement of the same thought. The pain was his in consequence of the sin that was ours. "All we like sheep had gone astray, and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all,"—literally "iniquity," but inclusive of its guilt and consequences. Nothing could be plainer than these words. The speakers confess that they know that the Servant's suffering was both vicarious and redemptive.†

But how did they get this knowledge? They do not describe any special means by which it came to them. They state this high and novel truth simply as the last step in a process of their consciousness. At first they were bewildered by the Servant's suffering; then they thought it contemptible, thus passing upon it an intellectual judgment; then, forced to seek a moral reason

* **נשא** and **סבל**. In speaking of his country's woes, Jeremiah (x. 19) says: *This is sickness or my sickness, and I must bear it*, **וְאֶשְׂאֵנִי זֶה חֲלִי**. Ezekiel (iv. 4) is commanded to lie on his side, and in that symbolic position to *bear the iniquity of His people*, **תִּשָּׂא עֲוֹנָם**. One of the Lamentations (v. 7) complains: *Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we bear* (**סבל**) *their iniquities*. In these cases the meaning of both **נשא** and **סבל** is simply to feel the weight of, be involved in. The verbs do not convey the sense of *carrying off* or *expiating*. But still it had been said of the Servant that in his suffering he would be practical and prosper; so that when we now hear that he bears his people's sins, we are ready to understand that he does not do this for the mere sake of sharing them, but for a practical purpose, which, of course, can only be their removal. There is, therefore, no need to quarrel with the interpretation of ver. 4, that the Servant *carries away* the suffering with which he is laden. Matthew makes this interpretation (viii. 17) in speaking of Christ's healing. But it is a very interesting fact, and not without light upon the free and plastic way in which the New Testament quotes from the Old, that Matthew has ignored the original and literal meaning of the quotation, which is that the Servant shared the sicknesses of the people: a sense impossible in the case for which the Evangelist uses the words.

† But they do not tell us whether they were totally exempted from suffering by the Servant's pains, or whether they also suffered with him the consequence of their misdeeds. For that question is not now present to their minds. Whether they also suffer or not (and other chapters in the prophecy emphasise the people's bearing of the consequences of their misdeeds), they know that it was not their own, but the Servant's suffering, which was alone the factor in their redemption.

for it, they accounted it as penal and due to the Servant for his own sins; then they recognised that its penalty was vicarious, that the Servant was suffering for them; and finally, they knew that it was redemptive, the means of their own healing and peace. This is a natural climax, a logical and moral progress of thought. The last two steps are stated simply as facts of experience following on other facts. Now our prophet usually publishes the truths, with which he is charged, as the very words of God, introducing them with a solemn and authoritative "Thus saith Jehovah." But this novel and supreme truth of vicarious and redemptive suffering, this passion and virtue which crowns the Servant's office, is introduced to us, not by the mouth of God, but by the lips of penitent men; not as an oracle, but as a confession; not as the commission of Divine authority laid beforehand upon the Servant like his other duties, but as the conviction of the human conscience after the Servant has been lifted up before it. In short, by this unusual turn of his art, the prophet seeks to teach us that vicarious suffering is not a dogmatic, but an experimental truth. The substitution of the Servant for the guilty people, and the redemptive force of that substitution, are no arbitrary doctrine, for which God requires from man a mere intellectual assent; they are no such formal institution of religion as mental indolence and superstition delight to have prepared for their mechanical adherence: but substitutive suffering is a great living fact of human experience, whose outward features are not more evident to men's eyes than its inner meaning is appreciable by their conscience, and of irresistible effect upon their whole moral nature.

Is this lesson of our prophet's art not needed? Men have always been apt to think of vicarious suffering, and of its function in their salvation, as something above and apart from their moral nature, with a value known only to God and not calculable in the terms of conscience or of man's moral experience; nay, rather as something that conflicts with man's ideas of morality and justice; whereas both the fact and the virtue of vicarious suffering come upon us all, as these speakers describe the vicarious sufferings of the Servant to have come upon them, as a part of inevitable experience. If it be natural, as we saw, for men to be bewildered by the first sight of suffering, to scorn it as futile and to count it the fault of the sufferer himself, it is equally natural and inevitable that these first and hasty theories should be dispelled by the longer experience of life and the more thorough working of conscience. The stricken are not always bearing their own sin. "Suffering is the minister of justice. This is true in part, yet it also is inadequate to explain the facts. Of all the sorrow which befalls humanity, how small a part falls upon the specially guilty; how much seems rather to seek out the good! We might almost ask whether it is not weakness rather than wrong that is punished in this world."* In every nation, in every family, the innocent suffer for the guilty. Vicarious suffering is not arbitrary or accidental; it comes with our growth: it is of the very nature of things. It is that part of the Service of Man, to which we are all born, and of the reality of which we daily grow more aware.

But even more than its necessity life teaches

* "Mystery of Pain," by James Hinton, p. 27.

us its virtue. Vicarious suffering is not a curse. It is Service—Service for God. It proves a power where every other moral force has failed. By it men are redeemed, on whom justice and their proper punishment have been able to effect nothing. Why this should be is very intelligible. We are not so capable of measuring the physical or moral results of our actions upon our own characters or in our own fortunes as we are upon the lives of others; nor do we so awaken to the guilt and heinousness of our sin as when it reaches and implicates lives which were not partners with us in it. Moreover, while a man's punishment is apt to give him an excuse for saying, I have expiated my sin myself, and so to leave him self-satisfied and with nothing for which to be grateful or obliged to a higher will; or while it may make him reckless or plunge him into despair; so, on the contrary, when he recognises that others feel the pain of his sin and have come under its weight, then shame is quickly born within him, and pity and every other passion that can melt a hard heart. If, moreover, the others who bear his sin do so voluntarily and for love's sake, then how quickly on the back of shame and pity does gratitude rise, and the sense of debt and of constraint to their will! For all these very intelligible reasons, vicarious suffering has been a powerful redemptive force in the experience of the race. Both the fact of its beneficence and the moral reasons for this are clear enough to lift us above a question, which sometimes gives trouble regarding it,—the question of its justice. Such a question is futile about any service for man, which succeeds as this does where all others have failed, and which proves itself so much in harmony with man's moral nature. But the last shred of objection to the justice of vicarious suffering is surely removed when the sufferer is voluntary as well as vicarious. And, in truth, human experience feels that it has found its highest and its holiest fact in the love that, being innocent itself, stoops to bear its fellows' sins,—not only the anxiety and reproach of them, but even the cost and the curse of them. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" and greater Service can no man do to men than to serve them in this way.

Now in this universal human experience of the inevitableness and the virtue of vicarious suffering, Israel had been deeply baptised. The nation had been "served" by suffering in all the ways we have just described. Beginning with the belief that all righteousness prospered, Israel had come to see the righteous afflicted in her midst; the best Israelites had set their minds to the problem, and learned to believe, at least, that such affliction was of God's will,—part of His Providence, and not an interruption to it. Israel, too, knew the moral solidarity of a people: that citizens share each other's sorrows, and that one generation rolls over its guilt upon the next. Frequently had the whole nation been spared for a pious remnant's sake; and in the Exile, while all the people were formally afflicted by God, it was but a portion of them whose conscience was quick to the meaning of the chastisement, and of them alone, in their submissive and intelligent sufferance of the Lord's wrath, could the opening gospel of the prophecy be spoken, that they "had accomplished their warfare, and had received of the Lord's hands double for all their

sins." But still more vivid than these collective substitutes for the people were the individuals, who, at different points in Israel's history, had stood forth and taken up as their own the nation's conscience and stooped to bear the nation's curse. Far away back, a Moses had offered himself for destruction, if for his sake God would spare his sinful and thoughtless countrymen. In a psalm of the Exile it is remembered that,

He said, that He would destroy them,
Had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the
breach,
To turn away His wrath, lest He should destroy.*

And Jeremiah, not by a single heroic resolve, but by the slow agony and martyrdom of a long life, had taken Jerusalem's sin upon his own heart, had felt himself forsaken of God, and had voluntarily shared his city's doom, while his generation, unconscious of their guilt and blind to their fate, despised him and esteemed him not. And Ezekiel, who is Jeremiah's far-off reflection, who could only do in symbol what Jeremiah did in reality, was commanded to lie on his side for days, and so "bear the guilt" of his people.†

But in Israel's experience it was not only the human Servant who served the nation by suffering, for God Himself had come down to "carry" His distressed and accursed people, and "to load Himself with them." Our prophet uses the same two verbs of Jehovah as are used of the Servant.‡ Like the Servant, too, God "was afflicted in all their affliction;" and His love towards them was expended in passion and agony for their sins. Vicarious suffering was not only human, it was Divine.

Was it very wonderful that a people with such an experience, and with such examples, both human and Divine, should at last be led to the thought of One Sufferer, who would exhibit in Himself all the meaning, and procure for His people all the virtue, of that vicarious reproach and sorrow, which a long line of their martyrs had illustrated, and which God had revealed as the passion of His own love? If they had had every example that could fit them to understand the power of such a sufferer, they had also every reason to feel their need of Him. For the Exile had not healed the nation; it had been for the most of them an illustration of that evil effect of punishment to which we alluded above. Penal servitude in Babylon had but hardened Israel. "God poured on him the fury of anger, and the strength of battle: it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart."§ What the Exile, then, had failed to do, when it brought upon the people their own sins, the Servant, taking these sins upon himself, would surely effect. The people, whom the Exile had only hardened, his vicarious suffering should strike into penitence and lift to peace.

IV. liii. 7-9. It is probable that with ver. 6 the penitent people have ceased speaking, and that the parable is now taken up by the prophet himself. The voice of God, which ut-

tered the first strophe, does not seem to resume till ver. 11.

If strophe iii. confessed that it was for the people's sins the Servant suffered, strophe iv. declares that he himself was sinless, and yet silently submitted to all which injustice laid upon him.

Now Silence under Suffering is a strange thing in the Old Testament—a thing absolutely new. No other Old Testament personage could stay dumb under pain, but immediately broke into one of two voices,—voice of guilt or voice of doubt. In the Old Testament the sufferer is always either confessing his guilt to God, or, when he feels no guilt, challenging God in argument. David, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Job, and the nameless martyred and moribund of the Psalms, all strive and are loud under pain. Why was this Servant the unique and solitary instance of silence under suffering? Because he had a secret which they had not. It had been said of him: "My Servant shall deal wisely" or "intelligently," shall know what he is about. He had no guilt of his own, no doubts of his God. But he was conscious of the end God had in his pain, an end not to be served in any other way, and with all his heart he had given himself to it. It was not punishment he was enduring; it was not the throes of the birth into higher experience, which he was feeling: it was a Service he was performing,—a service laid on him by God, a service for man's redemption, a service sure of results and of glory. Therefore "as a lamb to the slaughter is led, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, he opened not his mouth."

The next two verses (8, 9) describe how the Servant's Passion was fulfilled. The figure of a sick man was changed in ver. 5 to that of a punished one, and the punishment we now see carried on to death. The two verses are difficult, the readings and renderings of most of the words being very various. But the sense is clear. The Servant's death was accomplished, not on some far hill top by a stroke out of heaven, but in the forms of human law and by men's hands. It was a judicial murder. "By tyranny and by judgment,"—that is, by a forced and tyrannous judgment,—"he was taken." To this abuse of law the next verse adds the indifference of public opinion: "and as for his contemporaries, who of them reflected that he was cut off from," or "cut down in, the land of the living,"—that in spite of the form of law that condemned him he was a murdered man,—that "for the transgression of my people the stroke was his?" So, having conceived him to have been lawfully put to death, they consistently gave him a convict's grave: "they made his grave with the wicked, and he was with the felon in his death," though—and on this the strophe emphatically ends—he was an innocent man, "he had done no harm, neither was guile in his mouth."

Premature sickness and the miscarriage of justice,—these to Orientals are the two outstanding misfortunes of the individual's life. Take the Psalter, set aside its complaints of the horrors of war and of invasion, and you will find almost all the rest of its sighs rising either from sickness or from the sense of injustice. These were the classic forms of individual suffering in the age and civilisation to which our prophet belonged, and it was natural, therefore, that when he was describing an Ideal or Representative Sufferer, he should fill in his picture with both

* Psalm cvi. 23; cf. also ver. 32, where the other side of the solidarity between Moses and the people comes out. *They angered Him also at the waters of Strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes . . . he spake unadvisedly with his lips.*

† See p. 817.

‡ Isa. xlv. 3, 4. See p. 775.

§ Ch. xlii. 25.

of them. If we remember this,* we shall feel no incongruity in the sudden change of the hero from a sick man to a convict, and back again in ver. 10 from a convict to a sick man. Nor, if we remember this, shall we feel disposed to listen to those interpreters who hold that the basis of this prophecy was the account of an actual historical martyrdom. Had such been the case the prophet would surely have held throughout to one or the other of the two forms of suffering. His sufferer would have been either a leper or a convict, but hardly both. No doubt the details in vv. 8 and 9 are so realistic that they might well be the features of an actual miscarriage of justice; but the like happened too frequently in the Ancient East for such verses to be necessarily any one man's portrait. Perverted justice was the curse of the individual's life—perverted justice and that stolid, fatalistic apathy of Oriental public opinion, which would probably regard such a sufferer as suffering for his sins the just vengeance of heaven, though the minister of this vengeance was a tyrant and its means were perjury and murder. "Who of his generation reflected that for the transgression of my people the stroke was on him!"

V. liii. 10-12. We have heard the awful tragedy. The innocent Servant was put to a violent and premature death. Public apathy closed over him and the unmarked earth of a felon's grave. It is so utter a perversion of justice, so signal a triumph of wrong over right, so final a disappearance into oblivion of the fairest life that ever lived, that men might be tempted to say, God has forsaken His own. On the contrary—so strophe v. begins—God's own will and pleasure have been in this tragedy: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him." The line as it thus stands in our English version has a grim, repulsive sound. But the Hebrew word has no necessary meaning of pleasure or enjoyment. All it says is, God so willed it. His purpose was in this tragedy. *Deus vult!* It is the one message which can render any pain tolerable or light up with meaning a mystery so cruel as this: "The Lord" Himself "had purposed to bruise" His Servant, "the Lord Himself had laid on him sickness" (the figure of disease is resumed).

God's purpose in putting the Servant to death is explained in the rest of the verse. It was in order that "through his soul making a guilt-offering, he might see a seed, prolong his days, and that the pleasure of the Lord might prosper by his hand."

What is a guilt-offering? The term originally meant guilt, and is so used by a prophet contemporary to our own.† In the legislation, however, both in the Pentateuch and in Ezekiel, it is applied to legal and sacrificial forms of restitution or reparation for guilt. It is only named in Ezekiel along with other sacrifices.‡ Both Numbers and Leviticus define it, but define it differently. In Numbers (v. 7, 8) it is the

payment, which a transgressor has to make to the human person offended, of the amount to which he has harmed that person's property: it is what we call damages. But in Leviticus it is the ram, exacted over and above damages to the injured party (v. 14-16; vi. 1-7), or in cases where no damages were asked for (v. 17-19), by the priest, the representative of God, for satisfaction to His law; and it was required even where the offender had been an unwitting one. By this guilt-offering "the priest made atonement" for the sinner and "he was forgiven." It was for this purpose of reparation to the Deity that the plagued Philistines sent a guilt-offering back with the ark of Jehovah, which they had stolen.* But there is another historical passage, which though the term "guilt-offering" is not used in it, admirably illustrates the idea.† A famine in David's time was revealed to be due to the murder of certain Gibeonites by the house of Saul. David asked the Gibeonites what reparation he could make. They said it was not a matter of damages. But both parties felt that before the law of God could be satisfied and the land relieved of its curse, some atonement, some guilt-offering, must be made to the Divine Law. It was a wild kind of satisfaction that was paid. Seven men of Saul's house were hung up before the Lord in Gibeon. But the instinct, though satisfied in so murderous a fashion, was a true and a grand instinct,—the conscience of a law above all human laws and rights, to which homage must be paid before the sinner could come into true relations with God, or the Divine curse be lifted off.

It is in this sense that the word is used of the Servant of Jehovah, the Ideal, Representative Sufferer. Innocent as he is, he gives his life as satisfaction to the Divine law for the guilt of his people. His death was no mere martyrdom or miscarriage of human justice: in God's intent and purpose, but also by its own voluntary offering, it was an expiatory sacrifice.‡ By his death the Servant did homage to the law of God. By dying for it He made men feel that the supreme end of man was to own that law and be in a right relation to it, and that the supreme service was to help others to a right relation. As it is said a little farther down, "My Servant, righteous himself, wins righteousness for many, and makes their iniquities his load."

It surely cannot be difficult for any one, who knows what sin is, and what a part vicarious suffering plays both in the bearing of the sin and in the redemption of the sinner, to perceive that at this point the Servant's service for God and man reaches its crown. Compare his death and its sad meaning, with the brilliant energies of his earlier career. It is a heavy and an honourable thing to come from God to men, laden with God's truth for your charge and responsibility; but it is a far heavier to stoop and take upon your heart as your business and burden men's suffering and sin. It is a needful and a lovely thing to assist the feeble aspirations of men, to put yourself on the side of whatever in

* If we remember this we shall also feel more reason than ever against perceiving the Nation, or any aspect of the Nation, in the Sufferer of ch. liii. For he suffers as the individual suffers, sickness and legal wrong. Tyrants do not put whole nations through a form of law and judgment. Of course, it is open to those who hold that the Servant is still an aspect of the Nation to reply that all this is simply evidence of how far the prophet has pushed his personification. A whole nation has been called "The Sick Man" even in our prosaic days. But see pp. 797-798.

† Jer. li. 4.

‡ xl. 39; xlii. 13; xliv. 29; xlv. 20.

* 1 Sam. vi. 13.

† Cf. Wellhausen's "Prolegomena," ch. ii. 2.

‡ There is no exegete but agrees to this. There may be differences of opinion about the syntax,—whether the verse should run, *though Thou makest his soul guilt* or *a guilt-offering*; or, *though his soul make a guilt-offering*; or (reading ישי for תשי), *while he makes his soul a guilt-offering*,—but all agree to the fact that by himself or by God the Servant's life is offered an expiation for sin, a satisfaction to the law of God.

them is upward and living,—to be the shelter, as the Servant was, of the bruised reed and the fading wick; but it is more indispensable, and it is infinitely heavier, to seek to lift the deadness of men, to take their guilt upon your heart, to attempt to rouse them to it, to attempt to deliver them from it. It is a useful and a glorious thing to establish order and justice among men, to create a social conscience, to inspire the exercise of love and the habits of service, and this the Servant did when “he set Law on the Earth, and the Isles waited for his teaching;” but after all man’s supreme and controlling relation is his relation to God, and to this their “righteousness” the Servant restored guilty men by his death.

And so it was at this point, according to our prophecy, that the Servant, though brought so low, was nearest his exaltation: though in death, yet nearest life, nearest the highest kind of life, “the seeing of a seed,” the finding of himself in others; though despised, rejected, and forgotten of men, most certain of finding a place among the great and notable forces of life,—“therefore do I divide him a share with the great, and the spoil he shall share with the strong.” Not because as a prophet he was a sharp sword in the hand of the Lord, or a light flashing to the ends of the earth, but in that—as the prophecy concludes, and it is the prophet’s last and highest word concerning him—in that “he bare the sin of the many, and interposed for the transgressors.”

We have seen that the most striking thing about this prophecy is the spectral appearance of the Servant. He haunts, rather than is present in, the chapter. We hear of him, but he himself does not speak. We see faces that he startles, lips that the sight of him shuts, lips that the memory of him, after he has passed in silence, opens to bitter confession of neglect and misunderstanding; but himself we see not. His aspect and his bearing, his work for God and his influence on men, are shown to us, through the recollection and conscience of the speakers, with a vividness and a truth that draw the consciences of us who hear into the current of the confession, and take our hearts captive. But when we ask, Who was he then? What was his name among men? Where shall we find himself? Has he come, or do you still look for him?—neither the speakers, whose conscience he so smote, nor God, whose chief purpose he was, give us here any answer. In some verses he and his work seem already to have happened upon earth, but again we are made to feel that he is still future to the prophet, and that the voices, which the prophet quotes as speaking of having seen him and found him to be the Saviour, are voices of a day not yet born while the prophet writes.

But about five hundred and fifty years after this prophecy was written, a Man came forward among the sons of men,—among this very nation from whom the prophecy had arisen; and in every essential of consciousness and of experience He was the counterpart, embodiment, and fulfilment of this Suffering Servant and his Service. Jesus Christ answers the questions which the prophecy raises and leaves unanswered. In the prophecy we see one who is only a spectre, a dream, a conscience without a voice, without a name, without a place in history. But in Jesus Christ of Nazareth the dream becomes a reality;

He, whom we have seen in this chapter only as the purpose of God, only through the eyes and consciences of a generation yet unborn,—He comes forward in flesh and blood; He speaks, He explains Himself, He accomplishes almost to the last detail the work, the patience, and the death that are here described as Ideal and Representative.

The correspondence of details between Christ’s life and this prophecy, published five hundred and fifty years before He came, is striking; if we encountered it for the first time, it would be more than striking, it would be staggering. But do not let us do what so many have done—so fondly exaggerate it as to lose in the details of external resemblance the moral and spiritual identity.

For the external correspondence between this prophecy and the life of Jesus Christ is by no means perfect. Every wound that is set down in the fifty-third of Isaiah was not reproduced or fulfilled in the sufferings of Jesus. For instance, Christ was not the sick, plague-stricken man whom the Servant is at first represented to be. The English translators have masked the leprous figure, that stands out so clearly in the original Hebrew,—for “acquainted with grief, bearing our griefs, put him to grief,” we should in each case read “sickness.” Now Christ was no Job. As Matthew points out, the only way He could be said “to bear our sicknesses and to carry our pains” was by healing them, not by sharing them.

And again, exactly as the judicial murder of the Servant, and the entire absence from his contemporaries of any idea that he suffered a vicarious death, suit the case of Christ, the next stage in the Servant’s fate was not true of the Victim of Pilate and the Pharisees. Christ’s grave was not with the wicked. He suffered as a felon without the walls on the common place of execution, but friends received the body and gave it an honourable burial in a friend’s grave. Or take the clause, “with the rich in his death.” It is doubtful whether the word is really “rich,” and ought not to be a closer synonym of “wicked” in the previous clause; but if it be “rich,” it is simply another name for “the wicked,” who in the East, in cases of miscarried justice, are so often coupled with the evil-doers. It cannot possibly denote such a man as Joseph of Arimathea; nor, is it to be observed, do the Evangelists in describing Christ’s burial in that rich and pious man’s tomb take any notice of this line about the Suffering Servant.

But the absence of a complete incidental correspondence only renders more striking the moral and spiritual correspondence, the essential likeness between the Service set forth in chap. liii. and the work of our Lord.

The speakers of chap. liii. set the Servant over against themselves, and in solitariness of character and office. They count him alone sinless where all they have sinned, and him alone the agent of salvation and healing where their whole duty is to look on and believe. But this is precisely the relation which Christ assumed between Himself and the nation. He was on one side, all they on the other. Against their strong effort to make Him the First among them, it was, as we have said before, the constant aim of our Lord to assert and to explain Himself as The Only.

And this Onliness was to be realised in suffering. He said, "I must suffer;" or again, "It behoves the Christ to suffer." Suffering is the experience in which men feel their oneness with their kind. Christ, too, by suffering felt His oneness with men; but largely in order to assert a singularity beyond. Through suffering He became like unto men, but only that He might effect through suffering a lonely and a singular service for them. For though He suffered in all points as men did, yet He shared none of their universal feelings about suffering. Pain never drew from Him either of those two voices of guilt or of doubt. Pain never reminded Christ of His own past, nor made Him question God.

Nor did He seek pain for any end in itself. There have been men who have done so; fanatics who have gloried in pain; superstitious minds that have fancied it to be meritorious; men whose wounds have been as mouths to feed their pride, or to publish their fidelity to their cause. But our Lord shrank from pain; if it had been possible He would have willed not to bear it: "Father, save Me from this hour; Father, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from Me." And when He submitted and was under the agony, it was not in the feeling of it, nor in the impression it made on others, nor in the manner in which it drew men's hearts to Him, nor in the seal it set on the truth, but in something beyond it, that He found His end and satisfaction. Jesus "looked out of the travail of His soul and was satisfied."

For, *firstly*, He knew His pain to be God's will for and outside Himself,—“I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished: Father, save Me from this hour, yet for this cause came I to this hour: Father, Thy will be done,”—and all opportunities to escape as temptations.

And, *secondly*, like the Servant, Jesus "dealt prudently, had insight." The will of God in His suffering was no mystery to Him. He understood from the first why He was to suffer.*

The reasons He gave were the same two and in the same order as are given by our prophet for the sufferings of the Servant,—first, that fidelity to God's truth could bring with it no other fate in Israel;† then that His death was necessary for the sins of men, and as men's ransom from sin. In giving the first of these reasons for His death, Christ likened Himself to the prophets who had gone before Him in Jerusalem; but in the second He matched Himself with no other, and no other has ever been known in this to match himself with Jesus.

When men, then, stand up and tell us that Christ suffered only for the sake of sympathy with His kind, or only for loyalty to the truth, we have to tell them that this was not the whole of Christ's own consciousness, this was not the whole of Christ's own explanation. Suffering, which leads men into the sense of oneness with their kind, only made Him, as it grew the nearer and weighed the heavier, more emphatic upon His difference from other men. If He Himself, by His pity, by His labours of healing (as Matthew points out), and by all His intercourse with His people, penetrated more deeply into

the participation of human suffering, the very days which marked with increasing force His sympathy with men, only laid more bare their want of sympathy with Him, their incapacity to follow into that unique conscience and understanding of a Passion, which He bore not only "with," but, as He said, "for" His brethren. "Who believed that which we heard, and to whom was the arm of the Lord revealed? As to His generation, who reflected . . . that for the transgression of my people He was stricken?" Again, while Christ indeed brought truth to earth from heaven, and was for truth's sake condemned by men to die, the burden which He found waiting Him on earth, man's sin, was ever felt by Him to be a heavier burden and responsibility than the delivery of the truth; and was in fact the thing, which, apart from the things for which men might put Him to death, remained the reason of His death in His own sight and in that of His Father. And He told men why He felt their sin to be so heavy, because it kept them so far from God, and this was His purpose, He said, in bearing it—that He might bring us back to God; not primarily that He might relieve us of the suffering which followed sin, though He did so relieve some when He pardoned them, but that He might restore us to right relations with God,—might, like the Servant, "make many righteous." Now it was Christ's confidence to be able to do this, which distinguished Him from all others, upon whom has most heavily fallen the conscience of their people's sins, and who have most keenly felt the duty and commission from God of vicarious suffering. If, like Moses, one sometimes dared for love's sake to offer his life for the life of his people, none, under the conscience and pain of their people's sins, ever expressed any consciousness of thereby making their brethren righteous. On the contrary, even a Jeremiah, whose experience, as we have seen, comes so wonderfully near the picture of the Representative Sufferer in chap. liii.,—even a Jeremiah feels, with the increase of his vicarious pain and conscience of guilt, only the more perplexed, only the deeper in despair, only the less able to understand God and the less hopeful to prevail with Him. But Christ was sure of His power to remove men's sins, and was never more emphatic about that power than when He most felt those sins' weight.

And "He has seen His seed;" He "has made many righteous." We found it to be uncertain whether the penitent speakers in chap. liii. understood that the Servant by coming under the physical sufferings, which were the consequences of their sins, relieved them of these consequences; other passages in the prophecy would seem to imply that, while the Servant's sufferings were alone valid for righteousness, they did not relieve the rest of the nation from suffering too. And so it would be going beyond what God has given us to know, if we said that God counts the sufferings on the Cross, which were endured for our sins, as an equivalent for, or as sufficient to do away with, the sufferings which these sins bring upon our minds, our bodies, and our social relations. Substitution of this kind is neither affirmed by the penitents who speak in the fifty-third of Isaiah, nor is it an invariable or essential part of the experience of those who have found forgiveness through Christ. Every day penitents turn to God through Christ, and

* Cf. Baldensperger ("Das Selbstbewusstsein Jesu," p. 119 ff.) on the genuineness of Christ's predictions and explanations of His sufferings.

† Cf. p. 812.

are assured of forgiveness, who feel no abatement in the rigour of the retribution of those laws of God, which they have offended; like David after his forgiveness, they have to continue to bear the consequences of their sins. But dark as this side of experience undoubtedly is, only the more conspicuously against the darkness does the other side of experience shine. By "believing what they have heard," reaching this belief through a quicker conscience and a closer study of Christ's words about His death, men, upon whom conscience by itself and sore punishment have worked in vain, have been struck into penitence, have been assured of pardon, have been brought into right relations with God, have felt all the melting and the bracing effects of the knowledge that another has suffered in their stead. Nay, let us consider this—the physical consequences of their sins may have been left to be endured by such men, for no other reason than in order to make their new relation to God more sensible to them, while they feel those consequences no longer with the feeling of penalty, but with that of chastisement and discipline. Surely nothing could serve more strongly than this to reveal the new conscience towards God that has been worked within them. This inward "righteousness" is made more plain by the continuance of the physical and social consequences of their sins than it would have been had these consequences been removed.

Thus Christ, like the Servant, became a force in the world, inheriting in the course of Providence a "portion with the great" and "dividing the spoils" of history "with the strong." As has often been said, His Cross is His Throne, and it is by His death that He has ruled the ages. Yet we must not understand this as if His Power was only or mostly shown in binding men, by gratitude for the salvation He won them, to own Him for their King. His power has been even more conspicuously proved in making His fashion of service the most fruitful and the most honoured among men. If men have ceased to turn from sickness with aversion or from weakness with contempt; if they have learned to see in all pain some law of God, and in vicarious suffering God's most holy service; if patience and self-sacrifice have come in any way to be a habit of human life,—the power in this change has been Christ. But because these two—to say, "Thy will be done," and to sacrifice self—are for us men the hardest and the most unnatural of things to do, Jesus Christ, in making these a conscience and a habit upon earth, has indeed shown Himself able to divide the spoil with the strong, has indeed performed the very highest Service for Man of which man can conceive.

BOOK IV.

THE RESTORATION.

WE have now reached the summit of our prophecy. It has been a long, steep ascent, and we have had very much to seek out on the way, and to extricate and solve and load ourselves with. But although a long extent of the prophecy, if we measure it by chapters, still lies before us, the end is in sight; every difficulty has been surmounted which kept us from seeing how we were to get to it, and the rest of the way may be said to be down-hill.

To drop the figure—the Servant, his vicarious suffering and atonement for the sins of the people, form for our prophet the solution of the spiritual problem of the nation's restoration, and what he has now to do is but to fill in the details of this.

We saw that the problem of Israel's deliverance from Exile, their Return, and their Restoration to their position in their own land as the Chief Servant of God to humanity, was really a double problem—political and spiritual. The solution of the political side of it was Cyrus. As soon as the prophet had been able to make it certain that Cyrus was moving down upon Babylon, with a commission from God to take the city, and irresistible in the power with which Jehovah had invested him, the political difficulties in the way of Israel's Return were as good as removed; and so the prophet gave, in the end of chap. xlviii., his great call to his countrymen to depart. But all through chaps. xl.-xlviii., while addressing himself to the solution of the political problems of Israel's deliverance, the prophet had given hints that there were moral and spiritual difficulties as well. In spite of their punishment for more than half a century, the mass of the people were not worthy of a return. Many were idolaters; many were worldly; the orthodox had their own wrong views of how salvation should come (xlv. 9 ff.); the pious were without either light or faith (l. 10). The nation, in short, had not that inward "righteousness," which could alone justify God in vindicating them before the world, in establishing their outward righteousness, their salvation and reinstatement in their lofty place and calling as His people. These moral difficulties come upon the prophet with greater force after he has, with the close of chap. xlviii., finished his solution of the political ones. To these moral difficulties he addresses himself in xlix.-liii., and the Servant and his Service are his solution of them:—the Servant as a Prophet and a Covenant of the People in chap. xlix. and in chap. l. 4 ff.: the Servant as an example to the people, chap. l. ff.; and finally the Servant as a full expiation for the people's sins in chap. lii. 13-liii. It is the Servant who is to "raise up the land, and to bring back the heirs to the desolate heritages," and rouse the Israel who are not willing to leave Babylon, "saying to the bound, Go forth; and to them that sit in darkness, Show yourselves" (xlix. 8, 9). It is he who is "to sustain the weary" and to comfort the pious in Israel, who, though pious, have no light as they walk on their way back (l. 4, 10). It is the Servant finally who is to achieve the main problem of all and "make many righteous" (liii. 11). The hope of restoration, the certainty of the people's redemption, the certainty of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the certainty of the growth of the people to a great multitude, are, therefore, all woven by the prophet through and through with his studies of the Servant's work in xlix., l., and lii. 13-liii.,—woven so closely and so naturally that, as we have already seen (pp. 808 f., 813 ff.), we cannot take any part of chaps. xlix.-liii. and say that it is of different authorship from the rest. Thus in chap. xlix. we have the road to Jerusalem pictured in vv. 9b-13, immediately upon the back of the Servant's call to go forth in ver. 9a. We have then the assurance of Zion being rebuilt and thronged by her children in vv. 14-23, and another affirmation of the certainty of redemp-

tion in vv. 24-26. In l. 1-3 this is repeated. In li.-lii. 12 the petty people is assured that it shall grow innumerable again; new affirmations are made of its ransom and return, ending with the beautiful prospect of the feet of the heralds of deliverance on the mountains of Judah (lii. 7b) and a renewed call to leave Babylon (vv. 11, 12). We shall treat all these passages in our twenty-first chapter.

And as they started naturally from the Servant's work in xlix. 1-9a and his example in l. 4-11, so upon his final and crowning work in chap. liii. there follow as naturally chap. liv. (the prospect of *the seed* that liii. 10 promised he should see), and chap. lv. (a new call to come forth). These two, with the little pre-exilic prophecy, chap. lvi. 1-8, we shall treat in our twenty-second chapter.

Then come the series of difficult small prophecies with pre-exilic traces in them, from lvi. 9-lix. They will occupy our twenty-third chapter. In chap. lx. Zion is at last not only in sight, but radiant in the rising of her new day of glory. In chaps. lxi. and lxii. the prophet, having reached Zion, "looks back," as Dillmann well remarks, "upon what has become his task, and in connection with that makes clear once more the high goal of all his working and striving." In lxiii. 1-6 the Divine Deliver is hailed. We shall take lx.-lxiii. 6 together in our twenty-fourth chapter.

Chap. lxiii. 7-lxiv. is an Intercessory Prayer for the restoration of *all* Israel. It is answered in chap. lxxv., and the lesson of this answer, that Israel must be judged, and that all cannot be saved, is enforced in chap. lxxvi. Chaps. lxiii. 7-lxxvi. will therefore form our twenty-fifth and closing chapter.

Thus our course is clear, and we can overtake it rapidly. It is, to a large extent, a series of spectacles, interrupted by exhortations upon duty; things, in fact, to see and to hear, not to argue about. There are few great doctrinal questions, except what we have already sufficiently discussed; our study, for instance, of the term righteousness, we shall find has covered for us a large part of the ground in advance. And the only difficult literary question is that of the pre-exilic and post-exilic pieces, which are alleged to form so large a part of chaps. lvi-lix. and lxiii.-lxxvi.

CHAPTER XXI.

DOUBTS IN THE WAY.

ISAIAH xlix.-lii. 12.

CHAPTERS xlix.-liii. are, as we have seen, a series of more or less closely joined passages, in which the prophet, having already made the political redemption of Israel certain through Cyrus, and having dismissed Cyrus from his thoughts, addresses himself to various difficulties in the way of restoration, chiefly moral and spiritual, and rising from Israel's own feelings and character; exhorts the people in face of them by Jehovah's faithfulness and power; but finds the chief solution of them in the Servant and his prophetic and expiatory work. We have already studied such of these passages as present the Servant to us, and we now take up those others, which meet the doubts and difficulties in the way

of restoration by means of general considerations drawn from God's character and power. Let it be noticed that, with one exception (chap. l. 11),* these passages are meant for earnest and pious minds in Israel,—for those Israelites, whose desires are towards Zion, but chill and heavy with doubts.

The form and the terms of these passages are in harmony with their purpose. They are a series of short, high-pitched exhortations, apostrophes and lyrics. One, chap. lii. 9-12, calls upon the arm of Jehovah, but all the rest address Zion,—that is, the ideal people in the person of their mother, with whom they ever so fondly identified themselves; or "Zion's children;" or "them that follow righteousness," or ye "that know righteousness;" or "my people, my nation;" or again Zion herself. This personification of the people under the name of their city, and under the aspect of a woman, whose children are the individual members of the people, will be before us till the end of our prophecy. It is, of course, a personification of Israel, which is complementary to Israel's other personification under the name of the Servant. The Servant is Israel active, comforting, serving his own members and the nations; Zion, the Mother-City, is Israel passive, to be comforted, to be served by her own sons and by the kings of the peoples.

We may divide the passages into two groups. *First*, the songs of return, which rise out of the picture of the Servant and his redemption of the people in chap. xlix. 9b, with the long promise and exhortation to Zion and her children, that lasts till the second picture of the Servant in chap. lii. 4; and *second*, the short pieces which lie between the second picture of the Servant and the third, or from the beginning of chap. li. to chap. lii. 12.

I.

In chap. xlix. 9b God's promise of the return of the redeemed proceeds naturally from that of their ransom by the Servant. It is hailed by a song in ver. 13, and the rest of the section is the answer to three doubts, which, like sobs, interrupt the music. But the prophecy, stooping, as it were, to kiss the trembling lips through which these doubts break, immediately resumes its high flight of comfort and promise. Two of these doubts are: ver. 14, "But Zion hath said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me;" and ver. 24, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty or the captives of the terrible be delivered?" The third is implied in chap. l. 1.

The promise of return is as follows: "On roads shall they feed, and on all bare heights shall be their pasture. They shall not hunger nor thirst, nor shall the mirage nor the sun smite them: for He that yearneth over them shall lead them, even by springs of water shall He guide them. And I will set all My mountains for a way, and My high ways shall be exalted. Lo, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the North and from the West, and these from the land of Sinim.† Sing forth, O heavens; and be glad,

* See p. 813.

† The question whether this is the land of China is still an open one. The possibility of intercourse between China and Babylon is more than proved. But that there were Jews in China by this time (though they seem to have found their way there by the beginning of the Christian era) is extremely unlikely. Moreover, the possi-

O earth; let the mountains break forth into singing: for Jehovah hath comforted His people, and over His afflicted He yearneth."

Now, do not let us imagine that this is the promise of a merely material miracle. It is the greater glory of a purely spiritual one, as the prophet indicates in describing its cause in the words, "because He that yearneth over them shall lead them." The desert is not to abate its immemorial rigours; in itself the way shall still be as hard as when the discredited and heart-broken exiles were driven down it from home to servitude. But their hearts are now changed, and that shall change the road. The new faith, which has made the difference, is a very simple one, that God is Power and that God is Love. Notice the possessive pronouns used by God, and mark what they put into His possession: two kinds of things,—powerful things, "I will make all My mountains a way;" and sorrowful things, "Jehovah hath comforted His people, and will have compassion on His afflicted."* If we will steadfastly believe that everything in the world which is in pain, and everything which has power, is God's, and shall be used by Him, the one for the sake of the other, this shall surely change the way to our feet, and all the world around to our eyes.

1. Only it is so impossible to believe it when one looks at real fact; and however far and swiftly faith and hope may carry us for a time, we always come to ground again and face to face with fact. The prophet's imagination speeding along that green and lifted highway of the Lord lights suddenly upon the end of it,—the still dismantled and desolate city. Fifty years Zion's altar fires have been cold and her walls in ruin. Fifty years she has been bereaved of her children and left alone. The prophet hears the winds blow mournfully through her fact's chill answer to faith. "But Zion said, Forsaken me hath Jehovah, and my Lord hath forgotten me!" Now let us remember that our prophet has Zion before him in the figure of a mother, and we shall feel the force of God's reply. It is to a mother's heart God appeals. "Doth a woman forget her sucking child so as not to yearn over the son of her womb? yea, such may forget, but I will not forget thee," desolate mother that thou art!† Thy life is not what thou art in outward show and feeling, but what thou art in My love and in My sight. "Lo, upon both palms have I graven thee; thy walls are before Me continually." The custom, which to some extent prevails in all nations, of puncturing or tattooing upon the skin a dear name one wishes to keep in mind, is followed in the East chiefly for religious purposes, and men engrave the name of God or some holy text upon the hand or arm for a memorial or as a mark of consecration. It is this fashion which God attributes to Himself. Having measured His love by the love of a mother, He gives this second human pledge for His memory and devotion. But again He ex-

ceeds the human habit; for it is not only the name of Zion which is engraved on His hands, but her picture. And it is not her picture, as she lies in her present ruin and solitariness, but her restored and perfect state: "thy walls are continually before Me." For this is faith's answer to all the ruin and haggard contradiction of outward fact. Reality is not what we see: reality is what God sees. What a thing is in His sight and to His purpose, that it really is, and that it shall ultimately appear to men's eyes. To make us believe this is the greatest service the Divine can do for the human. It was the service Christ was always doing, and nothing showed His divinity more. He took us men and He called us, unworthy as we were, His brethren, the sons of God. He took such an one as Simon, shifting and unstable, a quicksand of a man, and He said, "On this rock I will build My Church." A man's reality is not what he is in his own feelings, or what he is to the world's eyes; but what he is to God's love, to God's yearning, and in God's plan. If he believe that, so in the end shall he feel it, so in the end shall he show it to the eyes of the world.

Upon those great thoughts, that God's are all strong things and all weak things, and that the real and the certain in life are His will, the prophecy breaks into a vision of multitudes in motion. There are a great stirring and hastening, crowds gather up through the verses, the land is lifted and thronged. "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all of them gather together, they come unto thee. As I live, saith Jehovah, thou shalt surely clothe thyself with them all as with an ornament, and gird thyself with them, like a bride. For as for thy waste places and thy desolate ones and thy devastated land—yea, thou wilt now be too strait for the inhabitants, and far off shall be they that devour thee. Again shall they speak in thine ears,—the children of thy bereavement" (that is, those children who have been born away from Zion during her solitude), "Too strait for me is the place, make me room that I may dwell. And thou shalt say in thine heart, Who hath borne me these,"—not begotten, as our English version renders, because the question with Zion was not who was the father of the children, but who, in her own barrenness, could possibly be the mother,—"Who hath borne me these, seeing I was" first "bereft of my children, and" since then have been "barren, an exile and a castaway! And these, who hath brought them up! Lo, I was left by myself. These,—whence are they!" Our English version, which has blundered in the preceding verses, requires no correction in the following; and the first great Doubt in the Way being now answered, for "they that wait on the Lord shall not be ashamed," we pass to the second, in ver. 24.

2. "Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the tyrant* be delivered?" Even though God be full of love and thought for

bility of such a name as Sinim for the inhabitants of China at that date has not been proved. No other claimants for the name, however, have made good their case. But we need not enter further into the question. The whole matter is fully discussed in Canon Cheyne's excursus, and by him and Terrien de Lacouperie in the *Babylonian and Oriental Record* for 1886-87. See especially the number for September, 1887.

* His *humbled, His poor* in the exilic sense of the word. See "Isaiah, i.-xxxix." pp. 432 ff.

† On the "Motherhood of God" cf. "Isaiah, i.-xxxix." p. 245 ff.

* For צַדִּיק, the *righteous* or *just*, which is in the text, the Syr., Vulg., Ewald, and others read עַרְיִן, as in the following verse, *terrible* or *terribly strong*. Dillmann, however (5th ed., 1890, p. 438), retains צַדִּיק takes the terms *mighty* and *just* as used of God, and reads the question, not as a question of despair uttered by the people, but as a triumphant challenge of the prophet or of God Himself. He would then make the next verse run thus: *Nay, for the captives of the mighty may be taken, and the prey of the delivered, but with him who strives with thee I will strive.*

Zion, will these tyrants give up her children? "Yea, thus saith Jehovah, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be delivered; and with him that quarreleth with thee will I quarrel, and thy children will I save. And I will make thine oppressors to eat their own flesh, and as with new wine with their blood shall they be drunken, that all flesh may know that I am Jehovah thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer the Mighty One of Jacob."

3. But now a third Doubt in the Way seems to have risen. Unlike the two others, it is not directly stated, but we may gather its substance from the reply which Jehovah makes to it (l. 1). "Thus saith Jehovah, What is this bill of divorce of your mother whom I have sent away, or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you?" The form, in which this challenge is put, assumes that the Israelites themselves had been thinking of Jehovah's dismissal of Israel as an irrevocable divorce and a bankrupt sale into slavery.*

"What now is this letter of divorce,—this that you are saying I have given your mother? You say that I have sold you as a bankrupt father sells his children,—to which then of my creditors is it that I have sold you?"

The most characteristic effect of sin is that it is always reminding men of law. Whether the moral habit of it be upon them or they are entangled in its material consequences, sin breeds in men the conscience of inexorable, irrevocable law. Its effect is not only practical, but intellectual. Sin not only robs a man of the freedom of his own will, but it takes from him the power to think of freedom in others, and it does not stop till it paralyses his belief in the freedom of God. He, who knows himself as the creature of unchangeable habits or as the victim of pitiless laws, cannot help imputing his own experience to what is beyond him, till all life seems strictly lawbound, the idea of a free agent anywhere an impossibility, and God but a part of the necessity which rules the universe.

Two kinds of generations of men have most tended to be necessitarian in their philosophy,—the generations which have given themselves over to do evil, and the generations whose political experience or whose science has impressed them with the inevitable physical results of sin. If belief in a Divine Redeemer, able to deliver man's nature from the guilt and the curse of sin, is growing weak among us to-day, this is largely due to the fact that our moral and our physical sciences have been proving to us what creatures of law we are, and disclosing, especially in the study of disease and insanity, how inevitably suffering follows sin. God Himself has been so much revealed to us as law, that as a generation we find it hard to believe that He ever acts in any fashion that resembles the reversal of a law, or ever works any swift, sudden deed of salvation.

Now the generation of the Exile was a generation, to whom God had revealed Himself as law. They were a generation of convicts. They had owned the justice of the sentence which had banished and enslaved them; they had experienced how inexorably God's processes of judgment sweep down the ages; for fifty years

they had been feeling the inevitable consequences of sin. The conscience of Law, which this experience was bound to create in them, grew ever more strong, till at last it absorbed even the hope of redemption, and the God who enforced the Law Himself seemed to be forced by it. To express this sense of law these earnest Israelites—for though in error they were in earnest—went to the only kind of law with which they were familiar, and borrowed from it two of its forms, which were not only suggested to them by the relations in which the nation and the nation's sons respectively stood to Jehovah, as wife and as children, but admirably illustrated the ideas they wished to express. There was, first, the form of divorce, so expressive of the ideas of absoluteness, deliberateness, and finality;—of absoluteness, for throughout the East power of divorce rests entirely with the husband; of deliberateness, for in order to prevent hasty divorce the Hebrew law insisted that the husband must make a bill or writing of divorce instead of only speaking dismissal; and of finality, for such a writing, in contrast to the spoken dismissal, set the divorce beyond recall. The other form, which the doubters borrowed from their law, was one which, while it also illustrated the irrevocableness of the act, emphasised the helplessness of the agent,—the act of the father, who put his children away, not as the husband put his wife in his anger, but in his necessity, selling them to pay his debts and because he was bankrupt.

On such doubts God turns with their own language. "I have indeed put your mother away, but 'where is the bill' that makes her divorce final, beyond recall? You indeed were sold, but was it because I was bankrupt? 'To which,' then, 'of My creditors (not the scorn of the plural) was it that I sold you? Nay, by means of your iniquities did you sell yourselves, and by means of your transgressions were you put away.' But I stand here ready as ever to save, I alone. If there is any difficulty about your restoration it lies in this, that I am alone, with no response or assistance from men. 'Why when I came was there no man? when I called was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? or is there in it no power to deliver?'" And so we come back to the truth, which this prophecy so often presents to us, that behind all things there is a personal initiative and urgency of infinite power, which moves freely of its own compassion and force, which is hindered by no laws from its own ends, and needs no man's co-operation to effect its purposes. The rest of the Lord's answer to His people's fear, that He is bound by an inexorable law, is simply an appeal to His wealth of force. This omnipotence of God is our prophet's constant solution for the problems which arise, and he expresses it here in his favourite figures of physical changes and convulsions of nature. "Lo, with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and sackcloth I set for their covering." The argument seems to be: if God can work those sudden revolutions in the physical world, those apparent interruptions of law in that sphere, surely you can believe Him capable of creating sudden revolutions also in the sphere of history, and reversing those laws and proc-

* The English version *Where is the bill*, is incorrect. The phrase is the same as in lxvi. ver. 1, *What is this house that ye build for Me? what is this place for My rest?* It implies a house already built; and so in the text above *What is this bill of divorce* implies one already thought of by the minds of the persons addressed by the question.

esses, which you feel to be unalterable. It is an argument from the physical to the moral world, in our prophet's own analogical style, and like those we found in ch. xl.

II. li.-lii. 12.

Passing over the passage on the Servant, ch. l. 4-II, we reach a second series of exhortations in face of Doubts in the Way of the Return. The first of this new series is li. 1-3.

Their doubts having been answered with regard to God's mindfulness of them and His power to save them, the loyal Israelites fall back to doubt themselves. They see with dismay how few are ready to achieve the freedom that God has assured, and upon how small and insignificant a group of individuals the future of the nation depends. But their disappointment is not made by them an excuse to desert the purpose of Jehovah: their fewness makes them the more faithful, and the defection of their countrymen drives them the closer to their God. Therefore, God speaks to them kindly, and answers their last sad doubt. "Hearken unto Me, ye that follow righteousness, that seek Jehovah." "Righteousness" here might be taken in its inward sense of conformity to law, personal righteousness of character; and so taken it would well fall in with the rest of the passage. Those addressed would then be such in Israel, as in face of hopeless prospects applied themselves to virtue and religion. But "righteousness" here is more probably used in the outward sense, which we have found prevalent in "Second Isaiah," of vindication and victory; the "coming right" of God's people and God's cause in the world, their justification and triumph in history.* They who are addressed will then be they who, in spite of their fewness, believe in this triumph, "follow it," make it their goal and their aim, and "seek Jehovah," knowing that He can bring it to pass. And because, in spite of their doubts, they are still earnest, and though faint are yet pursuing, God speaks to comfort them about their fewness. Their present state may be very small and unpromising, but let them look back upon the much more unpromising character of their origin: "look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye were digged." To-day you may be a mere handful, ridiculous in the light of the destiny you were called to achieve, but remember you were once but one man: "look unto Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bare you: for as one I called him and blessed him, that I might make of him many."

When we are weary and hopeless it is best to sit down and remember. Is the future dark: let us look back and see the gathering and impetus of the past! We can follow the luminous track, the unmistakable increase and progress, but the most inspiring sight of all is what God makes of the individual heart; how a man's heart is always His beginning, the fountain of the future, the origin of nations. Lift up your

hearts, ye few and feeble; your father was but one when I called him, and I made him many!

Having thus assured His loyal remnant of the restoration of Zion, in spite of their fewness, Jehovah in the next few verses (4-8) extends the prospect of His glory to the world: "Revelation shall go forth from Me, and I will make My law to light on the nations." Revelation and Law between them summarise His will. As He identified them both with the Servant's work (ch. xl. 11), so here He tells the loyal in Israel, who were in one aspect His Servant, that they shall surely come to pass; and in the next little oracle, vv. 7, 8, He exhorts them to do that in which the Servant has been set forth as an example: "fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be dismayed at their revilings. For like a garment the moth shall eat them up, and like wool shall the worm devour them." It is a response in almost the same words to the Servant's profession of confidence in God in ch. l. 7-9. By some it is used as an argument to show that the Servant and the godly remnant are to our prophet still virtually one and the same; but we have already seen (ch. l. 10) the godfearing addressed as distinct from the Servant, and can only understand here that they are once more exhorted to take him as their example. But if the likeness of the passage on the Servant to this passage on the suffering Remnant does not prove that Remnant and Servant are the same, it is certainly an indication that both passages, so far from being pieced together out of different poems, are most probably due to the same author and were produced originally in the same current of thought.

When all Doubts in the Way have now been removed, what can remain but a great impatience to achieve at once the near salvation? To this impatience the loosened hearts give voice in vv. 9-11: "Awake, awake, put on strength, Arm of Jehovah; awake as in the days of old, ages far past!" Not in vain have Israel been called to look back to the rock whence they were hewn and the hole of the pit whence they were digged. Looking back, they see the ancient deliverance manifest: "Art thou not it that hewed Rahab in pieces, that pierced the Dragon! Art thou not it that dried up the sea, waters of the great flood; that did set the hollows of the sea a way for the passage of the redeemed." Then there breaks forth the march of the Return, which we heard already in the end of ch. xxxv,* and to His people's impatience Jehovah responds in vv. 9-16 in strains similar to those of ch. xl. The last verse of this reply is notable for the enormous extension which it gives to the purpose of Jehovah in endowing Israel as His prophet,—an extension to no less than the renewal of the universe,—"in order to plant the heavens and found the earth;" though the reply emphatically concludes with the restoration of Israel, as if this were the cardinal moment in the universal regeneration,—"and to say to Zion, My people art thou." The close conjunction, into which this verse brings words already applied to Israel as the Servant and words which describe Israel as Zion, is another of the many proofs we are discovering of the impossibility of breaking up "Second Isaiah" into poems, the respective subjects of which are one or other of these two personifications of the nation.†

But the desire of the prophet speeds on before

* Cf. p. 785. Dillmann's view that *righteousness* means here personal character is contradicted by the whole context, which makes it plain that it is something external, the realisation of which those addressed are doubting. What troubles them is not that they are personally unrighteous, but that they are so few and insignificant. And what God promises them in answer is something external, the establishment of Zion. Cf. also the external meaning of *righteousness* in vv. 5, 6.

* "Isaiah, i-xxxix.," p. 441.

† Cf. p. 808.

the returning exiles to the still prostrate and desolate city. He sees her as she fell, the day the Lord made her drunken with the cup of His wrath. With urgent passion he bids her awake, seeking to rouse her now by the horrid tale of her ruin, and now by his exultation in the vengeance the Lord is preparing for His enemies (li. 17-23). In a second strophe he addresses her in conscious contrast to his taunting against Babel. Babel was to sit throneless and stripped of her splendour in the dust; but Zion is to shake off the dust, rise, sit on her throne and assume her majesty. For God hath redeemed His people. He could not tolerate longer "the exulting of their tyrants, the blasphemy of His name" (lii. 1-6). All through these two strophes the strength of the passion, the intolerance of further captivity, the fierceness of the exultation of vengeance, are very remarkable.

But from the ruin of his city, which has so stirred and made turbulent his passion, the prophet lifts his hot eyes to the dear hills that encircle her; and peace takes the music from vengeance. Often has Jerusalem seen rising across that high margin the spears and banners of her destroyers. But now the lofty skyline is the lighting place of hope. Fit threshold for so Divine an arrival, it lifts against heaven, dilated and beautiful, the herald of the Lord's peace, the publisher of salvation.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation! Hark thy watchmen! they lift up the voice, together they break into singing; yea, eye to eye do they see when Jehovah returneth to Zion."

The last verse is a picture of the thronging of the city of the prophets by the prophets again—so close that they shall look each other in the face. For this is the sense of the Hebrew "to see eye to eye," and not that meaning of reconciliation and agreement which the phrase has come to have in colloquial English. The Exile had scattered the prophets and driven them into hiding. They had been only voices to one another, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel with the desert between the two of them, or like our own prophet, anonymous and unseen. But upon the old gathering-ground, the narrow but the free and open platform of Jerusalem's public life, they should see each other face to face, they should again be named and known. "Break out, sing together, ye wastes of Jerusalem: for Jehovah has comforted His people, has redeemed Jerusalem. Bared has Jehovah His holy arm to the eyes of all the nations, and see shall all ends of the earth the salvation of our God."

Thus the prophet, after finishing his long argument and dispelling the doubts that still lingered at its close, returns to the first high notes and the first dear subject with which he opened in ch. xl. In face of so open a way, so unclouded a prospect, nothing remains but to repeat, and this time with greater strength than before, the call to leave Babylon:

Draw off, draw off, come forth from there, touch not the
unclean;
Come forth from her midst; be ye clean that do bear the
vessels of Jehovah.
Nay, neither with haste shall ye forth, nor in flight shall
ye go,
For Jehovah goeth before thee, and Israel's God is thy
rearward.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE EVE OF RETURN.

ISAIAH liv.-lvi. 8.

ONE of the difficult problems of our prophecy is the relation and grouping of chs. liv.-lix. It is among them that the unity of "Second Isaiah," which up to this point we have seen no reason to doubt, gives way. Ch. lvi. 9-lvii. is evidently pre-exilic, and so is ch. lix. But in chs. liv., lv., and lvi. 1-8 we have three addresses, evidently dating from the Eve of the Return. We shall, therefore, treat them together.

I. THE BRIDE THE CITY (ch. liv.).

We have already seen why there is no reason for the theory that ch. liv. may have followed immediately on ch. lii. 12.* And from Calvin to Ewald and Dillmann, critics have all felt a close connection between ch. lii. 13-liii. and ch. liv. "After having spoken of the death of Christ," says Calvin, "the prophet passes on with good reason to the Church: that we may feel more deeply in ourselves what is the value and efficacy of His death." Similar in substance, if not in language, is the opinion of the latest critics, who understand that in ch. liv. the prophet intends to picture that full redemption which the Servant's work, culminating in ch. liii., could alone effect. Two key-words of ch. liii. had been "a seed" and "many." It is "the seed" and the "many" whom ch. liv. reveals. Again, there may be, in ver. 17 of ch. liv., a reference to the earlier picture of the Servant in ch. l., especially ver. 8. But this last is uncertain; and, as a point on the other side there are the two different meanings as well as the two different agents, of "righteousness" in ch. liii. 11, "My Servant shall make many righteous," and in ch. liv. 17, "their righteousness which is of Me, saith Jehovah." In the former, righteousness is the inward justification; in the latter, it is the external historical vindication.

In ch. liv. the people of God are represented under the double figure, with which the Book of Revelation has made us familiar, of Bride and City. To imagine a Nation or a Land as the spouse of her God is a habit natural to the religious instinct at all times; the land deriving her fruitfulness, the nation her standing and prestige, from her connection with the Deity. But in ancient times this figure of wedlock was more natural than it is among us, in so far as the human man and wife did not then occupy that relation of equality, to which it has been the progress of civilisation to approximate; but the husband was the lord of his wife,—as much her Baal as the god was the Baal of the people,—her law-giver, in part her owner, and with full authority over the origin and subsistence of the bond between them. Marriage thus conceived was a figure for religion almost universal among the Semites. But as in the case of so many other religious ideas common to the Hebrews and their heathen kin, this one, when adopted by the prophets of Jehovah, underwent a thorough moral reformation. Indeed, if one were asked to point out a supreme instance of the operation of that unique conscience of the re-

* Cf. p. 813.

ligion of Jehovah, which was spoken of before,* one would have little difficulty in selecting its treatment of the idea of religious marriage. By the neighbours of Israel, the marriage of a god to his people was conceived with a grossness of feeling and illustrated by a foulness of ritual, which thoroughly demoralised the people, affording, as they did, to licentiousness the example and sanction of religion. So debased had the idea become, and so full of temptation to the Hebrews were the forms in which it was illustrated among their neighbours, that the religion of Israel might justly have been praised for achieving a great moral victory in excluding the figure altogether from its system. But the prophets of Jehovah dared the heavier task of retaining the idea of religious marriage, and won the diviner triumph of purifying and elevating it. It was, indeed, a new creation. Every physical suggestion was banished, and the relation was conceived as purely moral. Yet it was never refined to a mere form or abstraction. The prophets fearlessly expressed it in the warmest and most familiar terms of the love of man and woman. With a stern and absolute interpretation before them in the Divine law, of the relations of a husband to his wife, they borrowed from that only so far as to do justice to the Almighty's initiative and authority in His relation with mortals; and they laid far more emphasis on the instinctive and spontaneous affections, by which Jehovah and Israel had been drawn together. Thus, among a people naturally averse to think or to speak of God as loving † men, this close relation to Him of marriage was expressed with a warmth, a tenderness, and a delicacy, that exceeded even the two other fond forms in which the Divine grace was conveyed,—of a father's and of a mother's love.

In this new creation of the marriage bond between God and His church, three prophets had a large share,—Hosea, Ezekiel, and the author of "Second Isaiah." To Hosea and Ezekiel it fell to speak chiefly of unpleasant aspects of the question,—the unfaithfulness of the wife and her divorce; but even then, the moral strength and purity of the Hebrew religion, its Divine vehemence and glow, were only the more evident for the unpromising character of the materials with which it dealt. To our prophet, on the contrary, it fell to speak of the winning back of the wife, and he has done so with wonderful delicacy and tenderness. Our prophet, it is true, has not one, but two, deep feelings about the love of God: it passes through him as the love of a mother, as well as the love of a husband. But while he lets us see the former only twice or thrice, the latter may be felt as the almost continual under-current of his prophecy, and often breaks to hearing, now in a sudden, single ripple of a phrase, and now in a long tide of marriage music. His lips open for Jehovah on the language of wooing,—“speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem;” and though his masculine figure for Israel as the Servant keeps his affection hidden for a time, this emerges again when the subject of Service is exhausted, till Israel, where she is not Jehovah's Servant,

is Jehovah's Bride. In the series of passages on Zion, from ch. xlix. to ch. lii., the City is the Mother of His children, the Wife who though put away has never been divorced. In ch. lxii. she is called Hephzi-Bah, My-delight-is-in-her, and Beulah, or Married,—“for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a youth marryeth a maiden, thy sons shall marry thee; and with the joy of a bridegroom over a bride, thy God shall joy over thee.”* But it is in the chapter now before us that the relation is expressed with greatest tenderness and wealth of affection. “Be not afraid, for thou shalt not be shamed; and be not confounded, for thou shalt not be put to the blush: for the shame of thy youth thou shalt forget, and the reproach of thy widowhood thou shalt not remember again. For thy Maker is thy Husband, Jehovah of Hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy of Israel, God of the whole earth is He called. For as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit thou art called of Jehovah, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In an egre of anger† I hid My face a moment from thee, but with grace everlasting will I have mercy upon thee, saith thy Redeemer Jehovah.”

In this eighth verse we pass from the figure of clear through flood and storm in ver. 11. “Af-the Bride to that of the City, which emerges flicted, Storm-beaten, Uncomforted, Lo, I am setting in dark metal” (*antimony*, used by women for painting round the eyes, so as to set forth their brilliance more) “thy stones,” (that they may shine from this setting like women's eyes,) “and I will found thee in sapphires:” as heaven's own foundation vault is blue, so shall the ground stones be of the new Jerusalem. “And I will set rubies for thy pinnacles, and thy gates shall be sparkling stones,‡ and all thy borders stones of delight,—stones of joy, jewels.” The rest of the chapter paints the righteousness of Zion as her external security and splendour.

II. A LAST CALL TO THE BUSY (ch. lv.).

The second address upon the Eve of Return is ch. lv. Its pure gospel and clear music render detailed exposition, except on a single point, superfluous. One can but stand and listen to those great calls to repentance and obedience, which issue from it. What can be added to them or said about them? Let one take heed rather to let them speak to one's own heart! A little exploration, however, will be of advantage among the circumstances from which they shoot.

The commercial character of the opening figures of ch. lv. arrests the attention. We saw that Babylon was the centre of the world's trade, and that it was in Babylon that the Jews first formed those mercantile habits, which have become, next to religion, or in place of religion, their national character. Born to be priests, the Jews drew down their splendid powers of attention, pertinacity, and imagination from God upon the world, till they equally appear to have

* See p. 791 ff.

† “Das eigentliche Wort ‘Liebe’ kommt im A. T. von Gott fast gar nicht vor,—und wo es, bei einem späten Schriftsteller, vorkommt, ist es Bezeichnung seiner besondern Bundes-liebe zu Israel, deren natürliche Kehrseite der Hass gegen die feindlichen Völker ist.”—Schultz, “A. T. Theologie,” 4th ed. p. 548.

* The reserve of this—the limitation of the relation to one of feeling—is remarkable in contrast to the more physical use of the same figure in other religions.

† *Egre*, or sudden rush of the tide, or spate, or freshet. The original is assonant: Besheseph qeseph.

‡ So literally; LXX. crystals, carbuncles, or diamonds.

been born traders. They laboured and prospered exceedingly, gathering property and settling in comfort. They drank of the streams of Babylon, no longer made bitter by their tears, and ceased to think upon Zion.

But, of all men, exiles can least forget that there is that which money can never buy. Money and his work can do much for the banished man,—feed him, clothe him, even make for him a kind of second home, and in time, by the payment of taxes, a kind of second citizenship; but they can never bring him to the true climate of his heart, nor win for him his real life. And of all exiles the Jew, however free and prosperous in his banishment he might be, was least able to find his life among the good things—the water, the wine, and the milk—of a strange country. For home to Israel meant not only home, but duty, righteousness, and God.* God had created the heart of this people to hunger for His word, and in His word they could alone find the “fatness of their soul.” Success and comfort shall never satisfy the soul which God has created for obedience. The simplicity of the obedience that is here asked from Israel, the emphasis that is laid upon mere obedience as ringing in full satisfaction, is impressive: “hearken diligently, and eat that which is good; incline your ear and come unto Me, hear and your soul shall live.” It suggests the number of plausible reasons, which may be offered for every worldly and material life, and to which there is no answer save the call of God’s own voice to obedience and surrender. To obedience God then promises influence. In place of being a mere trafficker with the nations, or, at best, their purveyor and money-lender, the Jew, if he obeys God, shall be the priest and prophet of the peoples. This is illustrated in vv. 4b-6, the only hard passage in the chapter. God will make His people like David; whether the historical David or the ideal David described by Jeremiah and Ezekiel is uncertain.† God will conclude an everlasting “covenant” with them, equivalent to the sure favours showered on him. As God set him for a witness (that is, a prophet) to “the peoples, a prince and a leader to the peoples,” so (in phrases that recall some used by David of himself in the eighteenth Psalm) shall they as prophets and kings influence strange nations—“calling a nation thou knowest not, and nations that have not known thee shall run

unto thee.” The effect of the unconscious influence, which obedience to God, and surrender to Him as His instrument, are sure to work, could not be more grandly stated. But we ought not to let another point escape our attention, for it has its contribution to make to the main question of the Servant. As explained in the note to a sentence above, it is uncertain whether *David* is the historical king of that name, or the Messiah still to come. In either case, he is an individual, whose functions and qualities are transferred to the people, and that is the point demanding attention. If our prophecy can thus so easily speak of God’s purpose of service to the Gentiles passing from the individual to the nation, why should it not also be able to speak of the opposite process, the transference of the service from the nation to the single Servant? When the nation were unworthy and unredeemed, could not the prophet as easily think of the relegation of their office to an individual, as he now promises to their obedience that that office shall be restored to them?

The next verses urgently repeat calls to repentance. And then comes a passage which is grandly meant to make us feel the contrast of its scenery with the toil, the money-getting and the money-spending from which the chapter started. From all that sordid, barren, human strife in the markets of Babylon, we are led out to look at the boundless heavens, and are told that “as they are higher than the earth, so are God’s ways higher than our ways, and God’s reckonings than our reckonings;” we are led out to see the gentle fall of rain and snow that so easily “maketh the earth to bring forth and bud, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,” and are told that it is a symbol of God’s word, which we were called from our vain labours to obey; we are led out “to the mountains and to the hills breaking before you into singing,” and to the free, wild natural trees,* tossing their unlopped branches; we are led to see even the desert change, for “instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the nettle shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to Jehovah for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” Thus does the prophet, in his own fashion, lead the starved worldly heart, that has sought in vain its fulness from its toil, through scenes of Nature, to that free omnipotent Grace, of which Nature’s processes are the splendid sacraments.

III. PROSELYTES AND EUNUCHS (ch. lvi. 1-8).

The opening verse of this small prophecy, “My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed,” attaches it very closely to the preceding prophecy. If ch. lv. expounds the grace and faithfulness of God in the Return of His people, and asks from them only faith as the price of such benefits, ch. lvi. 1-8 adds the demand that those who are to return shall keep the law, and extends their blessings to foreigners and others, who though technically disqualified from the privileges of the born and legitimate Israelite, had attached themselves to Jehovah and His Law.

Such a prophecy was very necessary. The

* English version, *trees of the field*, but the field is the country beyond the bounds of cultivation; and as beasts of the field means *wild beasts*, so this means *wild trees*,—unforced, unaided by man’s labour.

* Cf. “Isaiah i.-xxxix.,” pp. 440 ff.

† The structure of this difficult passage is this. Ver. 3 states the equation: the everlasting covenant with the people Israel = the sure, unfailing favours bestowed upon the individual David. Vv. 4 and 5 unfold the contents of the equation. Each side of it is introduced by a *Lo*. *Lo*, on the one side, what I have done to David; *Lo*, on the other, what I will do to you. As David was a *witness of peoples, a prince and commander of peoples*, so shalt thou call to them and make them obey thee. This is clear enough. But who is David? The phrase the *favours of David* suggests 2 Chron. vi. 42, *remember the mercies of David thy servant*; and those in ver. 5 recall Psalm xviii. 43 f.: *Thou hast made me the head of nations; A people I know not shall serve me; As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me; Strangers shall submit themselves to me*. Yet both Jeremiah and Ezekiel call the coming Messiah David. Jer. xxx. 9: *They shall serve Jehovah their God and David their King*. Ezek. xxxiv. 23; *And I will set up a shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I Jehovah will be their God, and My servant David prince among them*. After these writers, our prophet could hardly help using the name David in its Messianic sense, even though he also quoted (in ver. 5) a few phrases recalling the historical David. But the question does not matter much. The real point is the transference of the favours bestowed upon an individual to the whole people.

dispersion of Israel had already begun to accomplish its missionary purpose; pious souls in many lands had felt the spiritual power of this disfigured people, and had chosen for Jehovah's sake to follow its uncertain fortunes. It was indispensable that these Gentile converts should be comforted against the withdrawal of Israel from Babylon, for they said, "Jehovah will surely separate me from His people," as well as against the time when it might become necessary to purge the restored community from heathen constituents.* Again, all the male Jews could hardly have escaped the disqualification, which the cruel custom of the East inflicted on some, at least, of every body of captives. It is almost certain that Daniel and his companions were eunuchs, and if they, then perhaps many more. But the Book of Deuteronomy had declared mutilation of this kind to be a bar against entrance to the assembly of the Lord. It is not one of the least interesting of the spiritual results of the Exile, that its necessities compelled the abrogation of the letter of such a law. With a freedom that foreshadows Christ's own expansion of the ancient strictness, and in words that would not be out of place in the Sermon on the Mount, this prophecy ensures to pious men, whom cruelty had deprived of the two things dearest to the heart of an Israelite,—a present place, and a perpetuation through his posterity, in the community of God,—that in the new temple a monument† and a name should be given, "better" and more enduring "than sons or daughters." This prophecy is further noteworthy as the first instance of the strong emphasis which "Second Isaiah" lays upon the keeping of the Sabbath, and as first calling the temple the "House of Prayer." Both of these characteristics are due, of course, to the Exile, the necessities of which prevented almost every religious act save that of keeping fasts and Sabbaths and serving God in prayer. On our prophet's teaching about the Sabbath there will be more to say in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE REKINDLING OF THE CIVIC CONSCIENCE.

ISAIAH lvi. 9-lix.

IT was inevitable, as soon as their city was again fairly in sight, that there should re-awaken in the exiles the civic conscience; that recollections of those besetting sins of their public life, for which their city and their independence were destroyed, should throng back upon them; that in prospect of their again becoming responsible for the discharge of justice and other political duties, they should be reminded by the prophet of their national faults in these respects, and of God's eternal laws concerning them. If we keep this in mind, we shall understand the presence in "Second Isaiah" of the group of prophecies at which we have now arrived, ch. lvi. 9-lix. Hitherto our prophet, in marked contrast to Isaiah himself, has said almost nothing of the social righteousness of his people. Israel's

righteousness, as we saw in our fourteenth chapter, has had the very different meaning for our prophet of her pardon and restoration to her rights. But in ch. lvi. 9-lix. we shall find the blame of civic wrong, and of other kinds of sin of which Israel could only have been guilty in her own land; we shall listen to exhortations to social justice and mercy like those we heard from Isaiah to his generation. Yet these are mingled with voices, and concluded with promises, which speak of the Return as imminent. Undoubtedly exilic elements reveal themselves. And the total impression is that some prophet of the late Exile, and probably the one whom we have been following, collected these reminiscences of his people's sin in the days of their freedom, in order to remind them, before they went back again to political responsibility, why it was they were punished and how apt they were to go astray. Believing this to be the true solution of a somewhat difficult problem, we have ventured to gather this mixed group of prophecies under the title of the Rekindling of the Civic Conscience. They fall into three groups: first, ch. lvi. 9-lvii.; second, ch. lviii.; third, ch. lix. We shall see that, while there is no reason to doubt the exilic origin of the whole of the second, the first and third of these are mainly occupied with the description of a state of things that prevailed only before the Exile, but they contain also exilic observations and conclusions.

I. A CONSCIENCE BUT NO GOD (ch. lvi. 9-lvii.).

This is one of the sections which almost decisively place the literary unity of "Second Isaiah" past possibility of belief. If ch. lvi. 1-8 flushes with the dawn of restoration, ch. lvi. 9-lvii. is very dark with the coming of the night, which preceded that dawn. Almost none dispute that the greater part of this prophecy must have been composed before the people left Palestine for exile. The state of Israel, which it pictures, recalls the descriptions of Hosea, and of the eleventh chapter of Zechariah. God's flock are still in charge of their own shepherds (lvi. 9-12),—a description inapplicable to Israel in exile. The shepherds are sleepy, greedy, sensual, drunkards,—victims to the curse against which Amos and Isaiah hurled their strongest woes. That sots like them should be spared while the righteous die unnoticed deaths (lvii. 1) can only be explained by the approaching judgment. "No man considereth that the righteous is taken away from the Evil." *The Evil* cannot mean, as some have thought, persecution,—for while the righteous are to escape it and enter into peace, the wicked are spared for it. It must be a Divine judgment,—the Exile. But "he entereth peace, they rest in their beds, each one that hath walked straight before him,"—for the righteous there is the peace of death and the undisturbed tomb of his fathers. What an enviable fate when emigration, and dispersion through foreign lands, are the prospect of the nation! Israel shall find her pious dead when she returns! The verse recalls that summons in Isa. xxvi., in which we heard the Mother Nation calling upon the dead she had left in Palestine to rise and increase her returned numbers.

Then the prophet indicts the nation for a religious and political unfaithfulness, which we

* Neh. xiii.

† The original is *a hand*; a term applied (perhaps because it consisted of tapering stones) to an *index*, or *monument* of victory, 1 Sam. xv. 12; or to a sepulchral monument, 2 Sam. xviii. 18.

know was their besetting sin in the days before they left the Holy Land. The scenery, in whose natural objects he describes them seeking their worship, is the scenery of Palestine, not of Mesopotamia,—*terebinths* and *wâdies*, and *clefts of the rocks*, and *smooth stones of the wâdies*. The unchaste and bloody sacrifices with which he charges them bear the appearance more of Canaanite than of Babylonian idolatry. The humiliating political suits which they paid—"thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thine ambassadors afar off, and didst debase thyself even unto Sheol" (ver. 9)—could not be attributed to a captive people, but were the sort of degrading diplomacy that Israel earned from Ahaz. While the painful pursuit of strength (ver. 10), the shabby political cowardice (ver. 11), the fanatic sacrifice of manhood's purity and childhood's life (ver. 5), and especially the evil conscience which drove their blind hearts through such pain and passion in a sincere quest for righteousness (ver. 12), betray the age of idolatrous reaction from the great Puritan victory of 701,—a generation exaggerating all the old falsehood and fear, against which Isaiah had inveighed, with the new conscience of sin which his preaching had created.* The dark streak of blood and lust that runs through the condemned idolatry, and the stern conscience which only deepens its darkness, are sufficient reasons for dating the prophecy after 700. The very phrases of Isaiah, which it contains, have tempted some to attribute it to himself. But it certainly does not date from such troubles as brought his old age to the grave. The evil, which it portends, is, as we have seen, no persecution of the righteous, but a Divine judgment upon the whole nation,—presumably the Exile. We may date it, therefore, some time after Isaiah's death, but certainly—and this is the important point—before the Exile. This, then, is an unmistakably pre-exilic constituent of "Second Isaiah."

Another feature corroborates this prophecy's original independence of its context. Its style is immediately and extremely rugged. The reader of the original feels the difference at once. It is the difference between travel on the level roads of Mesopotamia, with their unchanging horizons, and the jolting carriage of the stony paths of Higher Palestine, with their glimpses rapidly shifting from gorge to peak. But the remarkable thing is that the usual style of "Second Isaiah" is resumed before the end of the prophecy. One cannot always be sure of the exact verse at which such a literary change takes place. In this case some feel it as soon as the middle of ver. 11, with the words, "Have not I held My peace even of long time, and thou fearest Me not?"† It is surely more sensible, however, after ver. 14, in which we are arrested in any case by an alteration of standpoint. In ver. 14 we are on in the Exile again—before ver. 14 I cannot recognise any exilic symptom—and the way of return is before us. "And one said,"—it is the repetition to the letter of the strange anonymous voice of chap. xl. 6,—"*and one said, Cast ye up, Cast ye up, open up,*" or "*sweep*

open, a way, lift the stumbling block from the way of My people." And now the rhythm has certainly returned to the prevailing style of "Second Isaiah," and the temper is again that of promise and comfort.

These sudden shiftings of circumstance and of prospect are enough to show the thoughtful reader of Scripture how hard is the problem of the unity of "Second Isaiah." On which we make here no further remark, but pass at once to the more congenial task of studying the great prophecy, vv. 14-21, which rises one and simple from these fragments as does some homogeneous rock from the confusing *débris* of several geological epochs.

For let the date and original purpose of the fragments we have considered be what they may, this prophecy has been placed as their conclusion with at least some rational, not to say spiritual intention. As it suddenly issues here, it gathers up, in the usual habit of Scripture, God's moral indictment of an evil generation, by a great manifesto of the Divine nature, and a sharp distinction of the characters and fate of men. Now, of what kind is the generation to whose indictment this prophecy comes as a conclusion? It is a generation which has lost its God, but kept its conscience. This sums up the national character which is sketched in vv. 3-13. These Israelites had lost Jehovah and His pure law. But the religion into which they fell back was not, therefore, easy or cold. On the contrary, it was very intense and very stern. The people put energy in it, and passion, and sacrifice that went to cruel lengths. Belief, too, in its practical results kept the people from fainting under the weariness in which its fanaticism reacted. "In the length of thy way thou wast wearied, yet thou didst not say, It is hopeless; life for thy hand"—that is, real, practical strength—"didst thou find: wherefore thou didst not break down." And they practised their painful and passionate idolatry with a real conscience. They were seeking to work out righteousness for themselves (ver. 12 should be rendered: "I will expose your righteousness," the caricature of righteousness which you attempt). The most worldly statesman among them had his sincere ideal for Israel, and intended to enable her, in the possession of her land and holy mountain, to fulfil her destiny (ver. 13). The most gross idolater had a hunger and thirst after righteousness, and burnt his children or sacrificed his purity to satisfy the vague promptings of his unenlightened conscience.

It was indeed a generation which had kept its conscience, but lost its God; and what we have in vv. 15 to 21 is just the lost and forgotten God speaking of His Nature and His Will. They have been worshipping idols, creatures of their own fears and cruel passions. But He is the "high and lofty one"—two of the simplest adjectives in the language, yet sufficient to lift Him they describe above the distorting mists of human imagination. They thought of the Deity as sheer wrath and force, scarcely to be appeased by men even through the most bloody rites and passionate self-sacrifice. But He says, "The high and the holy I dwell in, yet with him also that is contrite and humble of spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The rest of the chapter is to the darkened consciences a plain statement of the moral character of God's working. God al-

* See p. 707.

† So Ewald, Cheyne, and Briggs. Ewald takes lvi. 9-lvii. 11a as an interruption, borrowed from an earlier prophet in a time of persecution, of the exilic prophecy, which goes on smoothly from lvi. 8 to lvii. 11b. We have seen that it is an error to suppose that lvi. 9-lvii. rose from a time of persecution.

ways punishes sin, and yet the sinner is not abandoned. Though he go in his own way, God "watches his ways in order to heal him. I create the fruit of the lips," that is, "thanksgivings: Peace, peace, to him that is far off and him that is near, saith Jehovah, and I will heal him." But, as in chap. xlviii. and chap. l., a warning comes last, and behind the clear, forward picture of the comforted and restored of Jehovah we see the weird background of gloomy, restless wickedness.

II. SOCIAL SERVICE AND THE SABBATH (chap. lviii.).

Several critics (including Professor Cheyne) regard chap. lviii. as post-exilic, because of its declarations against formal fasting and the neglect of social charity, which are akin to those of post-exilic prophets like Zechariah and Joel, and seem to imply that the people addressed are again independent and responsible for the conduct of their social duties. The question largely turns on the amount of social responsibility we conceive the Jews to have had during the Exile. Now we have seen that many of them enjoyed considerable freedom: they had their houses and households; they had their slaves; they traded and were possessed of wealth. They were, therefore, in a position to be chargeable with the duties to which chap. lviii. calls them. The addresses of Ezekiel to his fellow-exiles have many features in common with chap. lviii., although they do not mention fasting; and fasting itself was a characteristic habit of the exiles, in regard to which it is quite likely they should err just as is described in chap. lviii. Moreover, there is a resemblance between this chapter's comments upon the people's enquiries of God (ver. 2) and Ezekiel's reply when certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of Jehovah.* And again vv. 11 and 12 of chap. lviii. are evidently addressed to people in prospect of return to their own land and restoration of their city. We accordingly date chap. lviii. from the Exile. But we see no reason to put it as early as Ewald does, who assigns it to a younger contemporary of Ezekiel. There is no linguistic evidence that it is an insertion, or from another hand than that of our prophet. Surely there were room and occasion for it in those years which followed the actual deliverance of the Jews by Cyrus, but preceded the restoration of Jerusalem,—those years in which there were no longer political problems in the way of the people's return for our prophet to discuss, and therefore their moral defects were all the more thrust upon his attention; and especially, when in the near prospect of their political independence, their social sins roused his apprehensions.

Those who have never heard an angry Oriental speak have no idea of what power of denunciation lies in the human throat. In the East, where a dry climate and large leisure bestow upon the voice a depth and suppleness prevented by our vulgar haste of life and teasing weather, men have elaborated their throat-letters to a number unknown in any Western alphabet; and upon the lowest notes they have put an edge, that comes up shrill and keen through the roar of the upper gutturals, till you feel their wrath cut as well as sweep you before it. In the Oriental throat, speech goes down deep enough to

echo all the breadth of the inner man; while the possibility of expressing within so supple an organ nearly every tone of scorn or surprise preserves anger from that suspicion of spite or of exhaustion, which is conveyed by too liberal a use of the nasal or palatal letters. Hence in the Hebrew language "to call with the throat" means to call with vehemence, but with self-command; with passion, yet as a man; using every figure of satire, but earnestly; neither forgetting wrath for mere art's sake, nor allowing wrath to escape the grip of the stronger muscles of the voice. It is "to lift the voice like a trumpet,"—an instrument, which, with whatever variety of music its upper notes may indulge our ears, never suffers its main tone of authority to drop, never slacks its imperative appeal to the wills of the hearers.

This is the style of the chapter before us, which opens with the words, "Call with the throat, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." Perhaps no subject more readily provokes to satire and sneers than the subject of the chapter,—the union of formal religion and unlovely life. And yet in the chapter there is not a sneer from first to last. The speaker suppresses the temptation to use his nasal tones, and utters, not as the satirist, but as the prophet. For his purpose is not to sport with his people's hypocrisy, but to sweep them out of it. Before he has done, his urgent speech, that has not lingered to sneer nor exhausted itself in screaming, passes forth to spend its unchecked impetus upon final promise and gospel. It is a wise lesson from a master preacher, and half of the fruitlessness of modern preaching is due to the neglect of it. The pulpit tempts men to be either too bold or too timid about sin; either to whisper or to scold; to euphemise or to exaggerate; to be conventional or hysterical. But two things are necessary,—the facts must be stated, and the whole manhood of the preacher, and not only his scorn or only his anger or only an official temper, brought to bear upon them. "Call with the throat, spare not, like a trumpet lift up thy voice, and publish to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin."

The subject of the chapter is the habits of a religious people,—the earnestness and regularity of their religious performance contrasted with the neglect of their social relations. The second verse, "the descriptions in which are evidently drawn from life,"* tells us that "the people sought God daily, and had a zeal to know His ways, as a nation that had done righteousness,"—fulfilled the legal worship,—"and had not forsaken the law† of their God: they ask of Me laws† of righteousness,"—that is, a legal worship, the performance of which might make them righteous,—"and in drawing near to God they take delight." They had, in fact, a great greed for ordinances and functions,‡—for the revival of such forms as they had been accustomed to of old. Like some poor prostrate rose, whose tendrils miss the props by which they were wont to rise to the sun, the religious conscience and affections of Israel, violently torn from their immemorial supports, lay limp and wind-swept on a bare land, and longed for God to raise some substitute for those altars of Zion by which, in the dear days

* Delitzsch.

† Mishpat and mishpatim, *cf.* p. 804.

‡ Such as is also expressed by exiles in Psalms xlii., xliii., and lxiii., but there with what spiritual temper, here with what a hard legal conception of righteousness.

* Ezek. xxi.; *cf.* xxxiii. 30 f.

of old, they had lifted themselves to the light of His face. In the absence of anything better, they turned to the chill and shadowed forms of the fasts they had instituted.* But they did not thereby reach the face of God. "Wherefore have we fasted," say they, "and Thou hast not seen? we have humbled our souls, and Thou takest no notice?" The answer comes swiftly: Because your fasting is a mere form! "Lo, in the very day of your fast ye find a business to do, and all your workmen you overtask." So formal is your fasting that your ordinary eager, selfish, cruel life goes on beside it just the same. Nay, it is worse than usual, for your worthless, wearisome fast but puts a sharper edge upon your temper: "Lo, for strife and contention ye fast, to smite with the fist of tyranny." And it has no religious value: "Ye fast not" like "as" you are fasting "to-day so as to make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose,—a day for a man to afflict himself? Is it to droop his head like a rush, and grovel on sack-cloth and ashes? Is it this thou wilt call a fast and a day acceptable to Jehovah?" One of the great surprises of the human heart is that self-denial does not win merit or peace. But assuredly it does not, if love be not with it. Though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Self-denial without love is self-indulgence. "Is not this the fast that I choose? to loosen the bonds of tyranny, to shatter the joints of the yoke, to let the crushed go free, and that ye burst every yoke. Is it not to break to the hungry thy bread, and that thou bring home wandering poor?† when thou seest one naked that thou cover him, and that from thine own flesh thou hide not thyself? Then shall break forth like the morning thy light, and thy health‡ shall immediately spring. Yea, go before thee shall thy righteousness, the glory of Jehovah shall sweep thee on," literally, "gather thee up. Then thou shalt call, and Jehovah shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here am I. If thou shalt put from thy midst the yoke, and the putting forth of the finger, and the speaking of naughtiness"—three degrees of the subtlety of selfishness, which when forced back from violent oppression will retreat to scorn and from open scorn to backbiting,—“and if thou draw out to the hungry thy soul,”—tear out what is dear to thee in order to fill his need, the strongest expression for self-denial which the Old Testament contains,—“and satisfy the soul that is afflicted, then shall uprise in the darkness thy light, and thy gloom shall be as the noonday. And guide thee shall Jehovah continually, and satisfy thy soul in droughts, and thy limbs make lissom; and thou shalt be like a garden well-watered,§ and like a spring of water whose waters fail not. And they that are of thee shall build the ancient ruins; the foundations of generation upon generation thou shalt raise up, and they shall be calling thee Repairer-of-the-Breach, Restorer-of-Paths-for-habitation.”|| Thus their

"righteousness" in the sense of external vindication and stability, which so prevails with our prophet, shall be due to their "righteousness" in that inward moral sense in which Amos and Isaiah use the word. And so concludes a passage which fills the earliest, if not the highest, place in the glorious succession of Scriptures of Practical Love, to which belong the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, the twenty-fifth of Matthew and the thirteenth of First Corinthians. Its lesson is,—to go back to the figure of the draggled rose,—that no mere forms of religion, however divinely prescribed or conscientiously observed, can of themselves lift the distraught and trailing affections of man to the light and peace of Heaven; but that our fellow-men, if we cling to them with love and with arms of help, are ever the strongest props by which we may rise to God; that character grows rich and life joyful, not by the performance of ordinances with the cold conscience of duty, but by acts of service with the warm heart of love.

And yet such a prophecy concludes with an exhortation to the observance of one religious form, and places the keeping of the Sabbath on a level with the practice of love. "If thou turn from the Sabbath thy foot," from "doing thine own business on My holy day;* and callest the Sabbath Pleasure,"—the word is a strong one, "Delight, Delicacy, Luxury,—Holy of Jehovah, Honourable; and dost honour it so as not to do thine own ways, or find thine own business, or keep making talk: then thou shalt find thy pleasure," or "thy delight, in Jehovah,"—note the parallel of pleasure in the Sabbath and pleasure in Jehovah,—“and He shall cause thee to ride on the high places of the land, and make thee to feel upon the portion of Jacob thy father: yea, the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken.”

Our prophet, then, while exalting the practical Service of Man at the expense of certain religious forms, equally exalts the observance of Sabbath; his scorn for their formalism changes when he comes to it into a strenuous enthusiasm of defence. This remarkable fact, which is strictly analogous to the appearance of the Fourth Commandment in a code otherwise consisting of purely moral and religious laws, is easily explained. Observe that our prophet bases his plea for Sabbath-keeping, and his assurance that it must lead to prosperity, not on its physical, moral, or social benefits, but simply upon its acknowledgment of God. Not only is the Sabbath to be honoured because it is the "Holy of Jehovah" and "Honourable," but "making it one's pleasure" is equivalent to "finding one's pleasure in Him." The parallel between these two phrases in ver. 13 and ver. 14 is evident, and means really this: Inasmuch as ye do it unto the Sabbath, ye do it unto Me. The prophet, then, enforces the Sabbath simply on account of its religious and Godward aspect. Now, let us remember the truth, which he so often enforces, that the Service of Man, however ardently and widely pursued, can never lead or sum up our duty; that the Service of God has, logically and practically, a prior claim, for without it the Service of Man must suffer both in obligation and in resource. God must be our first resort—must have our first homage, affection, and obedience. But this cannot well take place without some amount of definite and regular and frequent devotion to Him. In the most

* For these see p. 746.

† Literally, *the poor, the wandering*. It was a frequent phrase in the Exile: Lam. iii. 19. *Remember mine affliction and my homelessness*; i. 7. *Jerusalem in the day of her affliction and her homelessness*. LXX. ἀστέγοι, roofless.

‡ Probably the fresh flesh which appears through a healing wound. Made classical by Jeremiah, who uses it thrice of Israel,—in the famous text, *Is there no balm*, etc., x. 22; and in xxx. 17; xxxiii. 6.

§ Jer. xxxi. 12.

|| Cf. Job xxiv. 13.

* Cf. Amos viii. 5.

spiritual religion there is an irreducible minimum of formal observance. Now, in that wholesale destruction of religious forms, which took place at the overthrow of Jerusalem,* there was only one institution, which was not necessarily involved. The Sabbath did not fall with the Temple and the Altar: the Sabbath was independent of all locality; the Sabbath was possible even in exile. It was the one solemn, public, and frequently regular form in which the nation could turn to God, glorify Him, and enjoy Him. Perhaps, too, through the Babylonian fashion of solemnising the seventh day, our prophet realised again the primitive institution of the Sabbath, and was reminded that, since seven days is a regular part of the natural year, the Sabbath is, so to speak, sanctioned by the statutes of Creation.

An institution, which is so primitive, which is so independent of locality, which forms so natural a part of the course of time, but which, above all, has twice—in the Jewish Exile and in the passage of Judaism to Christianity—survived the abrogation and disappearance of all other forms of the religion with which it was connected, and has twice been affirmed by prophecy or practice to be an essential part of spiritual religion and the equal of social morality,—has amply proved its Divine origin and its indispensableness to man.

III. SOCIAL CRIMES (ch. lix).

Ch. lix. is, at first sight, the most difficult of all of "Second Isaiah" to assign to a date.† For it evidently contains both pre-exilic and exilic elements. On the one hand, its charges of guilt imply that the people addressed by it are responsible for civic justice to a degree which could hardly be imputed to the Jews in Babylon. We saw that the Jews in the Exile had an amount of social freedom and domestic responsibility which amply accounts for the kind of sins they are charged with in chap. lviii. But ver. 14 of ch. lix. reproaches them with the collapse of justice in the very seat and public office of justice, of which it was not possible they could have been guilty except in their own land and in the days of their independence. On the other hand, the promises of deliverance in chap. lix. read very much as if they were exilic. "Judgment" and "righteousness" are employed in ver. 9 in their exilic sense,‡ and God is pictured exactly as we have seen Him in other chapters of our prophet.

Are we then left with a mystery? On the contrary, the solution is clear. Israel is followed into exile by her old conscience. The charges of Isaiah and Ezekiel against Jerusalem, while Jerusalem was still a "civitas," ring in her memory. She repeats the very words. With truth she says that her present state, so vividly described in vv. 9-11, is due to sins of old, of which, though perhaps she can no longer commit them, she still feels the guilt. Conscience always crowds the years together; there is no difference

of time in the eyes of God the Judge. And it was natural, as we have said already, that the nation should remember her besetting sins at this time; that her civic conscience should awake again, just as she was again about to become a civitas.*†

The whole of this chapter is simply the expansion and enforcement of the first two verses, that keep clanging like the clangour of a great high bell: "Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have been separators between you and your God, and your sins have hidden" His "face from you, that He will not hear." There is but one thing that comes between the human heart and the Real Presence and Infinite Power of God; and that one thing is Sin. The chapter labours to show how real God is. Its opening verses talk of "His Hand, His Ear, His Face." And the closing verses paint Him with the passions and the armour of a man,—a Hero in such solitude and with such forward force, that no imagination can fail to see the Vivid, Lonely Figure. "And He saw that there was no man, and He wondered that there was none to interpose; therefore His own right arm brought salvation unto Him, and His righteousness it upheld Him. And He put on righteousness like a breastplate and salvation" for "an helmet upon His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped Himself in zeal like a robe." Do not let us suppose this is mere poetry. Conceive what inspires it,—the great truth that in the Infinite there is a heart to throb for men and a will to strike for them. This is what the writer desires to proclaim, and what we believe the Spirit of God moved his poor human lips to give their own shape to,—the simple truth that there is One, however hidden He may be to men's eyes, who feels for men, who feels hotly for men, and whose will is quick and urgent to save them. Such an One tells His people that the only thing which prevents them from knowing how real His heart and will are—the only thing which prevents them from seeing His work in their midst—is their sin.

The roll of sins to which the prophet attributes the delay of the people's deliverance is an awful one; and the man who reads it with conscience asleep might conclude that it was meant only for a period of extraordinary violence and bloodshed. Yet the chapter implies that society exists,

* Another slight trace reveals the conglomerate nature of the chapter. If, as the earlier verses indicate, it was Israel that sinned, then it is the rebellious in Israel who should be punished. In ver. 18a, therefore, the *adversaries* or *enemies* ought to be Israelites. But in 18b the foreign *islands* are included. The LXX. has not this addition. Bredenkamp takes the words for an insertion. Yet the consequences of Israel's sin, according to the chapter, are not so much the punishment of the rebellious among the people as the delay of the deliverance for the whole nation,—a deliverance which Jehovah is represented as rising to accomplish, the moment the people express the sense of their rebellion and are penitent. The *adversaries* and *enemies* of ver. 18, therefore, are the oppressors of Israel, the foreigners and heathen; and 18b with its *islands* comes in quite naturally.

† Note on *mishpat* and *Ssedhaqah* in ch. lix. This chapter is a good one for studying the various meanings of *mishpat*. In ver. 4 the verb *shaphat* is used in its simplest sense of going to law. In vv. 8 and 14 *mishpat* is a quality or duty of man. But in ver. 9 it is rather what man expects from God, and what is far from man because of his sins; it is *judgment* on God's side, or God's saving ordinance. In this sense it is probably to be taken in ver. 15.—*Ssedhaqah* follows the same parallel. This goes to prove that we have two distinct prophecies amalgamated, unless we believe that a play upon the words is intended.

* See p. 741.

† Ewald conceives chs. lviii., lix. to be the work of a younger contemporary of Ezekiel, to which the chief author of "Second Isaiah" has added words of his own: lviii. 12, lix. 21. The latter is evidently an insertion; cf. change of person and of number, etc. Delitzsch puts the passage down to the last decade of the Captivity, when for a little time Cyrus had turned away from Babylon, and the Jews despaired of his coming to save them.

‡ See p. 785 ff.

and that at least the forms of civilisation are in force. Men sue one another before the usual courts. But none "sue in righteousness or goeth to the law in truth. They trust in vanity and speak lies." All these charges might be true of a society as outwardly respectable as our own. Nor is the charge of bloodshed to be taken literally. The Old Testament has so great a regard for the spiritual nature of man, that to deny the individual his rights or to take away the peace of God from his heart, it calls the shedding of innocent blood. Isaiah reminds us of many kinds of this moral murder when he says, "your hands are full of blood: seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Ezekiel reminds us of others when he tells how God spake to him, that if he "warn not the wicked, and the same wicked shall die in his iniquity, his blood will I require at thy hand." And again a Psalm reminds us of the time "when the Lord maketh inquisition for blood, He forgetteth not the cry of the poor." * This is what the Bible calls murder and lays its burning words upon,—not such acts of bloody violence as now and then make all humanity thrill to discover that in the heart of civilisation there exist men with the passions of the ape and the tiger, but such oppression of the poor, such cowardice to rebuke evil, such negligence to restore the falling, such abuse of the characters of the young and innocent, such fraud and oppression of the weak, as often exist under the most respectable life, and employ the weapons of a Christian civilisation in order to fulfil themselves. We have need to take the bold, violent standards of the prophets and lay them to our own lives,—the prophets that call the man who sells his honesty for gain, "a harlot," and hold him "blood-guilty" who has wronged, tempted, or neglected his brother. Do not let us suppose that these crimson verses of the Bible may be passed over by us as not applicable to ourselves. They do not refer to murderers or maniacs: they refer to social crimes, to which we all are in perpetual temptation, and of which we all are more or less guilty,—the neglect of the weak, the exploitation of the poor for our own profit, the soiling of children's minds, the multiplying of temptation in the way of God's little ones, the malice that leads us to blast another's character, or to impute to his action evil motives for which we have absolutely no grounds save the envy and sordidness of our own hearts. Do not let us fail to read all such verses in the clear light which John the Apostle throws on them when he says: "He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SALVATION IN SIGHT.

ISAIAH lx.-lxiii. 7.

THE deliverance from Babylon has long been certain, since chap. xlviii.; all doubts in the way of Return have been removed, chap. xlix.-lii. 12; the means for the spiritual Restoration of the people have been sufficiently found, chap. liii. and preceding chapters on the Servant; Zion has been hailed from afar, chap. liv.; last calls to

* Isa. i. 17; Ezek. ii. 18; Psalm ix. 12.

leave Babylon have been uttered, chap. lv.; last councils and comforts, lvi. 1-8; and the civic conscience has been rekindled, chap. lvi. 9-lix. There remains now only to take possession of the City herself; to rehearse the vocation of the restored people; and to realise all the hopes, fears, hindrances, and practical problems of the future. These duties occupy the rest of our prophecy, chaps. lx.-lxvi.

Chap. lx. is a prophecy as complete in itself as chap. liv. The City, which in liv. was hailed and comforted from afar, is in chap. lx. bidden rise and enjoy the glory that has at last reached her. Her splendours, hinted at in chap. liv., are seen in full and evident display. In chaps. lxi.-lxii. her prophet, her genius and representative, rehearses to her his duties, and sets forth her place among the peoples. And in chap. lxiii. 1-7 we have another of those theophanies or appearances of the Sole Divine Author of His people's salvation, which,—abrupt and separate as if to heighten the sense of the solitariness of their subject—occur at intervals throughout our prophecy,—for instance, in chap. xlii., vv. 10-17, and in chap. lix. 16-19. These three sections, chap. lx., chaps. lxi.-lxii. and chap. lxiii. 1-7, we will take together in this chapter of our volume.

I. ARISE, SHINE (ch. lx).

The sixtieth chapter of Isaiah is the spiritual counterpart of a typical Eastern day, with the dust laid and the darts taken out of the sunbeams,—a typical Eastern day in the sudden splendour of its dawn, the completeness and apparent permanence of its noon, the spaciousness it reveals on sea and land, and the barbaric profusion of life, which its strong light is sufficient to flood with glory.

Under such a day we see Jerusalem. In the first five verses of the chapter, she is addressed, as in chap. liv., as a crushed and desolate woman. But her lonely night is over, and from some prophet at the head of her returning children the cry peals, "Arise, shine, for come hath thy light, and the glory of Jehovah hath risen upon thee." In the East the sun does not rise; the word is weak for an arrival almost too sudden for twilight. In the East the sun leaps above the horizon. You do not feel that he is coming, but that he is come. This first verse is suggested by the swiftness with which he bursts upon an Eastern city, and the shrouded form does not, as in our twilight, slowly unwrap itself, but "shines" at once, all plates and points of glory. Then the figure yields: for Jerusalem is not merely one radiant point in a world equally lighted by the sun, but is herself Jehovah's unique luminary. "For behold the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples, but upon thee shall Jehovah arise, and His glory upon thee shall be seen. And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." In the next two verses it is again a woman who is addressed. "Lift up" thine eyes "round about and see, all of them have gathered, have come to thee: thy sons from afar are coming, and thy daughters are carried in the arms." * Then follows the fairest verse in the chapter. "Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall throb and grow large; for there shall be turned upon thee the sea's flood-tide, and the

* Literally, *on the side or hip*, the Eastern method of carrying children.

wealth of the nations shall come to thee." The word which the Authorised English version translated "shall flow together," and our Revised Version "lightened," means both of these. It is liquid light,—light that ripples and sparkles and runs across the face; as it best appears in that beautiful passage of the thirty-fourth Psalm, "they looked to Him and their faces were lightened." Here it suggests the light which a face catches from sparkling water. The prophet's figure has changed. The stately mother of her people stands not among the ruins of her city, but upon some great beach, with the sea in front,—the sea that casts up all heaven's light upon her face and drifts all earth's wealth to her feet, and her eyes are upon the horizon with the hope of her who watches for the return of children.

The next verses are simply the expansion of these two clauses,—about the sea's flood and the wealth of the Nations. Vv. 6-9 look first landward and then seaward, as from Jerusalem's own wonderful position on the high ridge between Asia and the sea: between the gates of the East and the gates of the West. On the one side, the city's horizon is the range of Moab and Edom, that barrier, in Jewish imagination, of the hidden and golden East across which pour the caravans here pictured. "Profusion of camels shall cover thee, young camels of Midian and Ephah; all of them from Sheba shall come: gold and frankincense shall they bring, and the praises of Jehovah shall they publish. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to thee: they shall come up with acceptance on Mine altar, and the house of My glory will I glorify." These were just what surged over Jordan from the far countries beyond, of which the Jews knew little more than the names here given,—tawny droves of camels upon the greenness of Palestine like a spate of the desert from which they poured; rivers of sheep brimming up the narrow drove-roads to Jerusalem:—conceive it all under that blazing Eastern sun. But then turning to Judah's other horizon, marked by the yellow fringe of sand and the blue haze of the sea beyond, the prophet cries for Jehovah: "Who are these like a cloud that fly, and like doves to their windows? Surely towards Me the Isles* are stretching, and ships of Tarshish in the van, to bring thy sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, to the Name of Jehovah of Hosts and to the Holy of Israel, for He hath glorified thee." The poetry of the Old Testament has been said to be deficient in its treatment of the sea; and certainly it dwells more frequently, as was natural for the imagination of an inland and a highland people to do, upon the hills. But in what literature will you find passages of equal length more suggestive of the sea than those short pieces in which the Hebrew prophet sought to render the futile rage of the world, as it dashed on the steadfast will of God, by the roar and crash of the ocean on the beach;† or painted a nation's prosperity as the waves of a summer sea;‡ or described the long coastlands as stretching out to God, and the white-sailed ships coming up the horizon like doves to their windows!

The rest of the chapter, from ver. 10 onwards, is occupied with the rebuilding and adornment of

Jerusalem, and with the establishment of the people in righteousness and peace. There is a very obvious mingling of the material and the moral. The Gentiles are to become subject to the Jew, but it is to be a voluntary submission before the evidence of Jerusalem's spiritual superiority. Nothing is said of a Messiah or a King. Jerusalem is to be a commonwealth; and, while her "magistracy shall be Peace and her overseers Righteousness," God Himself, in evident presence, is to be her light and glory. Thus the chapter ends with God and the People, and nothing else. God for an everlasting light around, and the people in their land, righteous, secure, and growing very large. "The least shall become a thousand, and the smallest a strong nation: I Jehovah will hasten it in its time."

This chapter has been put through many interpretations to many practical uses:—to describe the ingathering of the Gentiles to the Church (in the Christian year it is the Lesson for Epiphany), to prove the doctrine that the Church should live by the endowment of the kingdoms of this world, and to enforce the duty of costliness and magnificence in the public worship of God. "The glory of the Lebanon shall come unto thee, fir-tree, plane-tree and sherbin together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary, and I will make the place of My feet glorious."

The last of these duties we may extend and qualify. If the coming in of the Gentiles is here represented as bringing wealth to the Church, we cannot help remembering that the going out to the Gentiles, in order to bring them in, means for us the spending of our wealth on things other than the adornment of temples; and that, besides the heathen, there are poor and suffering ones for whom God asks men's gold, as He asked it in olden days for the temple, that He may be glorified. Take that last phrase:—"And"—with all that material wealth which has flown in from Lebanon, from Midian, from Sheba—"I will make the place of My feet glorious." When this singular name was first uttered it was limited to the dwelling-place of the Ark and Presence of God, visible only on Mount Zion. But when God became man, and did indeed tread with human feet this world of ours, what were then the "places of His feet?" Sometimes, it is true, the Temple, but only sometimes; far more often where the sick lay, and the bereaved were weeping,—the pool of Bethesda, the death-room of Jairus' daughter, the way to the centurion's sick servant, the city gateways where the beggars stood, the lanes where the village folk had gathered, against His coming, their deaf and dumb, their palsied and lunatic. These were "the places of His feet, who Himself bare our sicknesses and carried our infirmities;" and these are what He would seek our wealth to make glorious. They say that the reverence of men builds now no cathedrals as of old; nay, but the love of man, that Christ taught, builds far more of those refuges and houses of healing, scatters far more widely those medicines for the body, those instruments of teaching, those means of grace, in which God is as much glorified as in Jewish Temple or Christian Cathedral.

Nevertheless He, who set "the place of His feet," which He would have us to glorify, among the poor and the sick, was He, who also did not for Himself refuse that alabaster box and that precious ointment, which might have been sold for much and given to the poor. The worship

* O. *coasts*. See pp. 757 ff.

† Isa. xiv.; "Isaiah i.-xxxix.," pp. 281 ff.

‡ Isa. xlviii. 18.

of God, if we read Scripture aright, ought to be more than merely grave and comely. There should be heartiness and lavishness about it,—profusion and brilliance. Not of material gifts alone or chiefly, gold, incense, or rare wood, but of human faculties, graces, and feeling; of joy and music and the sense of beauty. Take this chapter. It is wonderful, not so much for the material wealth which it devotes to the service of God's house, and which is all that many eyes ever see in it, as for the glorious imagination and heart for the beautiful, the joy in light and space and splendour, the poetry and the music, which use those material things simply as the light uses the wick, or as music uses the lyre, to express and reveal itself. What a call this chapter is to let out the natural wonder and poetry of the heart, its feeling and music and exultation,—“all that is within us,” as the Psalmist says,—in the Service of God. Why do we not do so? The answer is very simple. Because, unlike this prophet, we do not realise how present and full our salvation is; because unlike him, we do not realise that “our light has come,” and so we will not “arise and shine.”

II. THE GOSPEL (chaps. lxi.-lxii.).

The speaker in chap. lxi. is not introduced by name. Therefore he may be the Prophet himself, or he may be the Servant. The present expositor, while feeling that the evidence is not conclusive against either of these, and that the uncertainty is as great as in chap. xlviii. 16,* inclines to think that there is, on the whole, less objection to its being the prophet who speaks than to its being the Servant. (See the appended note.) But it is not a very important question which is intended, for the Servant was representative of prophecy; and if it be the prophet who speaks here, he also speaks with the conscience of the whole function and aim of the prophetic order. That Jesus Christ fulfilled this programme does not decide the question one way or the other; for a prophet so representative was as much the antetype and foreshadowing of Christ as the Servant himself was. On the whole, then, we must be content to feel about this passage, what we must have already felt

* See p. 783, note. Some points of the speaker's description of himself—for example, the gift of the Spirit and the anointing—suit equally well any prophet, or the unique Servant. The lofty mission and its great results are not too lofty or great for our prophet, for Jeremiah received his office in terms as large. That the prophet has not yet spoken at such length in his own person is no reason why he should not do so now, especially as this is an occasion on which he sums up and enforces the whole range of prophecy. It can, therefore, very well be the prophet who speaks. On the other hand, to say with Diestel that it cannot be the Servant because the personification of the Servant ceases with ch. liii. is to beg the question. A stronger argument against the case for the Servant is that the speaker does not call himself by that name, as he does in other passages when he is introduced; but this is not conclusive, for in l. 4-9 the Servant, though he speaks, does not name himself. To these may be added this (from Krüger), that the Servant's discourse never passes without transition into that of God, as this speaker's in ver. 8, but the prophet's discourse often so passes; and this, that *בְּשֵׁר*, *קִרָּה*, and *נַחֵם* are often used of the prophet, and not at all of the Servant. These are all the points in the question, and it will be seen how inconclusive they are. If any further proof of this were required, it would be found in the fact that authorities are equally divided. There hold for the Servant Calvin, Delitzsch, Cheyne (who previously took the other view), Driver, Briggs, Nägelsbach, and Orelli. But the Targums, Ewald, Hitzig, Diestel, Dillmann, Bredenkamp, and Krüger hold by the prophet. Krüger's reasons, “*Essai sur la Théologie d'Isaïe xl.-lxvi.*,” p. 76, are specially worthy of attention.

about many others in our prophecy, that the writer is more anxious to place before us the whole range and ideal of the prophetic gift than to make clear in whom this ideal is realised; and for the rest Jesus of Nazareth so plainly fulfilled it, that it becomes, indeed, a very minor question to ask whom the writer may have intended as its first application.

If chap. lx. showed us the external glory of God's people, chap. lxi. opens with the programme of their inner mission. There we had the building and adornment of the Temple, that “Jehovah might glorify His people:” here we have the binding of broken hearts and the beautifying of soiled lives, that “Jehovah may be glorified.” But this inner mission also issues in external splendour, in a righteousness which is like the adornment of a bride and like the beauty of spring.

The commission of the prophet is mainly to duties we have already studied in preceding passages, both on himself and on the Servant. It will be enough to point out its special characteristics. “The Spirit of my Lord Jehovah is upon me, for that Jehovah hath anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim to the captive liberty, and to the prisoners open ways; * to proclaim an acceptable year for Jehovah, and a day of vengeance for our God; to comfort all that mourn; to offer to the mourners of Zion, to give unto them a crest† for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the mantle of praise for the spirit of dimness;‡ so that men may call them Oaks-of-Righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that He may break into glory.”

There are heard here all the keynotes of our prophet, and clear, too, is that usual and favourite direction of his thoughts from the inner and spiritual influences to the outward splendour and evidence, the passage from the comfort and healing of the heart to the rich garment, the renown, and his own dearest vision of great forest trees,—in short, Jehovah Himself breaking into glory. But one point needs special attention.

The prophet begins his commission by these words, “to bring good tidings to the afflicted,” and again says, “to proclaim to the captive.” “The afflicted,” or “the poor,” as it is mostly rendered, is the classical name for God's people in Exile. We have sufficiently moved among this people to know for what reason the “bringing of good tidings” should here be reckoned as the first and most indispensable service that prophecy could render them. Why, in the life of every nation, there are hours, when the factors of destiny, that loom largest at other times, are dwarfed and dwindled before the momentousness of a piece of news,—hours, when the nation's attitude in a great moral issue, or her whole freedom and destiny, are determined by telegrams from the seat of war. The simultaneous news of Grant's capture of Vicksburg and Meade's defeat of Lee, news that finally turned English opinion, so long shamefully debating and wavering, to the side of God and the slave; the telegrams from the army, for which silent crowds waited in the Berlin squares through the autumn nights of 1870, conscious that the unity and birthright of Germany hung upon the tid-

* Literally, *opening*; but the word is always used of opening of the eyes. Ewald renders *open air*, Dillmann *hellen Blick*.

† Any insignia or ornament for the head.

‡ The same word as in xlii. 3, *fading wick*.

ings,—are instances of the vital and paramount influence in a nation's history of a piece of news. The force of a great debate in Parliament, the expression of public opinion through all its organs, the voice of a people in a general election, things in their time as ominous as the Fates, all yield at certain supreme moments to the meaning of a simple message from Providence. Now it was for *news* from God that Israel waited in Exile; for good tidings and the proclamation of fact. They had with them a Divine Law, but no mere exposition of it could satisfy men who were captives and waited for the command of their freedom. They had with them Psalms, but no beauty of music could console them: "How should we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" They had Prophecy, with its assurance of the love and the power of their God; and much as there was in it to help them to patience and to hope, general statements were not enough for them. They needed the testimony of a fact. Freedom and Restoration had been promised them: they waited for the proclamation that it was coming, for the good news that it had arrived. Now our prophecy is mainly this proclamation and good news of fact. The prophet uses before all other words two,—to call or proclaim, *kara*, and to tell good tidings, *bisser*. We found them in his opening chapter: we find them again here when he sums up his mission. A third goes along with them, "to comfort," *naham*, but it is the accompaniment, and they are the burden, of his prophecy.

But "good tidings" and the "proclamation" meant so much more than the mere political deliverance of Israel—meant the fact of their pardon, the tale of their God's love, of His provision for them, and of His wonderful passion and triumph of salvation on their behalf—that it is no wonder that these two words came to be ever afterwards the classical terms for all speech and prophecy from God to man. We actually owe the Greek words of the New Testament for "gospel" and "preaching" to this time of Israel's history. The Greek term, from which we have "evangel," "evangelist," and "evangelise," originally meant good news, but was first employed in a religious sense in the Greek translation of our prophecy. And our word "preach" is the heir, though not the lineal descendant, through the Latin *prædicare* and the Greek *κηρύσσειν*, of the word, which is translated in chap. lx. of our prophet to *proclaim*, but in chap. xl. to *call* or *cry*. It is to the Exile that we trace the establishment among God's people of regular preaching side by side with sacramental and liturgical worship; for it was in the Exile that the Synagogue arose, whose pulpit was to become as much the centre of Israel's life as was the altar of the Temple. And it was from the pulpit of a synagogue centuries after, when the preaching had become dry exposition or hard lawgiving, that Jesus re-read our prophecy and affirmed again the "good news" of God.

What is true of nations is true of individuals. We indeed support our life by principles; we develop it by argument;—we cannot lay too heavy stress upon philosophy and law. But there is something of far greater concern than either argument or the abstract principles from which it is developed; something that our reason cannot find of itself, that our conscience but increases our longing for. It is, whether certain things are facts or not; whether, for instance, the

Supreme Power of the Universe is on the side of the individual combatant for righteousness; whether God is love; whether Sin has been forgiven; whether Sin and Death have ever been conquered; whether the summer has come in which humanity may put forth their shoots conscious that all the influence of heaven is on their side, or whether, there being no heavenly favours, man must train his virtue and coax his happiness to ripen behind shelters and in conservatories of his own construction. Now Christ comes to us with the good news of God that it is so. The supreme force in the Universe is on man's side, and for man has won victory and achieved freedom. God has proclaimed pardon. A Saviour has overcome sin and death. We are free to break from evil. The struggle after holiness is not the struggle of a weakly plant in an alien soil and beneath a wintry sky, counting only upon the precarious aids of human cultivation; but summer has come, the acceptable year of the Lord has begun, and all the favour of the Almighty is on His people's side. These are the "good tidings" and "proclamation" of God, and to every man who believes them they must make an incalculable difference in life.

As we have said, the prophet passes in the rest of this prophecy from the spiritual influences of his mission to its outward effects. The people's righteousness is described in the external fashion, which we have already studied in chap. xiv.; Zion's espousals to Jehovah are celebrated, but into that we have also gone thoroughly (pp. 828 ff.); the restoration of prophecy in Jerusalem is described (lxii. 6-9), as in chap. lii. 8; and another call is given to depart from Babylon and every foreign city and come to Zion. This call coming now, so long after the last, and when we might think that the prophet had wholly left Babylon behind, need not surprise us. For even though some Jews had actually arrived at Zion, which is not certain, others were hanging back in Babylon; and, indeed, such a call as this might fitly be renewed for the next century or two: so many of God's people continued to forget that their citizenship was in Zion.

III. THE DIVINE SAVIOUR (chap. lxiii. 1-7).

Once again the prophet turns to hail, in his periodic transport, the Solitary Divine Hero and Saviour of His people.

That the writer of this piece is the main author of "Second Isaiah" is probable, both because it is the custom of the latter to describe at intervals the passion and effort of Israel's Mighty One, and because several of his well-known phrases meet us in this piece. The "speaker in righteousness mighty to save" recalls chap. xlv. 19-24; and "the day of vengeance and year of my redeemed" recalls chap. lxi. 2; and "I looked, and there was no helper, and I gazed, and there was none to uphold," recalls lix. 16. The prophet is looking out from Jerusalem towards Edom,—a direction in which the watchmen upon Zion had often in her history looked for the return of her armies from the punishment of Israel's congenital and perpetual foe. The prophet, however, sees the prospect filled up, not by the flashing van of a great army, but by a solitary figure, without ally, without chariot, without weapons, "swaying on in the wealth of his strength." The keynote of the piece is the lone-

liness of this Hero. A figure is used, which, where battle would only have suggested complexity, enthrals us with the spectacle of solitary effort,—the figure of trampling through some vast winefat alone. The Avenging Saviour of Israel has a fierce joy in being alone: it is his new nerve to effort and victory,—“therefore mine own right arm, it brought salvation to me.” We see One great form in the strength of one great emotion. “My fury, it upheld me.”

The interpretation of this chapter by Christians has been very varied, and often very perverse. To use the words of Calvin, “Violenter torserunt hoc caput Christiani.” But, as he sees very rightly, it is not the Messiah nor the Servant of Jehovah, who is here pictured, but Jehovah Himself. This Solitary is the Divine Saviour of Israel, as in chap. xlii. 7 f. and in chap. lix. 16f. In chap. viii. of Book II. we spoke so fully of the Passion of God that we may now refer to that chapter for the essential truth which underlies our prophet’s anthropomorphism, and claims our worship where a short sight might only turn the heart away in scorn at the savage and blood-stained surface. One or two other points, however, demand our attention before we give the translation.

Why does the prophet look in the direction of Edom for the return of his God? Partly, it is to be presumed, because Edom was as good a representative as he could choose of the enemies of Israel other than Babylon.* But also partly, perhaps, because of the names which match the red colours of his piece,—the wine and the blood. Edom means *red*, and Bosrah is assonant to Bôsser, a *vinedresser*.† Fitter background and scenery the prophet, therefore, could not have for his drama of Divine Vengeance. But we must take care, as Dillmann properly remarks, not to imagine that any definite, historical invasion of Edom by Israel, or other chastening instrument of Jehovah, is here intended. It is a vision which the prophet sees of Jehovah Himself: it illustrates the passion, the agony, the unshared and unaided effort which the Divine Saviour passes through for His people.

Further, it is only necessary to point out, that the term in ver. 1 given as “splendid” by the Authorised Version, which I have rendered “sweeping,” is literally “swelling,” and is, perhaps, best rendered by “sailing on” or “swinging on.” The other verb which the Revised Version renders “marching” means “swaying,” or moving the head or body from one side to another, in the pride and fulness of strength. In ver. 2 “like a wine-treader” is literally “like him that treadeth in the pressing-house”—Geth (the first syllable of Gethsemane, the oil-press). But *וְרַחֵם* in ver. 3 is the “pressing-trough.”

Who is this coming from Edom,
Raw-red his garments from Bosrah!
This sweeping on in his raiment,
Swaying in the wealth of his strength?

I that do speak in righteousness,
Mighty to save!

Wherefore is red on thy raiment,
And thy garments like to a wine-treader’s?

* See “Isaiah i.-xxxix.,” pp. 438-40.

† Cf. Krüger, “Essai sur la Théologie d’Isaïe xl.-lxvi.,” pp. 154-55. Lagarde has proposed to read *מִצְרֵם*, past participle, for *מִצְרֵם* and *מִצְרֵם* for *מִצְרֵם*. *Who is this that cometh dyed red, redder in his garments than a vinedresser?*

A trough I have trodden alone,
Of the peoples no man was with me.
So I trod them down in my wrath,
And trampled them down in my fury;
Their life-blood sprinkled my garments,
And all my raiment I stained.
For the day of revenge in my heart,
And the year of my redeemed has come.
And I looked, and no helper;
I gazed, and none to uphold!
So my righteousness won me salvation;
And my fury, it hath upheld me.
So I stamp on the peoples in my wrath,
And make them drunk with my fury,
And bring down to earth their life-blood.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LAST INTERCESSION AND THE JUDGMENT.

ISAIAH lxiii. 7-lxvi.

WE might well have thought, that with the section we have been considering the prophecy of Israel’s Redemption had reached its summit and its end. The glory of Zion in sight, the full programme of prophecy owned, the arrival of the Divine Saviour hailed in the urgency of His feeling for His people, in the sufficiency of His might to save them,—what more, we ask, can the prophecy have to give us? Why does it not end upon these high notes? The answer is, the salvation is indeed consummate, but the people are not ready for it. On an earlier occasion, let us remember, when our prophet called the nation to their Service of God, he called at first the whole nation, but had then immediately to make a distinction. Seen in the light of their destiny, the mass of Israel proved to be unworthy; tried by its strain, part immediately fell away. But what happened upon that call to Service happens again upon this disclosure of Salvation. The prophet realises that it is only a part of Israel who are worthy of it. He feels again the weight, which has been the hindrance of his hope all through,—the weight of the mass of the nation, sunk in idolatry and wickedness, incapable of appreciating the promises. He will make one more effort to save them—to save them all. He does this in an intercessory prayer, ch. lxiii. 7-lxiv., in which he states the most hopeless aspects of his people’s case, identifies himself with their sin, and yet pleads by the ancient power of God that *we all* may be saved. He gets his answer in ch. lxv., in which God sharply divides Israel into two classes, the faithful and the idolaters, and affirms that, while the nation shall be saved for the sake of the faithful remnant, Jehovah’s faithful servants and the unfaithful can never share the same experience or the same fate. And then the book closes with a discourse in ch. lxvi., in which this division between the two classes in Israel is pursued to a last terrible emphasis and contrast upon the narrow stage of Jerusalem itself. We are left, not with the realisation of the prophet’s prayer for the salvation of all the nations, but with a last judgment separating its godly and ungodly portions.

Thus there are three connected divisions in lxiii. 7-lxvi. *First*, the prophet’s Intercessory Prayer, ch. lxiii. 7-lxiv.; *second*, the Answer of Jehovah, ch. lxv.; and *third*, the Final Discourse and Judgment, ch. lxvi.

I. THE PRAYER FOR THE WHOLE PEOPLE.
(ch. lxiii. 7-lxiv.).

There is a good deal of discussion as to both the date and the authorship of this piece,—as to whether it comes from the early or the late Exile, and as to whether it comes from our prophet or from another. It must have been written after the destruction and before the rebuilding of the Temple; this is put past all doubt by these verses: "Thy holy people possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down Thy sanctuary." "Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. The house of our holiness and of our ornament, wherein our fathers praised Thee, is become for a burning of fire, and all our delights are for ruin."*

This language has been held to imply that the disaster to Jerusalem was recent, as if the city's conflagration still flared on the national imagination, which in later years of the Exile was impressed rather by the long cold ruins of the Holy Place, the haunt of wild beasts. But not only is this point inconclusive, but the impression that it leaves is entirely dispelled by other verses, which speak of the Divine anger as having been of long continuance, and as if it had only hardened the people in sin; compare ch. lxiii. 17 and lxiv. 6, 7. There is nothing in the prayer to show that the author lived in exile, and accordingly the proposal has been made to date the piece from among the first attempts at rebuilding after the Return. To the present expositor this seems to be certainly wrong. The man who wrote vv. 11-15 of ch. lxiii. had surely the Return still before him; he would not have written in the way he has done of the Exodus from Egypt unless he had been feeling the need of another exhibition of Divine Power of the same kind. The prayer, therefore, must come from pretty much the same date as the rest of our prophecy,—after the Exile had long continued, but while the Return had not yet taken place. Nor is there any reason against attributing it to the same writer. It is true the style differs from the rest of his work, but this may be accounted for, as in the case of ch. liii., by the change of subject. Most critics, who hold that we still follow the same author, take for granted that some time has elapsed since the prophet's triumphant strains in ch. lx.-lxii. This is probable; but there is nothing to make it certain. What is certain is the change of mood and conscience. The prophet, who in chap. lx. had been caught away into the glorious future of the people, is here as utterly absorbed in their barren and doubtful present. Although the salvation is certain, as he has seen it, the people are not ready. The fact he has already felt so keenly about them,—see chap. xlii. vv. 24, 25,—that their long discipline in exile has done the mass of them no good, but evil, comes forcibly back upon him (ch. lxiv. 5b ff.). "Thou wast angry, and we sinned" only the more: "in such a state we have been long, and shall we be saved!" The banished people are thoroughly unclean and rotten, fading as a leaf, the sport of the wind. But the prophet identifies himself with them. He speaks of their sin as *ours*, of their misery as *ours*. He takes of them the very saddest view

possible, he feels them all as sheer dead weight: "there is none that calleth on Thy name, that stirreth himself up to take hold on Thee: for Thou hast hid Thy face from us, and delivered us into the power of our iniquities." But the prophet thus loads himself with the people in order to secure, if he can, their redemption as a whole. Twice he says in the name of them all, "Doubtless Thou art our Father." His great heart will not have one of them left out; "we all," he says, "are the work of Thy hand, we are all Thy people."

But this intention of the prayer will amply account for any change of style we may perceive in the language. No one will deny that it is quite possible for the same man now to fling himself forward into the glorious vision of his people's future salvation, and again to identify himself with the most hopeless aspects of their present distress and sin; and no one will deny that the same man will certainly write in two different styles with regard to each of these different feelings. Besides which, we have seen in the passage the recurrence of some of our prophecy's most characteristic thoughts. We feel, therefore, no reason for counting the passage to be by another hand than that which has mainly written "Second Isaiah." It may be at once admitted that he has incorporated in it earlier phrases, reminiscences, and echoes of language about the fall of Jerusalem in use when the Lamentations were written. But this was a natural thing for him to do in a prayer in which he represented the whole people and took upon himself the full burden of their woes.

If such be the intention of chs. lxiii. 7-lxiv., then in them we have one of the noblest passages of our prophet's great work. How like he is to the Servant he pictured for us! How his great heart fulfils the loftiest ideal of Service: not only to be the prophet and the judge of his people, but to make himself one with them in all their sin and sorrow, to carry them all in his heart. Truly, as his last words said of the Servant, he himself "bears the sin of many, and interposes for the transgressors." Before we see the answer he gets, let us make clear some obscure things and appreciate some beautiful ones in his prayer.

It opens with a recital of Jehovah's ancient lovingkindness and mercies to Israel. This is what perhaps gives it connection with the previous section. In ch. lxii. the prophet, though sure of the coming glory, wrote before it had come, and "urged" upon "the Lord's remembrancers to keep no silence, and give Him no silence till He establish and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." This work of remembrancing, the prophet himself takes up in lxiii. 7: "The lovingkindnesses of Jehovah I will record," literally, "cause to be remembered, the praises of Jehovah, according to all that Jehovah hath bestowed upon us." And then he beautifully puts all the beginnings of God's dealings with His people in His trusting of them: "For He said, Surely they are My people, children that will not deal falsely; so He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, the Angel of His Face saved them." This must be understood, not as an angel of the Presence, who went out from the Presence to save the people, but, as it is in other Scriptures, God's own Presence, God Himself; and so interpreted, the phrase falls into line with the rest

* Ch. lxiii. 18 and lxiv. 10, 11. In the Hebrew ch. lxiv. begins a verse later than it does in the English version.

of the verse, which is one of the most vivid expressions that the Bible contains of the personality of God.* "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Then he tells us how they disappointed and betrayed this trust, ever since the Exodus, the days of old. "But they rebelled and grieved the Spirit of His holiness: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, He Himself fought against them." This refers to their history down to, and especially during, the Exile: compare ch. xlii. vv. 24, 25. Then in their affliction they "remembered the days of old"—the English version obscures the sequence here by translating *he remembered*—and then follows the glorious account of the Exodus. In ver. 13 the *wilderness* is, of course, *prairie*, flat *pasture-land*; they were led as smoothly as "a horse in a meadow, that they stumbled not. As cattle that come down into the valley"—cattle coming down from the hillside to pasture and rest on the green, watered plains—"the Spirit of Jehovah caused them to rest: so didst Thou lead Thy people to make Thyself a glorious name." And then having offered such precedents, the prophet's prayer breaks forth to a God, whom His people feel no longer at their head, but far withdrawn into heaven: "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and Thy glory: where is Thy zeal and Thy mighty deeds? the surge of Thy bowels and Thy compassions are restrained towards me." Then he pleads God's fatherhood to the nation, and the rest of the prayer alternates between the hopeless misery and undeserving sin of the people, and, notwithstanding, the power of God to save as He did in times of old; the willingness of God to meet with those who wait for Him and remember Him; and, once more, His fatherhood, and His power over them, as the power of the potter over the clay.

Two points stand out from the rest. The Divine Trust, from which all God's dealing with His people is said to have started, and the Divine Fatherhood, which the prophet pleads.

"He said, Surely they are My people, children that will not deal falsely: so He was their Saviour." The "surely" is not the fiat of sovereignty or foreknowledge: it is the hope and confidence of love. It did not prevail; it was disappointed.

This is, of course, a profound acknowledgment of man's free will. It is implied that men's conduct must remain an uncertain thing, and that in calling men God cannot adventure upon greater certainty than is implied in the trust of affection. If one asks, What, then, about God's foreknowledge, who alone knoweth the end of a thing from the beginning, and His sovereign

*Semites had a horror of painting the Deity in any form. But when God had to be imagined or described, they chose the form of a man and attributed to Him human features. Chiefly they thought of His face. To see His face, to come into the light of His countenance, was the way their hearts expressed longing for the living God. Exod. xxiii. 14; Psalm xxxi. 16, xxxiv. 16, lxxx. 7. But among the heathen Semites God's face was separated from God Himself, and worshipped as a separate god. In heathen Semitic religions there are a number of deities who are the faces of others. But the Hebrew writers, with every temptation to do the same, maintained their monotheism, and went no farther than to speak of the *angel of God's Face*. And in all the beautiful narratives of Genesis, Exodus, and Judges about the glorious Presence that led Israel against their enemies, the angel of God's face is an equivalent of God Himself. Jacob said, *the God which hath fed me, and the angel which hath redeemed me, bless the lads*. In Judges this angel's word is God's Word.

grace, who chooseth whom He will? are you not logically bound to these?—then it can only be asked in return, Is it not better to be without logic for a little, if at the expense of it we obtain so true, so deep a glimpse into God's heart as this simple verse affords us? Which is better for us to know—that God is Wisdom which knows all, or Love that dares and ventures all? Surely, that God is Love which dares and ventures all with the worst, with the most hopeless of us. This is what makes this single verse of Scripture more powerful to move the heart than all creeds and catechisms. For where these speak of sovereign will, and often mock our affections with the bare and heavy (if legitimate) sceptre they sway, this calls forth our love, honour, and obedience by the heart it betrays in God. Of what unsuspicious trust, of what chivalrous adventure of love, of what fatherly confidence, does it speak! What a religion is this of ours in the power of which a man may every morning rise and feel himself thrilled by the thought that God trusts him enough to work with His will for the day; in the power of which a man may look round and see the sordid, hopeless human life about him glorified by the truth that for the salvation of such God did adventure Himself in a love that laid itself down in death. The attraction and power of such a religion can never die. Requiring no painful thought to argue it into reality, it leaps to light before the natural affection of man's heart; it takes his instincts immediately captive; it gives him a conscience, an honour, and an obligation. No wonder that our prophet, having such a belief, should once more identify himself with the people, and adventure himself with the weight of their sin before God.

The other point of the prayer is the Fatherhood of God, concerning which all that is needful to say here is that the prophet, true to the rest of Old Testament teaching on the subject, applies it only to God's relation to the nation as a whole. In the Old Testament no one is called the son of God except Israel as a people, or some individual representative and head of Israel. And even of such the term was seldom employed. This was not because the Hebrew was without temptation to imagine his physical descent from the gods, for neighbouring nations indulged in such dreams for themselves and their heroes; nor because he was without appreciation of the intellectual kinship between the human and the Divine, for he knew that in the beginning God had said, "Let us make man in our own image." But the same feeling prevailed with him in regard to this idea, as we have seen prevailed in regard to the kindred idea of God as the husband of His people.* The prophets were anxious to emphasise that it was a moral relation,—a moral relation, and one initiated from God's side by certain historical acts of His free, selecting, redeeming, and adopting love. Israel was not God's son till God had evidently called and redeemed him. Look at how our prophet uses the word Father, and to what he makes it equivalent. The first time it is equivalent to Redeemer: "Thou, O Lord, art our Father; our Redeemer from old is Thy name" (lxiii. 16b). The second time it is illustrated by the work of the potter: "But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou our potter; and we are all the work

* See pp. 828 ff.

of Thy hand" (lxiv. 8). Could it be made plainer in what sense the Bible defines this relation between God and man? It is not a physical, nor is it an intellectual relation. The assurance and the virtue of it do not come to men with their blood or with the birth of their intellect, but in the course of moral experience, with the sense that God **claims** them from sin and from the world for Himself; with the gift of a calling and a destiny; with the formation of character, the perfecting of obedience, the growth in His knowledge and His grace. And because it is a moral relation time is needed to realise it, and only after long patience and effort may it be unhesitatingly claimed. And that is why Israel was so long in claiming it, and why the clearest, most undoubting cries to God the Father, which rise from the Greek in the earliest period of his history, reach our ears from Jewish lips only near the end of their long progress, only (as we see from our prayer) in a time of trial and affliction.

We have a New Testament echo of this Old Testament belief in the Fatherhood of God, as a moral and not a national relation, in Paul's writings, who in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (vi. 17, 18) urges thus: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

On these grounds, then,—that God in His great love had already adventured Himself with this whole people, and already by historical acts of election and redemption proved Himself the Father of the nation as a whole,—does our prophet plead with Him to save them all again. The answer to this pleading he gets in ch. lxv.

II. GOD'S ANSWER TO THE PROPHET'S INTERCESSION (ch. lxv.).

God's answer to His prophet's intercession is twofold. *First*, He says that He has already all this time been trying them with love, meeting them with salvation; but they have not turned to Him. The prophet has asked, "Where is Thy zeal? the yearning of Thy bowels and Thy compassions are restrained towards me. Thou hast hid Thy face far from us. Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things, O Jehovah? Wilt Thou hold Thy peace and afflict us very sore?" And now, in the beginning of ch. lxv., Jehovah answers, not with that confusion of tenses and irrelevancy of words with which the English version makes Him speak; but suitably, relevantly, and convincingly. "I have been to be inquired of those who asked not for Me. I have been to be found of them that sought Me not. I have been saying, I am here, I am here, to a nation that did not call on My name. I have stretched out My hands all the day to a people turning away, who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts; a people that have been provoking Me to My face continually,"—and then He details their idolatry. This, then, is the answer of the Lord to the prophet's appeal. "In this I have not all power. It is wrong to talk of Me as the potter and of man as the clay, as if all the active share in salvation lay with Me. Man is free,—free to withhold himself from My urgent affection; free to turn from My outstretched hands; free to choose before Me the

abomination of idolatry. And this the mass of Israel have done, clinging, fanatical and self-satisfied, to their unclean and morbid imaginations of the Divine, all the time that My great prophecy by you has been appealing to them." This is a sufficient answer to the prophet's prayer. Love is not omnipotent; if men disregard so open an appeal of the Love of God, they are hopeless; nothing else can save them. The sin against such love is like the sin against the Holy Ghost, of which our Lord speaks so hopelessly. Even God cannot help the despisers and abusers of Grace.

The rest of God's answer to His prophet's intercession emphasises that the nation shall be saved for the sake of a faithful remnant in it (vv. 8-10). But the idolaters shall perish (vv. 11, 12). They cannot possibly expect the same fare, the same experience, the same fate, as God's faithful servants (vv. 13-15). But those who are true and faithful Israelites, surviving and experiencing the promised salvation, shall find that God is true, and shall acknowledge Him as "the God of Amen, because the former troubles are forgotten" (those felt so keenly in the prophet's prayer in ch. lxiv.) "and because they are hid from Mine eyes." The rest of the answer describes a state of serenity and happiness wherein there shall be no premature death, nor loss of property, nor vain labour, nor miscarriage, nor disappointment of prayer nor delay in its answer, nor strife between man and the beasts, nor any hurt or harm in Jehovah's Holy Mountain. Truly a prospect worthy of being named as the prophet names it, "a new heaven and a new earth!"

Ch. lxv. is thus closely connected, both by circumstance and logic, with the long prayer which precedes it. The tendency of recent criticism has been to deny this connection, especially on the line of circumstance. Ch. lxv. does not, it is argued, reflect the Babylonish captivity as ch. lxiii. 7-lxiv. so clearly does; but, on the contrary, "while some passages presuppose the Exile as past, others refer to circumstances characteristic of Jewish life in Canaan."* But this view is only possible through straining some features of the chapter adaptable either to Palestine or Babylon, and overlooking others which are obviously Babylonian. "Sacrificing in gardens and burning incense on tiles" were practices pursued in Jerusalem before the Exile, but the latter was introduced there from Babylon, and the former was universal in heathendom. The practices in ver. 5 are never attributed to the people before the Exile, were all possible in Babylonia, and some we know to have been actual there.† The other charge of idolatry in ver. 11 "suits Babylonia," Cheyne admits, "as well as (probably) Palestine."‡ But what seems

* Cheyne. Similarly Bredenkamp, who contends that the prophecy is Isaianic, and to be dated from the time of Manasseh.

† Cf. Dillmann, *in loco*.

‡ Among Orientals the planets Jupiter and Venus were worshipped as the Larger and the Lesser Luck. They were worshipped as Merodach and Istar among the Babylonians. Merodach was worshipped for prosperity (cf. Sayce, "Hibbert Lectures," pp. 460, 476, 488). It may be Merodach and Istar, to whom are here given the name Gad, or Luck (cf. Genesis xxii. 11, and the name Baal Gad in the Lebanon valley) and Meni, or Fate, Fortune (cf. Arabic al-manijjat, fate; Wellhausen, "Skizzen," iii. 22 ff., 189.) There was in the Babylonian Pantheon a "Manu the Great who presided over fate" (Lenormant, "Chaldean Magic," etc., p. 120). Instances of idolatrous feasts will be found in Sayce, *op. cit.*, p. 539; cf. 1 Cor. x. 21, *Ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils*.

decisive for the exilic origin of ch. lxv. is that the possession of Judah and Zion by the seed of Jacob is still implied as future (ver. 9). Moreover the holy land is alluded to by the name common among the exiles in flat Mesopotamia, *My mountains*, and in contrast with the idolatry of which the present generation is guilty the idolatry of their fathers is characterised as having been "upon the mountains and upon the hills," and again the people is charged with "forgetting My holy mountain," a phrase reminiscent of Psalm cxxxvii. ver. 4, and more appropriate to a time of exile, than when the people were gathered about Zion. All these resemblances in circumstances corroborate the strong logical connection which we have found between ch. lxiv. and ch. lxv., and leave us no reason for taking the latter away from the main author of "Second Isaiah," though he may have worked up into it recollections and remains of an older time.

III. THE LAST JUDGMENT (ch. lxvi.).

Whether with the final chapter of our prophecy we at last get footing in the Holy Land is doubtful.* It was said on p. 736 that, "in vv. 1 to 4 of this chapter the Temple is still unbuilt, but the building would seem to be already begun." This latter clause should be modified to, "the building would seem to be in immediate prospect." The rest of the chapter, vv. 6-24, has features that speak more definitely for the period after the Return; but even they are not conclusive, and their effect is counterbalanced by some other verses. Ver. 6 may imply that the Temple is rebuilt, and ver. 20 that the sacrifices are resumed; but, on the other hand, these verses may be, like parts of ch. lx., statements of the prophet's vivid vision of the future.† Vv. 7 and 8 seem to describe a re-peopling of Jerusalem that has already taken place; but ver. 9 says, that while the "bringing to the birth" has already happened, which is, as we must suppose, the deliverance from Babylon,—or is it the actual arrival at Jerusalem?—the "bringing forth from the womb," that is, the complete restoration of the people, has still to take place. Ver. 13 is certainly addressed to those who are not yet in Jerusalem.

These few points reveal how difficult, nay, how impossible, it is to decide the question of date, as between the days immediately before the Return and the days immediately after. To the present expositor the balance of evidence seems to be with the later date. But the difference is very small. We are at least sure—and it is really all that we require to know—that the rebuilding of Jerusalem is very near, nearer than it has been felt in any previous chapter. The Temple is, so to speak, within sight, and the

prophet is able to talk of the regular round of sacrifices and sacred festivals almost as if they had been resumed.

To the people, then, either in the near prospect of Return, or immediately after some of them had arrived in Jerusalem, the prophet addresses a number of oracles, in which he pursues the division that ch. lxv. had emphasised between the two parties in Israel. These oracles are so intricate that we are compelled to take up the chapter verse by verse. The first of them begins by correcting certain false feelings in Israel, excited by former promises of the rebuilding and the glory of the Temple. "Thus saith Jehovah, The heavens are My throne, and earth is My footstool: what is this for a house that ye will build (or, are building) Me, and what is this for a place for My rest? Yea, all these things" (that is, all the visible works of God in heaven and earth) "My hand hath made, and so came to pass all these things, saith Jehovah. But unto this will I look, unto the humble and contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word." These verses do not run counter to, or even go beyond, anything that our prophet has already said. They do not condemn the building of the Temple: this was not possible for a prophecy which contains ch. lx. They condemn only the kind of temple which those whom they address had in view,—a shrine to which the presence of Jehovah was limited, and on the raising and maintenance of which the religion and righteousness of the people should depend. While the former Temple was standing, the mass of the people had thus misconceived it, imagining that it was enough for national religion to have such a structure standing and honoured in their midst. And now, before it is built again, the exiles are cherishing about it the same formal and materialistic thoughts. Therefore the prophet rebukes them, as his predecessors had rebuked their fathers, and reminds them of a truth he has already uttered, that though the Temple is raised, according to God's own promise and direction, it will not be to its structure, as they conceive of it, that He will have respect, but to the existence among them of humble and sincere personal piety. The Temple is to be raised: "the place of His feet God will make glorious," and men shall gather round it from the whole earth, for instruction, for comfort, and for rejoicing. But let them not think it to be indispensable either to God or to man,—not to God, who has heaven for His throne and earth for His footstool; nor to man, for God looks direct to man, if only man be humble, penitent, and sensitive to His word. These verses, then, do not go beyond the Old Testament limit; they leave the Temple standing, but they say so much about God's other sanctuary man, that when His use for the Temple shall be past, His Servant Stephen * shall be able to employ these words to prove why it should disappear.

The next verse is extremely difficult. Here it is literally: "A slaughterer of the ox, a slayer of a man; a sacrificer of the lamb, a breaker of a dog's neck; an offerer of meat-offering, swine's blood; the maker of a memorial offering of incense, one that blesseth an idol, or vanity." Four legal sacrificial acts are here coupled with four unlawful sacrifices to idols. Does this mean that in the eye of God, impatient even of the ritual He has consecrated, when

See what is said in p. 746 of Book II. about the connection of idolatry and commerce.

* Bleek (5th ed., pp. 287, 288) holds ch. lxvi. to be by a prophet who lived in Palestine after the resumption of sacrificial worship (vv. 3, 6, 30), that is, upon the altar of burnt-offering which the Returned had erected there, and at a time when the temple-building had begun. Vatke also holds to a post-exilic date, "Einleitung in das A. T." pp. 625, 630. Kuenen, too, makes the chapter post-exilic. Bredenkamp takes vv. 1-6 for Palestinian, but pre-exilic, and ascribes them to Isaiah. With ver. 1 he compares 1 Kings viii. 27; and as to ver. 6 he asks, How could the unbelieving exiles be in the neighbourhood of the Temple and hear Jehovah's voice in thunder from it? Vv. 7-14 he takes as exilic, based on an Isaianic model.

† So Dillman and Driver; Cheyne is doubtful.

Acts vii. 49.

performed by men who do not tremble at His word, each of these lawful sacrifices is as worthless and odious as the idolatrous practice associated with it,—the slaughter of the ox as the offering of a human sacrifice, and so forth? Or does the verse mean that there are persons in Israel who combine, like the Corinthians blamed by Paul,* both the true and the idolatrous ritual, both the table of the Lord and the table of devils? Our answer will depend on whether we take the four parallels with ver. 2, which precedes them, or with the rest of ver. 3, to which they belong, and ver. 4. If we take them with ver. 2, then we must adopt the first, the alternative meaning; if with ver. 4, then the second of these meanings is the right one. Now there is no grammatical connection, nor any transparent logical one, between vv. 2 and 3, but there is a grammatical connection with the rest of ver. 3. Immediately after the pairs of lawful and unlawful sacrificial acts, ver. 3 continues, “yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.” That surely signifies that the unlawful sacrifices in ver. 3 are things already committed and delighted in, and the meaning of putting them in parallel to the lawful sacrifices of Jehovah’s religion is either that Israelites have committed them instead of the lawful sacrifices, or along with these. In this case, vv. 3, 4 form a separate discourse by themselves, with no relation to the equally distinct oracle in vv. 1 and 2. The subject of vv. 3 to 4 is, therefore, the idolatrous Israelites. They are delivered unto Satan, their choice; they shall have no part in the coming Salvation. In ver. 5 the faithful in Israel, who have obeyed God’s word by the prophet, are comforted under the mocking of their brethren, who shall certainly be put to shame. Already the prophet hears the preparation of the judgment against them (ver. 6). It comes forth from the city where they had mockingly cried for God’s glory to appear. The mocked city avenges itself on them. “Hark, a roar from the City! Hark, from the Temple! Hark, Jehovah accomplishing vengeance on His enemies!”

A new section begins with ver. 7, and celebrates to ver. 9 the sudden re-population of the City by her children, either as already a fact, or, more probably, as a near certainty. Then comes a call to the children, restored, or about to be restored, to congratulate their mother and to enjoy her. The prophet reawakens the figure, that is ever nearest his heart, of motherhood,—children suckled, borne, and cradled in the lap of their mother fill all his view; nay, finer still, the grown man coming back with wounds and weariness upon him to be comforted of his mother. “As a man whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And ye shall see, and rejoice shall your heart, and your bones shall flourish like the tender grass.” But this great light shines not to flood all Israel in one, but to cleave the nation in two, like a sword of judgment. “The hand of Jehovah shall be known towards His servants, but He will have indignation against His enemies” (enemies, that is, within Israel. Then comes the fiery judgment) “For by fire will Jehovah plead, and by His sword with all flesh; and the slain of Jehovah shall be many.” Why there should be slain of Jehovah within Israel is then explained. Within

* 2 Cor. x.

Israel there are idolaters: “they that consecrate themselves and practise purification for the gardens, after one in the middle; * eaters of swine’s flesh, and the Abomination, and the Mouse. They shall come to an end together, saith Jehovah, for I” (know, or will punish,†) “their works and their thoughts.” In this eighteenth verse the punctuation is uncertain, and probably the text is corrupt. The first part of the verse should evidently go, as above, with ver. 17. Then begins a new subject.

“It is coming to gather all the nations and the tongues, and they shall come and shall see My glory; and I will set among them a sign” (a marvellous and mighty act, probably of judgment, for he immediately speaks of their survivors) “and I will send the escaped of them to the nations Tarshish, Put‡ and Lud, drawers of the bow, to Tubal and Javan” (that is, to far Spain, and the distances of Africa, towards the Black Sea and to Greece, a full round of the compass) “the isles far off that have not heard report of Me, nor have seen My glory; and they shall recount My glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brethren from among all the nations an offering to Jehovah, on horses and in chariots and in litters, and on mules and on dromedaries, up on the Mount of My Holiness, Jerusalem, saith Jehovah, just as when the children of Israel bring the offering in a clean vessel to the house of Jehovah. And also from them will I take to be priests, to be Levites, saith Jehovah. For like as the new heavens and the new earth which I am making shall be standing before Me, saith Jehovah, so shall stand your seed and your name.” But again the prophecy swerves from the universal hope into which we expect it to break, and gives us instead a division and a judgment: the servants of Jehovah on one side occupied in what the prophet regards as the ideal life, regular worship—so little did he mean ver. 1 to be a condemnation of the Temple and its ritual!—and on the other the rebels’ unburied carcasses gnawed by the worm and by fire, an abomination to all. “And it shall come to pass from new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, saith Jehovah: and they shall go out and look on the carcasses of the men who have rebelled against Me; for their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

We have thus gone step by step through the chapter, because its intricacies and sudden changes were not otherwise to be mastered. What exactly it is composed of must, we fear, still remain a problem. Who can tell whether its short, broken pieces are all originally from our prophet’s hand, or were gathered by him from others, or were the fragments of his teaching which the reverent hands of disciples picked carefully up that nothing might be lost? Some-

* So, in literal translation of the text, *the One* being a master of ceremonies, who, standing in the middle, was imitated by the worshippers (*cf.* Baudissin, “Studien zur Semitischen Religions-geschichte,” i. p. 315, who combats Lagarde’s and Selden’s view, that *אֶחָד* *one*, stands for the God Hadad). The Massoretes read the feminine form of *one*, which might mean some goddess.

† *Know*, Pesh. and some editions of the LXX.; *punish*, Delitzsch and Cheyne.

‡ The Hebrew text has *Pul*, the LXX. *Put*. *Put* and *Lud* occur together, Ezek. xxvii. 10-xxx. 5. *Put* is *Punt*, the Egyptian name for East Africa. *Lud* is not *Lydia*, but a North African nation. Jeremiah, xlv. 9, mentions, along with *Cush*, *Put* and the *Ludim* in the service of Egypt, and the *Ludim* as famous with the bow.

times we think it must be this last alternative that happened; for it seems impossible that pieces so strange to each other, so loosely connected, could have flowed from one mind at one time. But then again we think otherwise, when we see how the chapter as a whole continues the separation made evident in ch. lxxv., and runs it on to a last emphatic contrast.

So we are left by the prophecy,—not with the new heavens and the new earth which it promised: not with the holy mountain on which none shall hurt nor destroy, saith the Lord; not with a Jerusalem full of glory and a people all holy, the centre of a gathered humanity,—but with the city like to a judgment floor, and upon its narrow surface a people divided between worship and a horrible woe.

O Jerusalem, City of the Lord, Mother eagerly desired of her children, radiant light to them that sit in darkness and are far off, home after exile, haven after storm,—expected as the Lord's garner, thou art still to be only His threshing-floor, and heaven and hell as of old shall, from new moon to new moon, through the revolving years, lie side by side within thy narrow walls! For from the day that Araunah the Jebusite threshed out his sheaves upon thy high wind-swept rock, to the day when the Son of Man standing over against thee divided in his last discourse the sheep from the goats, the wise from the foolish, and the loving from the selfish, thou hast been appointed of God for trial and separation and judgment.

It is a terrible ending to such a prophecy as ours. But is any other possible? We ask how can this contiguity of heaven and hell be within the Lord's own city, after all His yearning and jealousy for her, after His fierce agony and strife with her enemies, after so clear a revelation of Himself, so long a providence, so glorious a deliverance? Yet, it is plain that nothing else can result, if the men on whose ears

the great prophecy had fallen, with all its music and all its gospel, and who had been partakers of the Lord's Deliverance, did yet continue to prefer their idols, their swine's flesh, their mouse, their broth of abominable things, their sitting in graves, to so evident a God and to so great a grace.

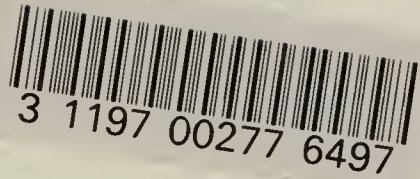
It is a terrible ending, but it is the same as upon the same floor Christ set to His teaching,—the gospel net cast wide, but only to draw in both good and bad upon a beach of judgment; the wedding feast thrown open and men compelled to come in, but among them a heart whom grace so great could not awe even to decency; Christ's gospel preached, His Example evident, and Himself owned as Lord, and nevertheless some whom neither the hearing nor the seeing nor the owning with their lips did lift to unselfishness or stir to pity. Therefore He who had cried, "Come all unto Me," was compelled to close by saying to many, "Depart."

It is a terrible ending, but one only too conceivable. For though God is love, man is free,—free to turn from that love; free to be as though he had never felt it; free to put away from himself the highest, clearest, most urgent grace that God can show. But to do this is the judgment.

"Lord, are there few that be saved?" The Lord did not answer the question but by bidding the questioner take heed to himself: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

Almighty and most merciful God, who hast sent this book to be the revelation of Thy great love to man, and of Thy power and will to save him, grant that our study of it may not have been in vain by the callousness or carelessness of our hearts, but that by it we may be confirmed in penitence, lifted to hope, made strong for service, and above all filled with the true knowledge of Thee and of Thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen.





DATE DUE

MAR 25 1992			
AUG 27 1990			
SEP 29 1994			
SEP 16 1994			
OCT 05 1995			
OCT 08 1995			
OCT 02 1995			
OCT 02 1996			
NOV 18 1996			
NOV 23 1996			

